CHAPTER III

SUICIDES IN LITERATURE

(MADAME BOVARY, ANNA KARENINA, THE AWAKENING, AND VOICES IN THE CITY)

Suicide is often portrayed as the ultimate form of despair; an action relinquishing all hope of reconciliation or salvation. Philippe Aire notes that the staging of death as an aesthetic event was a nineteenth-century invention (7). The concept of suicide has been very controversial in literature since the art of writing has been around. Many writers use everyday happenings to convey the despair and grief in their lives. From the very beginning of Western Literature, from Greek Tragedy onwards women’s suicide have been portrayed as central plot elements. Death plays a major role in all literature, but women and men are depicted quite differently when they are subjected to death producing experiences or to death itself.

Many writers easily transfer the imagery of death used in connection with the hunter or the warrior to the pursuit of women. To overcome a proud woman is always a great triumph for the masculine ego; she seems often to be used as a testing ground for triumphs during the hunt or on the field of battle (Bassein65). Emma, Anna, Edna, Monisha all die, like thousands of other women in fiction, because, in accordance with the well-worn stereotypes and morality of their times, their sexual lives dictate that they must; because they are wrenched into existence by authors who see death as the end best fitting the demands of their fiction. The following chapter analyses women suicides in
literature primarily, *Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina*, and *The Awakening* which are well-known novels of the nineteenth century besides a twentieth century novel, *Voices in the City*. Accordingly, these stories have attracted a number of scholars to study them as literary classics of suicidal literature.

Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880), was one of the masters of nineteenth century fiction in France. He was born in Rouen, and was the second son to a family of doctors. He studied law at Paris in the 1840s; he was terminated by his nerve disease, and the consequent failure at the law exams, which led him to devote himself fully to literature. Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) differs in a striking way from other canonical, male authored realist novels of female adultery of the nineteenth century. The time of the plot of the novel is mid-nineteenth century and the setting is France. The novel was first published in 1857.

Flaubert is first novel *Madame Bovary*, is the story of an adulterous, including a doctor, and a lawyer. Emma, the beautiful and romantic wife of a provincial doctor, feels trapped in the necessarily dull life of a provincial doctor, and seeks release in extramarital affairs, first with a young man from the landed aristocracy, and then with a lawyer, which eventually prove no less frustrating. She finally kills herself leaving Charles, her husband, a wreck. Charles too dies soon, leaving their only daughter orphaned.

Emma's motives for killing herself are not those common to nineteenth-century realist novels of female adultery. Flaubert in *Madame Bovary* condemns his main female character to a despicable, ugly, and drawn-out death without being either, compassionate or dispassionate toward her. He seems to loathe the people of his time and to have
attempted to concentrate in Emma many of their loathsome qualities. Although he does place before the reader representatives of larger segments of society--the religious, medical, and legal--his focus is basically on Emma who suffers not only the corruption of these but also the worst that chance, and fate can deal her (Bassein 69).

The novel has significantly influenced literary criticism; since its publication, *Madame Bovary* has been one of the most frequently discussed books in the history of world literature. Many scholars have concurred with Paul de Man's assertion that "contemporary criticism of fiction owes more to this novel than to any other nineteenth-century work" (Olive89). Social and historical themes are among the most frequently discussed motifs of *Madame Bovary*. As Jean Rousset indicates, Emma's life is constantly a prelude to her end: he thinks her joys are all followed by a small death that foreshadows her final demise (455). It her horrible death was thought by many readers to be just punishment for the kind of life she led. Emma is one of scores of heroines whose adultery made her into a kind of monster to scare generations of women and critically damage their concept of self.

Emma's tragedy begins with remorse or fear vis-a-vis her husband for her unfaithfulness. Until Emma's end there is always the possibility of Charles's discovering his wife's infidelities, which creates some mild suspense in the novel. But whenever he wanders close to the truth, he not only fails to see it, but repeatedly becomes the unconscious facilitator of Emma's amorous adventures. Only after her death does he learn of his wife's affairs upon discovering letters from Rodolphe and Leon in her rosewood desk. Fear of Charles's wrath should he find out about her affair's or a guilty conscience for them, cannot have been the motivating forces of her suicide.
Emma's life is made up of troughs and waves that grow ever more extreme until finally when her financial entanglements prove too much for her and she has nowhere to turn for help. She goes under, never to surface again. She is almost another-oriented person. All of her private actions are designed to make her public stance more attractive or compelling in order that she may get a hold on those who will satisfy her lust. Drawn back to herself she does, when less mature, have her imagination to propel her into the realm of make-believe, but later, when drawn back go herself, it is the inner passions or deceits which ultimately make her so desperate that she takes her own life (Bassien 71). The books is an onrush of events showing her stepping hopefully outward toward fulfillment and then receding back to her miserable self. Flaubert thus locks her finally in a sense of defeat and degradation from which no amount of wishful thinking on the part of the reader can rescue her.

Charles had fallen in love with Emma, the daughter of one of his patients and the two decide to marry. After a grandiose wedding, they settle in Tostes, where Charles has his practice. The marriage however, does not live up to Emma's romantic expectations. Emma Bovary expected to have a wonderful wedding, but the wedding was set in a small place with only few guests attending. Since she is a romantic woman, Emma imagined her wedding with fancy places, guests and decorations. "Emma would have preferred a midnight wedding with torches…so there was great wedding-party, at which they sat down forty-three to a table and remained there sixteen hours…"(MB 38).

Ever since she lived in a convent as a young girl, she had dreamt of love and marriage as a solution to all her problems. One day she attends an extravagant ball at the home of a wealthy nobleman; thereafter, she begins to dream constantly of a more
sophisticated life. She gets weary and depressed when she compares her fantasies to the humdrum reality of village life. Her listlessness eventually makes her indisposed. When she gets in the family way, Charles decides to move to a different town with the hope of reviving her health. The new town where the Bovary's shift to is Yonville where she meets Leon, a law clerk, who likes her and loves to escape through romantic novels. Emma gives birth to her daughter Berthe, she experiences no excitement; motherhood rather disappoints her for she had desired a son. Meanwhile, romantic feelings begin to blossom between Emma and Leon. However, when Emma realizes that Leon loves her, a sense of guilt dawns upon her and she throws herself into the role of a faithful, dutiful wife. Realizing that he can never possess Emma, he departs for Paris to study law. His departure makes Emma unhappy. A wealthy neighbor named Rodolphe who meets Emma at an agricultural fair is attracted by her beauty and declares his love to her. He seduces her and a passionate affair ensues.

Flaubert's novel shapes the reader's reactions on the subliminal level both by the rise and fall of events, each of which parallels Emma's life and death and by constantly speaking in terms of death. It is not surprising that Emma takes her own life, not only has she threatened to do so but she also appears through Flaubert's chain of events, language and imagery to constantly be in process toward that end. His depiction of her would seem to bear out his claim that every time he looked at an attractive women, he thought of her skeleton (Demorest 284). While at times he does speak of her beauty, it is as an element associated with death, not as a compensatory virtue. Women, sex, and death certainly merge in Madame Bovary; Flaubert seems to conceive of the three inseparably.
Flaubert identifies Emma with death in images of the elderly and depraved, the first of these is the Duke de Liverier, the Marquis' father-in-law. At the Marquis' ball, she notices this old man "bent over his full place.... his napkin tied around his neck like a child...letting drops of gravy from his mouth...eyes.....ribbon" (MB 34-35). To show what produces such a sight, Flaubert says he lived a life of dissipation and was involved in duels, gambling, and elopements. He had lost his fortune and made his family fearful.

Flaubert takes Emma through one of the most painful of deaths. The fact that she is amidst her people adds to the horror of it, because their response is not casual. She vomits blood, screams horribly, tortures Charles by confessing love for him, frightens her child by frequently wishing to have her near her, and takes communion from the priest whom Homais compares to ravens attracted to the smell of death (MB 236).

Just as her death rattle becomes stronger, the blind man's song reaches her ears from the street and she begins "an atrocious, frantic, desperate laugh," thinking she sees the hideous face of the wretch looking out of the darkness and menacing her (MB 238). The old fellow has become her mirror. Flaubert will not let Emma rest in her grave; her effects, negative as they are, persist in Charles' becoming blasphemous, drawing back in horror at the sight of her dead face, sparing nothing to give her a "decent" burial, and suffering the torture of listening to the hammer resound against the wood as her casket is being built. He seems now to imitate Emma in his financial involvements. Every night he dreams of her, but she falls away into decay in his arms. His distress helps bring on his own sudden death. Young Mademoiselle Bovary fares poorly also, coming to spend her days working in a cotton mill (Bassein 79).
Emma Bovary surely tops the list of hideous women who stand as the embodiment of all that tradition has deemed evil and at the same time are viewed by some as possessing "inner beauty". Just as early churchmen equated women with sin, Flaubert sees her as a vile contaminator. Other men have shown their hatred of women and depicted them as responsible for undoing others, but few have been able to accommodate this version of the debilitating image of the women as a beautiful destroyer. Beguin states that one of Flaubert's main qualities is that he suggests more than he says, (292) Sartre states that Madame Bovary is "more complete, more total" than life as Flaubert knew it(Sartre140). Beguin's statement indicates the danger of Flaubert's work, that is be taken as more pervasive and universal than its face value presents it to be, while Sartre's statement points to the exaggeration and overstated quality of most works of art. Both the elevation into a universal and the falsification of reality that such works exhibit, do for Flaubert's readers what Emma's readings in the convent did for her; make her reach for what does not exist and in so doing make her go down to defeat.

Still, Emma ends her life by committing suicide. Because her motives for killing herself are not those common to nineteenth-century realist novels of female adultery, the sequence of events leading to Madame Bovary's death begins with a night of pleasure. At a masked ball in Rouen Emma "sautatoute la nuit, au son furieux des trombones" (MB 365). The next day she returns home to discover Lheureux's treachery. Her house will be seized; she must have money. The furious trombones seem to accompany her accelerating course as she races from man to man - from Léon to Maître Guillaumin to Binet to Rodolphe - in an attempt to raise money: all in vain. Finally, she sees a way out in the arsenic of Homais's pharmacy. Home now, she enjoys at last a moment of calm,
and falls victim to what will not be the last of the series of illusions that has been her life. After a less than exemplary life, Emma now appears to be dying correctly; anointed, absolved, wept over, attended by husband, doctor, priest, politician, she appears at last submissive, ready to play her role in the deathbed script written for her by men. She is completely surrounded by other debts, lovers, poison, extreme unction, the mirror, the blind beggar and his song: the elements of this sequence have been conceived leading to her suicide.

The final scene has been generally read as the final assault by Flaubert's brutal irony on Emma's illusions - in this case, her last-minute religious conversion. The blind man has received special attention. This poor wretch, whose rotting face is an emblem of the realist impulses within the novel, has dogged the young woman's steps through her last adultery; his song offers a symbolic commentary on her life (Starobinski 84). Just before the final agony, Emma isolates herself from the ritual in which she plays the principal role: she asks for her mirror, and gazes at herself a long while.

Flaubert has proud immeasurably that he was the greater creator and master craftsman of the contemporary novel, and the source of nearly every important technical advancement made since the middle of the last century. For there is a distance between the novels written before and after Madame Bovary. The core of the pre-Flaubertian novel was its narration. However subtle their psychology, Flaubert's predecessors were concerned with a succession of events in time which constituted the relation between the novel and what is loosely called "reality." Undoubtedly Madame Bovary is the story of a young woman with romantic ideas, that it begins with her schooldays, goes on to her marriage to a dull country doctor, and ends with her death.
In the essay "Suicide Representations of the Feminine in Nineteenth Century," Margaret Higgonet has developed the relationship between male writer and female suicide, arguing that from the male perspective of the nineteenth century female suicides are seen as a weak escape: Yet to the nineteenth-century male writers most sympathetic to women's plight in bourgeois life subvert the heroism of women's voluntary deaths in their focus on social and masculine victimization; the reliance on social explanation which climaxes in the realistic novel—and as in Durkheim underplays the heroine's choice—at the same time that its social determinism exculpates us of our complicity in the functioning social institutions.

Emma's ruin is not that of the romantic heroine who had lost all the honours. She has lost something far more important-money hers, Charles', their inheritances, their future income, the very furniture in their home. There follows a tempestuous time in Yonville—a visit to the shark Lheureux, to Monsieur Guillemin, the notary, a secret moneylender, who offers "love" as the price of his interest, and to Boulanger, now back at his estate. She asks Boulanger for love and for three thousand francs, which he refuses. The tale of her romances with men is complete: the charming episode with the viscount, whom she thinks she has caught sight of a few pages earlier, is balanced by the frantic promiscuity of her last days (Rinebart 305).

As a romanticist she had been unable to see or to value it, even though Charles' love is not the bourgeois affection founded on family comfort. Charles makes a rather sorry figure as son, scholar, and doctor throughout the novel; he is not to be distinguished from his bourgeois neighbors, except that he is less successful, but in one respect his character is heroic. His love survives the loss of his wife's affection for himself and their child, the loss of his property, the loss of his belief in her chastity, and the loss of her life.
Flaubert created characters who possess real human behaviour. Every human has sexual feelings including the desperate women in this novel. Emma appears to have the sexual hunger since her husband did not satisfy her appetite for it well enough. When she met young and attractive men, she lost control of herself. Emma Bovary has a great desire for the sexual, while she was waiting for the right man to help her complete this yearning. Leon Dupuis and Rodolphe Boulanger become her secret lovers. Leon, a young charming law student seemed to stimulate Emma to behave in an immoral way. He has the same taste of reading romantic stories as Emma, which attracted her. The romantic emotion took her far away from the morality of a respectable woman of the day.

"As she lay in bed watching the fire burn bright, the scene came back to her: Leon standing there, bending his walking-can in one hand…she found him charming; couldn't stop thinking of him; remembered how he had looked on other occasions, the things he had said, the sound of his voice, everything about him.(MB 115).

Eric Gans in his work Madame Bovary: The End of Romance presents the relationship between Flaubert's perception of romance and society:

In Flaubert's universe, the world is not a very noble place, but (Emma's) desire would be unrealistic in any possible world…the lover Emma yearns for never existed anywhere but romantic fiction. Realism in this sense portrays the world as real in opposition to a set of ideal expectations…result to devalue both halves of the opposition…Emma’s ideal is not justified yearning for something higher, but a romantic cliché.
The fantasy in which she lived made her unable to take action for herself. She blamed Leon for her disappointed hopes, as though he had betrayed her; and she even wished for a catastrophe that would bring about their separation, since she did not have the courage to take any action herself. (MB 251). Finally Emma lost all control over her life as she became instead of the active character in the novel merely the observer of the consequences of her actions. And like the heroines of the novels she read, she saw her only salvation would be through a dramatic suicide. Emma's obsession with reading leads her to make decisions that escalated her unhappiness and further paralyzed her from dealing with reality.

Emma has affairs with other men that it goes against the morality of society; as a result, she is punished for what she has done. Flaubert's description of how Emma died is quite long and torturing for the readers. Emma suffered from the poison she had taken, and readers can feel her suffering in the language used by the writer. "She began to groan, feebly at first, a violent shudder went through her shoulders; she turned whiter than the sheet she was clutching in her fingers"(MB 327). This explanation proved that the writer had thoroughly researched the process of dying from the poison that Emma had taken. Flaubert also gave readers Emma's feeling whilst dying from arsenic. She began to scream, horribly. She damned and cursed the poison, begged it to be quick, and with her stiffening arms pushed away everything that Charles kept trying to make her drink"(MB 330).

Tolstoy’s sense of man’s greatness is powerfully expressed in his four major novels: his little-known work, The Cossacks (1863); his panoramic masterpieces, War and Peace (1863–69) and Anna Karenina (1873–76); and his ideological
novel, *Resurrection* (1899); as well as in his two major novellas, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886) and *Hadji-Murat* (1904). In these works, characters search and suffer, struggle and err, and hit any number of dead ends. These frustrated characters each have a capacity for growth and exaltation, despite the many obstacles life throws their way. The second half of the nineteenth century in Russia was a time of immense transition. Leo Tolstoy was celebrated as one of the most influential writers both in Russia and worldwide during the nineteenth century. At this time in Russia, a woman was quite constrained over the decisions regarding her life before and after marriage. Russian society taught that the "ideal woman" would be pious, pure, submissive and domestic. Domestic education, another crucial subject for the young woman, focused on preparing her for the duties of household manager and educator of her children. This type of education was designed to encourage the young upper-class girl, in her pursuit as a successful wife and mother, to achieve a well-balanced home life (Stites 10). Russian literature reflected the most pressing issues facing women in Russia in the 19th century. The subject of a young, almost childlike girl being wed to an old, worn out man was commonly explored through literature. The gender-gapped marriage, many times the woman being as much as thirty years younger than the man, was also reflected in Russian literature and linked to the failing institution of the family.

Tolstoy masterfully creates Anna as a sympathetic character because he reveals her desire to find quest. She does not compromise her love for Vronsky by hiding their affair, but openly embraces it. In *Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy portrays a young, beautiful woman who has been ill-matched to an older, lifeless man. Their difference in age forages the wall that will eventually separate them both emotionally and physically. Anna
loses herself in her search for love and true happiness. The unhappy marriage has led directly to the unhappy family. Edwina Cruise suggests in her article "Women, Sexuality and the Family in Tolstoy", that Tolstoy seemed to be as enthralled at the outcome of the characters' lives as were his readers, and it does not appear from the historical evidence that he planned the events to take place as they did." There is an oft-told story that during the writing of Anna Karenina, Tolstoy emerged from his study shaking his head in bewilderment at what Anna had done that day"(Cruise 192). Tolstoy links the causes that lead to Anna's downfall to her husband's negligence. Anna is faced with an excessive amount of freedom and almost no direction from her husband who is more consumed with work than with fostering his relationship with his wife and son. Anna is presented with a tempting offer of intimacy with a man whose whole world seemingly revolves around his adoration for her, such an intelligent and attractive woman.

Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina (1873-1876) has been described as a remarkable portrayal of the many faceted nature of Russian society and, within that society, of individuals with a diversity that society views. The female as depicted in this work is primarily a follower, a shrewd and malicious manipulator, or a wife on the brink of exhaustion, or, in the case of Anna, a suicide. Tolstoy's Anna like many women in literature, is created out of the belief that a woman's primary function is to satisfy sexual needs and to procreate. She has many sisters who find themselves criticized if they are not sexual enough and damned if they are noticeably passionate (Bassein 89). Anna experiences both external conflicts and internal conflicts within her married life, her love affair, and her life in the society.
Tolstoy briefly alludes to the match made between Anna and Karenina as a relation not growing out of love and desire but being merely a business arrangement. Married young for the sake of security and fortune, she has, it seems never lived out the beauty and gaiety in her demeanor”(Segal 93). Tolstoy opines his disagreement with unequal marriages between couples with no physical or emotional desire for each other, with an age gap sometimes ranging between twenty-five years or more, and no common interests.

In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy represents three married women and examines their successes and failures in part to understand and convey what is needed to create happy families. Dolly has lost her husband to the affections of other women because she is too conservative and has no ability to relate to him outside of the very limited sphere of family life. Anna has lost both her husband and her child because she has too freely embraced her freedom and refuses to accept the responsibilities. Kitty is the best and brightest example of what Tolstoy imagined to be a successful wife and mother.

Tolstoy makes Anna almost totally a creature of passion and then allows that passion to destroy her. After she meets Vronsky, all of her activities revolve around maintaining a loving relationship with him. For example, her studies assist him in his art and later his projects as landowner, namely founding a hospital and running a stud farm. Still later when she adopts a family, all of her efforts are designed to give her something to do in order that she would not be overcome with shame and torment resulting from her passion. Even maintaining her social position is important only as it relates to love. With regard to Anna, D. S. Merezhkpvsky says,
“We scarcely know what she felt and thought how she lived—it seems that she did not exist before love, one cannot imagine an Anna who does not love. She is entirely love, as if her whole being, body and soul were fashioned out of love like the body of Salamander out of fire, and On dine out of water” (805).

Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* has removed the restrictions of time and place and created, instead, situations, problems and eternally perplexing questions that are timeless and ageless. Herein lays the difficulty in debating, discussing and deciding whether this work is, indeed, a treatise promoting rights, the freedom of women, or whether it is a work denouncing women through the ultimate failure and suicide of the heroine Anna. Tolstoy himself had to come to terms with what he wanted to produce in the work versus what would be the most honest rendering of these characters he had created.

"Tolstoy approached the world in this anti-historical manner because he did not really believe in progress. Human life seemed unchanging and so the problems that faced him and his contemporaries were not 'topical'—the women's question, crime...but those that had confronted man throughout history" (Andrew, 119).

To render Anna believable to a scrupulous audience, her fall into depravity must be convincing. In order for that to occur, she must fall from something, from somewhere, and a sufficient fall does not merely constitute a superficial fall from the pretentious wife to the lying lover but must include a moral decline, a battle of the spirit and will, so that
the only possible solution would be suicide; precisely because society lacks the ability to rescue her.

"Anna just cannot be the vain, self-indulgent creature who ruins worthy men... despair, which leads to the death of Anna in the context Tolstoy proposes the context of futility and self-disgust, is not felt by the kind of woman Tolstoy set out to portray. She must have the qualities which are capable of feeling utter spiritual desolation--honesty, awareness, sensitivity, and intelligence" (Boyd 96).

Tolstoy demands of Anna that she be the "ideal" moral female character present before us at the beginning of the novel. It could be argued that, to a certain degree, every person has the good qualities Anna possesses, but Anna radiates goodness with every fiber of her being: from the first glimpse of her at the train station chatting about missing her son, when her thoughts and heart are then directed toward the family of the conductor who has just been killed, to her warmth toward Dolly and Dolly's children, and even her ability to captivate the young and lovely Kitty with her radiant beauty and charm. All of these circumstances bring the reader proximally closer to loving and accepting Anna--no matter what. Anna most likely forced into a union with a man for whom she had no desire, but that Alexey, out of guilt, was pushed into a corner to defend his honour and marry the girl he had hitherto unwittingly been pursuing. Questions about her parents, her past life, and why she married Karenin are not answered. Thus, she is a person without ancestry. In the novel, Karenin and Vronsky, like every human being, possess significant weakness, irrespective of Anna's perception.
Anna is also ready to throw away parts of her existence in order that she might love. Her attraction to Vronsky causes a split between herself and Kitty just as it seems their relationship might flower into a lasting one. Even as a mother Anna is that at the exclusion of much else, until she meets Vronsky. Then the experience of motherhood, in the case of her son is soon denied her, and later she is not sufficiently attracted to her daughter to make a relationship with her an essential part of her existence. Even her clothing limits her. Often dressed in black, she seems destined for death before she actually is. Anna is a woman, carved almost totally from passion and its consequences, thrusting thoughts, even of these consequences away from her, leaving much less than a complete human being. Tolstoy likes to show emotion flowing out of Anna: she thus becomes empty of even this aspect of her makeup and is never rounded or totals (Bassein 90)

From his youth as an orphan through adulthood, Karenina had no plans to marry, knowing himself well enough to know it did not suit him. His character is cast as one with very high scruples and one based on social morality, and so, when Anna's aunt alleges his conduct toward Anna and that the family would be shameful if he does not marry Anna, he is also trapped. Once resolved on being Anna's husband, he makes the effort, as shown in the work through several passages, to be a good, although impassionate, husband to Anna, and his eventual disgrace due to Anna's infidelity exposes his vulnerable, suffering position. Anna's character is also vulnerable, and Vronsky who is a master at the art of social intercourse and making love, most likely senses her suppressed desires. Indeed, when they first meet, we get a glimpse of the
influence Anna's presence, both extrovertly displayed and introvert hidden, has on the young officer.

He...felt compelled to have another look at her, 'not because she was very beautiful nor because of the elegance and modest grace of her whole figure, but because he saw in her sweet face as she passed him something especially tender and kind. When he looked round she turned her head. Her bright gray eyes which seemed dark because of her black lashes rested for a moment on his face as if recognizing him, and then turned to the passing crowd evidently in search of someone. In that short look Vronsky had time to notice the subdued animation that enlivened her face and seemed to flutter between her bright eyes and scarcely perceptible smile which curved her rosy lips. It was as if an excess of vitality so filled her whole being that it betrayed itself against her will, now in her smile, now in the light of her eyes. She deliberately tried to extinguish that light in her eyes, but it showed despite of her faint smile (AK 56).

Anna is kind and tender because she is not focused on her own happiness but rather the happiness and desires of others. Her sacrifice to come and attempt to save her brother's marriage is through the leaving of her son. She considers the family of the conductor instead of concentrating on leaving the station. These actions highlight her selfless qualities that were the most noble and highly esteemed qualities in Tolstoy's view. She is lonely, and begins to see, through the dim light that begins to shine from the flame of discontent that has been kindled within her, how evidently superficial and fantastic her life has been up to this point. It should not be counted against her character
that she finds her son less than she had imagined him, but rather one should realize that
now that a man has touched these places that have been buried within, the feelings and
needs that have been superimposed on the love and affection of her son, now are fixing
themselves on Vronsky.

Vronsky has succeeded in reducing Anna to nothing but an object of sexual
pleasure; her body has become the primary target for conquest and in order to obtain the
pleasure now through the body, he must destroy the soul thriving within the body; for that
is the one obstacle preventing him from obtaining his spoils. Anna's moral and spiritual
characteristics must be supplanted for her to be able to live with the shame and conflict of
committing such a vile, loathsome sinful act.

The very act of committing adultery makes Anna accepts the choice she has
made. She realizes intuitively what she must sacrifice in order to have Vronsky's love and
is depicted as being so lonely and desperate that she willingly makes the sacrifice. The
family was one in which commonly marriage was considered a sacred institution to be
esteemed, protected and highly revered in order to further strengthen both the individual
existing within that family and the society which benefits from the individuals who are a
product of that structure. Bearing these ideas in mind, Vronsky and Anna have then
ultimately traversed in opposition to the force, or forces, which are there to shape and
build the individual regarding the necessary patterns of growth inherent in all human
beings.

In Anna Karenina, Anna has chosen to rebel against the moral principles
established by society and the church, leaving her husband and abandoning her son to
live openly with her lover. Through Anna Tolstoy was trying to convince his peers, how ill equipped women are to handle their own affairs and to show, what becomes of a woman who has much freedom.

Nabokov says, "Vronsky does not catch the sense of those words; Anna does, and what these French words contain is the idea of iron, of something battered and crushed--and this something is she" (182). As Nabokov so brilliantly projects throughout his lecture, Anna and Vronsky's relationship is tainted from the initial meeting by death. It is death that brings them together--the death of a train conductor. Anna, because Tolstoy has made her acutely aware of her spiritual and physical weaknesses and the precious balance of her soul, realizes that if she gives in to her desires for Vronsky her life will surely end in death. Throughout the work, the recurring dream images and her own self-fulfilling prophecy foreshadow for the reader that her ultimate fate will be death, but it is more complex than a fate sealed by sin(183).

A closer look at the narrow and traditional approach to women from which Anna develops will further illustrate why suicide would seem to Tolstoy, as well as to most of his contemporaries, the only appropriate conclusion to Anna’s life although Tolstoy makes is very clear that Anna’s brother Stiva is involved in a passionate relationship beyond his marriage and seems to utilize his amorous encounters to create the kind of climate where Anna’s affair is not unheard of, as well as perhaps to show that there is a generous strain of amorousness in their common blood, he now here indicates that Stiva will not eventually face any of the hardships that Anna faces.
Stiva has few regrets, little shame, not much responsibility, and is the last person in the novel one might except to have tendencies toward suicide. These siblings are alike in possessing passion but quite opposite in their responses to it. The world they move in respond to them in almost diametrically opposite manners. Stiva is on the road to a new appointment as the novel ends; Anna is dead. Women are play things to Stiva, like the “little decanters that were really woman”. While Vronsky is the center of Anna’s world. The institution of family is a microcosm of the larger society that contains within it all the ideological assumptions of the institutions of patriarchy. Millet calls the family “as patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole” (45). She elaborates:

Patriarchy's chief institution is the family. It is both a mirror of and a connection with the larger society. Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children, including the power of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale...

Women's chattel status continues in their loss of name, their obligation to adopt the husband's domicile and the general legal assumptions that marriage involves an exchange of the female's domestic service and sexual consortium in return for financial support (46-47).

Women from the olden days have been perceived as an oppressed class and their lives have been circumcised by male domination. The relationship between a man and a woman has been one of dominance and sub ordinance and the “birthright priority” of men ruling women has become institutionalized in our social order (Millett 33). The masculine birthright of super ordination has pervaded into culture, literature, arts, humanities, education, law, folklore, anthropology and all other reams of life.
Women are made to accept the patriarchal vision of the feminine as their own
"Women" says de Beauvoir, "still dream through the dreams of men"(74).

“Unfaithful” is the word applied to Stiva “adulterous “… a stronger term found
much more often in legal jargon, is applied to Anna. Stiva is regretful not for carrying on
with the governess, but for having failed to conceal it from his wife Dolly (AK 133). His
children are not very important him; he never interferes with Dolly’s mothering, allowing
her to fuss over them as she pleases. He can be away from them for long period of time,
yet, we are told he needs his home very much, as most men do, for “their home, their
wives, is their holy places” (AK 134). So little harm is done to anyone.Stiva says in
having an affair, and “one gets so much pleasure.” In order to buy gifts for a woman,
Stiva may take all the money there is in the house away with him, leaving dolly with
nothing to pay bills or buy necessities; “Try us he would to be a considerate husband and
father, Oblonsky [Stiva] never could remember that he had wife and children”(AK 136).

In contrast to stiva, Anna is loaded with guilt and shame, unreasonable jealousy,
concerned for her son and, when pushed far enough, tendencies toward melancholy and
death. She is restricted in her activities and by finding devious ways to meet her lover she
becomes much more of a deceiver than her brother. Greater harm (though Tolstoy does
not emphasize this fact) is done by Stiva who neglect his family, which includes six
children, for Anna’s son and husband never lack provisions or the security money brings.
Stiva finds easy outlets for sex, while Anna find little that is easy in her relationship with
Vronsky. Tormented herself, she is taunted by those around her who, like Tolstoy, cannot
allow woman the private or public freedom men the message is that women simply suffer
and their ultimate suffering is an early death. Reason, which this novel so often advocates
as important, finds little place in the divergent way Anna and Stiva are presented as spouses, lovers and siblings. Stiva chuckles through his encounters; Anna flounders and we never given sufficient explanation as to why this need be so, especially for a child born of the same parents as Stiva.

Vronsky represents a more mature emotional fulfillment and certainly physical one. Once she takes the plunge of sexual relations with Vronsky she is left lifeless internally and emotionally. During the consummation scene between Vronsky and Anna, Tolstoy uses the term murderer when referring to Vronsky and victim when referring to Anna. This language suggests that Anna's spiritual and mental death has already begun to take place; indeed she herself recognizes what she has sacrificed for the sake of their affair and what ultimately will become of her in the long run:

That which for nearly a year had been Vronsky's sole and exclusive desire, supplanting all his former desires: that which for Anna had been an impossible, dreadful, but all the more bewitching dream of happiness, had come to pass. Pale, with trembling lower jaw, he stood over her, entreating her to be calm, himself not knowing why or how…

She felt so guilty, so much to blame, that it only remained for her to humble herself and ask to be forgiven; but she had no one in the world now except him, so that even prayer for forgiveness was addressed to him. Looking at him she felt her humiliation physically, and could say nothing more. He felt what a murderer must feel when looking at the body he has deprived of life. The body he had deprived of life was their love, the first
period of their love. There was something frightful and revolting in the recollection of what had been paid for with this terrible price of shame. This shame she felt at her spiritual nakedness communicated itself to him. But in spite of the murder's horror of the body of his victim, that body must be cut in pieces and hidden away, and he must make use of what he has obtained by the murderer. Then, as the murder desperately throws himself on the body, as though with passion, and drags it and hacks it, so Vronsky covered her face and shoulders with kisses (AK 135-6).

The murder here is not of course the physical murder of Anna, but her spiritual and emotional murder. She realizes intuitively what she must sacrifice in order to have Vronsky's love and is depicted as being so lonely and desperate that she willingly makes the sacrifice.

Deception, as Tolstoy reveals further multiplies her shame, and it is with a “terrible” sense of guilt that she recognizes her “fault” towards Karenin. As her shame increases, she can take refuge only in love; when Vronsky’s love dwindles, she is eclipsed. It is through a narrow and traditional approach that Tolstoy shows Anna to be a victim of the limited artificial upper strata of society. In this society, she managed to move into a very limited relationship with Karenina and finally with Vronsky to a state where no hope is left. Pessimism and finally suicide are from the book’s point of view the logical culmination to a life that can be reduced to zero by the removal of a lover. (Bassein 93).
Anna Karenina, as much as any other work treated here, supports the notion that women were traditionally viewed as death–oriented. One avenue for playing down tendencies to see the death-producing or death itself as essential to all women, no matter what age, might be to have all women marry as Dolly does and, even though miserable, find one’s whole excuse for existence in motherhood and the home. Anna at first leans in this direction in her relationship with her son but Tolstoy makes this avenue very unattractive and uninviting. Marriage is a deplorable state where women who marry lose all their appeal, grow careless of themselves, and are deceived by their husband or ignored. Given the belief that marriage is a sad predicament, it subsequently follows that women may very well be driven in to a corner like Anna and be drawn to kill themselves. Levin does tell Dolly that women who do not marry “can find woman’s work in the family”(AK 137). Since most women tend to want to leave the family and marry, or urged to, they are pushed into either the kind of life Anna has or the one Betty Friedan describes as death–in–life and represented in Dolly. It should be remembered that the book alludes to another woman being nearly beaten to death by her husband and shows Nicolas, despite his interest in making a better life for the peasant, mouthing the threat of thrashing his wife. Misery is even the lot of Kitty, who in many ways comes closer to Tolstoy’s, or at least Levin’s, concept of what a woman ought to be, because she is extremely capable at tending to the dying and goes through a particularly painful trauma of giving birth, an experience Dolly calls torture.

Tolstoy was aware of women’s operation resulting from inequality but in this work possessed no vision of what it would be like should this inequality be eradicated. He sees Anna’s own desire to operate in a nontraditional way as the very essence of her
downfall. At one point Pestov speaks of the inequality of husband and wife which allows the former to be punished less severely than the latter for infidelity. The code that Vronsky leaves his wife allows him to lie to a woman but not to a man; in fact deception is an except in the case of the husband deceiving the wife. This fact is not good or reasonable, but it is “absolute (AK148)” Dolly questions the whole practice of courtship and emphasizes how it works to the man’s advantage (149).

For Tolstoy, death is the logical end for women who defied tradition and moved into what we would call a more positive arena. To reiterate, her positive sides help undermine her existence and are thus are negated. The predicament of women is thus clearly defined in Anna Karenina: if she transgresses into the active and positive, she is less than if she remains in the trap from which she is trying to escape. Tolstoy exhibits in Anna none of the stamina found in women of our times who recover from a divorce or love affair by going to college, finding a new job, or moving to a different locality. These women would find nothing but discouragement in Tolstoy’s Anna. Ample and evenly spaced allusions to Anna’s propensity for death, the breaking of Frou-Frou’s back, and Anna’s affinity with Levin, who thinks much on death, supports the exaggerated connection between the two (Bassein 99).

A significant link between Anna and Levin is their interest in death. Allowing that he never stops thinking of death, Levin, while searching for reasons for existence, finds that death helps make the pessimistic approach the most visible one. The impending death of his brother Nicholas is but one of the troublesome occurrences that cause Levin to be preoccupied with death. Anna is not basically pessimistic and would not dwell as persistently on death as Levin does were she not involved with one major event of her
life, her association with Vronsky. Although Anna is not as disposed toward joy as her brother Stiva, she more consistently thinks living to be more important than Levin does. It is especially obvious that Levin and Anna appreciate one another when Levin meets her for the first time and discovers her mental power and attractive aspects. She makes contact with Levin on a number of levels, and as a result, to the contemporary reader, both are bigger people (AK 101)

Nabokov concludes that just before her suicide Anna finally recognizes that "what the horrible little man in her dream was going over the iron is what her sinful life has done to her soul--battering and destroying it ...and that now she will follow the direction of her dream and have a train, a thing iron, destroy her body" (175). Anna throws herself under the train and is struck on the head by "something huge and relentless" (Browning 527).

Anna's suicide gives her a measure of the heroism of the martyr which is fully consonant with her highly attractive role as the representative of fidelity to one's own self and individuality. Anna is, properly speaking, a tragic figure. She perishes because of her insistence upon the purity and actuality of her nature as an individual, a quality which Tolstoy himself and many of his readers consider as the positive essence of humanity. In short, Anna did what seemed to her a good and heroic thing in challenging society for the sake of her love for Vronski and, because of the nature of reality; she died for it (Pursglove 158). Anna is unable to function in the society in which she lives because society cannot understand or accept the raw passionate honesty that fuels the light in Anna's eyes. Tolstoy, does not officially condemn Anna, but by, showing her gradual death both morally and emotionally. The impulsiveness of Anna's decision to throw
herself in front to the train and her final wish "to rise, to throw herself back" suggests her conflicting motives, which spring from her inability to find fulfillment in the world while she is living (AK 768). Anna's choice of suicidal instrument bears down on her from the outside, unlike Emma's choice of poison, which destroys her from the inside. The nature of the external forces on Anna assign more blame to society, the presence of social forces makes Anna's death beyond control, and therefore an act of less self-will.

Tolstoy, to greater degree than Flaubert, presents his heroine as an object of pity and sympathy and in turn creates a more developed representation of the effects of social repression on women in the nineteenth century. Emma and Anna are defined through their relationships with men, and therefore are denied the means to pursue an individual destiny, come to the conclusion that suicide is the only option open to them as a way of deciding their own existences.

Kate Chopin (1850-1904) is one of the noteworthy precursors of feminism in America with the path-breaking resistance to patriarchy. Kate Chopin was one of the first American women writers to think of sexual liberation for women. She marked the beginning of a long struggle to break free from the oppressive power structures setup by man and reinforced by culture. The feminist revolution in the late nineteenth century was foreshadowed by the thoughts and writings of individual women thinkers like Kate Chopin. Gilbert and Gubar remark in their book writers Literature by Women-Tradition in English comment:

It is in The Awakening that Chopin most openly and vividly dramatized her own-as well as her heroines-desire for freedom…she used a
distinctively turn-of-the-century myth of female sexual independence to show how her protagonist, Edna Pontellier, was defined, and ultimately destroyed, by a society that could not conceive of allowing a woman—especially a wife and mother—the kind of autonomy for which she longed. Specially, Chopin attempted…to explore ideas about her relationship between female sexuality and female creativity that were, in her era, almost entirely forbidden—at least for women writers (1012).

Chopin fought against the cultural and social forces that underestimated the writings of women. She proved their worth by rejecting the masculine culture and creating a separatist literature of inner space. Her works reveal a strong rebellious opposition towards patriarchy and the domestic role that is destined for women. Showalter in her essay "Tradition and the female Talent: The Awakening as a Solitary book" comments that "Chopin went boldly beyond the work of her precursors in writing about women's longing for sexual and personal emancipation"(170). She writes:

_The Awakening_ was… a revolutionary book. Generally recognized today as the first aesthetically successful novel to have been written by an American woman, it marked a significant epoch in the evolution of an American female literary tradition. As an American woman novelist of the 1890s, Kate Chopin had inherited a rich complex tradition, composed not only of her American female precursors, but also of American transcendentalism, European realism, and fin-de-siecle feminism and aestheticism. In this context, The Awakening broke new thematic and stylistic grounds (170).
Showalter draws a parallel between Chopin and her creation Edna Pontellier. As Edna breaks away from the conventional feminine roles of wife and mother, Chopin breaks away from the conventions of literary domesticity. Showalter calls *The Awakening* "as a parable of Chopin’s, literary awakening" (170). Kate Chopin was impressed with Maupassant who escaped from tradition and authority and "had entered into himself and looked out upon life through his own being and with his own eyes" (Seyersted 701). She daringly gave an unabashed treatment of feminine sexuality, which was hitherto dealt with apparently and that too superficially. Per Seyersted in the introduction to his collection of the works of Kate Chopin remarks: "She was the first woman writer in America to accept sex with its profound repercussions as a legitimate subject for serious fiction"(32).

In Kate Chopin’s times, women writers were expected to adhere in their writing to the same standards of feminine propriety that they were required to observe in their personal conduct. In 1854, when Fanny Fern published her autobiographical novel, *Ruth Hall*, she was condemned for portraying her father and brother disrespectfully and satirically. Similarly, Kate Chopin met with hostile reaction when *The Awakening* was published four decades later. Edna Pontellier, is the wife of a New Orleans business man. On vacation, they go to the Grand Isle, Louisiana. She meets a romantic young man, Robert Lebrun. They spend time at the island together and realize that they have romantic feelings toward each other. After the vacation, Robert has to leave for Mexico. Edna discovers that he is the one who can bring her freedom. When he comes back, Edna asks him to take her away; Robert disappears because he does not want to go against the moral ethics of society. Edna decides to drown herself by walking naked down into the sea. By
concluding the novel with Edna's suicide, Kate Chopin was not indeed punishing Edna, but rather corroborating Edna's liberty as traditional social values seemed restrictive and repressive for both Kate Chopin and Edna.

In *The Awakening*, LeoncePontellier treats Edna like a prized possession, a piece of personal property that he owns much like Nora in Ibsen's *The Doll House*. He is said to look at his wife “as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage”(21). Mr. Ontellier exerts his power over Edna fearing that she might become more powerful and self-reliant, threatening his security over her. As TorilMoi writes, “Because power is relative, all increase in woman's power decrease man's power over her”(61). It is this that Mr. Pontellier fears and so he tries to restrict herself within the conventional feminine role, with the usual, social and domestic relationships. Her relationship with Leonce deteriorates as the feminine consciousness in her begins to stir and she comes to self-discovery of her plight. In the essay "Ambivalence: The Socialization of woman", women such as Edna are described thus:

For these women, who have internalized the unequal evaluation of roles, who have developed needs to achieve, who have been rewarded because of their achievements, the traditional role is inadequate because it cannot gratify those non-nurturant, non-supportive, nondependent, non-passive aspects of the self.(Bardwick and Douvan 154).

Edna's concept of love is romantic, idealized and is a dream which is not consummated in real life. Edna's passion is stirred more because of the very hopelessness
and an attainability of the nature of her love. When Edna marries Leonce Pontellier, it is not out of love, it is purely an accident, and she views it as the decree of fate.

The acme of bliss, which would have been a marriage with the tragedian, was not for her in this world. As the devoted wife of a man who worshipped her… She grew fond of her husband, realizing with some unaccountable satisfaction that no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection thereby threatening its dissolution.

(TA 898).

Thus, unlike Emma Bovary, Edna theoretically believes that romantic love is not in the realm of this world, yet as George Arms suggests in his essay: Kate Chopin's The Awakening in the perspective of her literary career, Edna remains a figure of romantic ideal in spite of her acting with a sexual freedom that the common reader would call realistic or even naturalistic (218).

Hence, although Edna seems to know theoretically that romance and reality do not often go together, she keeps to her romantic ideal, and when Robert Lebrun appears in front of her she desires to accomplish her romance in reality. The charge on her protagonist Edna Pontellier, is that of a woman who over looked her domestic duties and enjoyed sensual fulfillment outside marriage. A woman writer turning to art for financial assistance was normal, but to work on “unchaste themes” was totally unacceptable which Chopin daringly did. Despite the caution of editors and critics to tone down her subjects, she created protagonists who were distinctly strong willed and committed to self-realization.
Women have always been oppressed in some way or another, and their needs are never understood. In the novel *The Awakening*, the males, such as Robert, Edna’s father, Edna’s husband, and Alcee Arobin, all try to control Edna, but do not realize that Edna wants to be a strong, independent woman. Arobin tries to manipulate Edna into thinking that she needs him. Robert wants Edna to be his wife, but he does not understand her. Edna’s father and husband think that she should be a proper lady, and try forcing her to be someone that she is not. All Edna wants is freedom, but she cannot get it with all these men in her life trying to control her. In *The Awakening*, Edna longs for her freedom, but due to the oppression from all of the male characters in her life, she is unable to find it.

Edmund Wilson praised *The Awakening* as an anticipation of D.H. Lawrence in its treatment of infidelity (590). Kenneth Eble maintained that “the novel is an American *Madame Bovary* though such a designation is not precisely accurate. Its central character is similar: the married woman who seeks love outside a stuffy, middle-class marriage” (vii-viii). Jules Chametzky was even more explicit: “What does surprise one is the modernity...of Mrs. Chopin’s insights into ‘the woman question’. It is not so much that she advocates women’s libidinal freedom or celebrates the force of the body’s prerogatives...What Kate Chopin shows so beautifully are the pressures working against woman’s true awakening to her condition, and what condition is’’. Chametzky offers, perhaps, the most detailed explanation:

“The struggle is for the woman to free herself from being an object or possession defined in her functions, or owned, by others… Certainly elements of the novel serve to confirm these interpretations especially if one take’s seriously some of the accusations leveled by the heroine in
moments of anger or distress. Edna is disillusioned by marriage; to her “a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth” (86).

Showalter admirably began to fulfill this purpose by providing a remarkably comprehensive overview of Chopin's *The Awakening* in her essay “Tradition and the female Talent- *The Awakening* as a Solitary Book”, she comments that, "Chopin went boldly beyond the work of her precursors in writing about women's longing for sexual and personal emancipation" (170).

Kate Chopin had been able to ignore the demands of an audience who thought Edna's “sins” made her deserving of death and who found compatible that sentimental and romantic tradition which sees marriage or death as the only excusable alternative subsequent to heterosexual love. As Leslie Fielder indicates, the audience found suicide far more acceptable than sex "Death even in a form as shocking to Christian orthodoxy as self-murder, offends the bourgeois mind less than sex"(32). Edna, in the early 1900's is one who revolts against the social status and leads the life of an independent female regardless of all the risks. It is a story that unfolds the two parts of her life, only to see them both falls apart. Thus the unreasonable conflict between her exterior world, the role of a wife and a mother that society has imposed on her and her interior reality of emotions and sexuality which initially are asleep and awaken through the course of the novel. Edna has lost touch with the chain of humanity and the society in which she lives; as a result, she cannot make a true commitment to life. Based on this fact, the novel's development shows a repeated movement down to the depths of Edna's unconscious and back to her conscious world. Edna's emotional awakening was stimulated by Robert whose presence built up her confidence allowing her to break out of her private inner
world reinforcing a totally different angle of viewing her life. Intense emotions were foreign to Edna so she had always kept her distance from them. When she surrenders she becomes a victim of these emotions "Edna bit her handkerchief convulsively, striving to hold back and to hide, even from herself as she would have hidden from another, the emotions which is troubling-tearing-her. Her eyes were brimming with tears (TA 89).

As Freud would explain in his psychoanalytic theory, we are conscious only of one tenth of our desires and motives. Robert brought emotional aspects of her inner troubled world to the surface, stimulating her desire for love, intimacy and the ecstasy of romance. But this emotional awakening was double-edged. On the one hand it delighted her and opened new depths in her and on the other hand, it becomes her consolation in the sense that she couldn't live the life she dreamt of. She was trapped in a world that didn't satisfy her in any way. Edna's sexual instincts or life instincts according to Freud, were awakened by Arobin. He aroused her sexual drives, fulfilled her need for a male figure to substitute for the absent Robert.

Edna's sensual wakening leads to the awakening of the creative interests within her. She resorts to art in order to relieve herself from the stifling oppression of patriarchy and to defy patriarchy that undermines that capability of women and imprison them to serve their interests. Edna however is unable to be a bird with "strong wings". Finally, when she drowns herself, she sees a bird with a "broken wing beating the air above reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down to the water" (TA 113). Edna has waged a struggle against the social constructions that circumscribe her and finally she seeks complete freedom through death Sandra M.Gilbert and Susan Gubar comment on this crisis of Edna:
She must be...assertive, authoritative, radiant with powerful feelings while at the same time absorbed in her own consciousness... the contradictions between her vocation and gender might well become insupportable, impelling her to deny one or the other, even during her suicide... (33).

The bird in the novel is also closely associated with solitude and remoteness. When Edna listen to the music which she names “solitude,” and image of a bird flying away from the naked, resigned man on the beach, is evoked in her. In the novel, the mother women are said to flutter about with extended angel wings to protect their brood. When Edna moves to a “pigeon house”, Chopin’s suggest that this is to be a place of cooing love. In the novel, the Parrot’s language is idiomatic and highly charged. The parrot’s language represents an alternative language for women that are often unrecognized and neglected by the patriarchal society. The bird image is a common image that refers to pathos. The bird is a victim figure and Ellen Moers in “Literary Women” points out that the caged bird metaphor is a recurrent image indicating the helplessness of women. Edna too lives a restricted life initially and she clamours to become a bird that soars high. Mademoiselle Reisz feels her shoulders to see if she is strong enough to break the inhibitions and fly high. Edna through her death frees herself from the cage of social conventions and acquires the identity that she is in quest of((Eagleton 210).

While the image of a bird brings the atmosphere of melancholy and helplessness, it is the company of the sea that is intoxicating and exhilarating to her. It can examined that, throughout The Awakening the image of the sea prevails. The novel opens at Grand Isle in the Gulf of Mexico, and the reader is always reminded of it because Edna's awakening to self is very much connected with the atmosphere of Grand Isle and her
accomplishment of swimming. The novel begins with the note of sea imagery and ends with the scene at the sea. Chopin describes the seductiveness of the sea at the beginning and repeats part of it at the end. The sea is a dominant symbol that can be variously interpreted to mean a world of adventure, of opportunity, of sexual pleasure, of danger, loneliness and death. In the novel, Chopin describes:

The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamouring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation. The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace (TA136).

Barbara Solomon in her essay, by suggesting that Edna's interaction with the other characters in The Awakening "helps to convince readers that Edna's problems are insoluble given the environment, the era, and the strength of newly discovered, uncompromising identity" (119). The strongest affirmation of Edna's suicide comes from Joyce Dyer, who sees Chopin's heroine as fulfilling her heroic destiny:

"Awakening is a serious matter. For what Edna's inward contemplation atlas has let her known is this: the only way to remain a romantic and hold onto our dreams and illusions is to die. Edna's dreams and ideals are so important to her that she refuses to give them up- in spite of the high price she has to pay. She rejects the very idea of compromise and walks into the gull"(131).
Chopin emphasizes the sea’s capacity to soothe the troubled soul. "The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. Walking on, she recalls terror she felt on the night when she had swum far out, but the memory quickly passes” (Berman59). The Awakening ends with Edna's mastering her fear and contemplating without regret or sadness the life she has now given up:

"She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, and then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air" (TA 137).

Edna's memories are those of awakening from the freedom of childhood to the limitations conferred by female sexuality. Thus Edna’s final act of destruction has a quality of uncompromising sensuous fulfillment as well. It is her answer to the inadequacies of life, a literal denial and reversal of the birth trauma she has just witnessed, a stripping away of adulthood, of limitation, of consciousness itself. If life cannot offer fulfillment to her of fusion, then the ecstasy of death is preferable to the relinquishing of that dream. Edna’s goes to the sea “and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at mercy of the sun, the breeze that beats upon her, and the waves that invited her” (TA 136). She is a child, an infant again. “How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky. How delicious. She felt like some new- born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known” (136). And with her final act Edna completes the regression, back beyond childhood, back into time
eternal. “Touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace” (136). As per Seyersted's remarks, Edna's suicide is a final assertion of self and "triumphant of her inner liberty" (149). And he continues:

Her suicide is the crowning glory of her development from the bewilderment which accompanied her early emancipation to the clarity with which she understands her own nature and the possibilities of her life as she decides to end it. Edna's victory lies in her awakening to an independent that includes an act of renunciation (150).

Edna's suicide is triggered by Robert's farewell note, because even though she felt despondency upon witnessing Mrs. Ratignolle's childbirth and realizing the inescapability of woman's biological nature, she was still looking forward to the moment of bliss with Robert upon returning home after her friend's childbirth. She would not have committed suicide if Robert had waited for her: but she realize in general that time would dictate that a day might come when Robert too would mean nothing. “Freedom” for Edna has always meant isolation and concealment, an increasingly sterile and barren existence; now suddenly she finds herself among people who have a different kind of freedom, the freedom to express the feelings openly and without fear.

Edna’s awakening to her intellectual and spiritual possibilities becomes synonymous with her ability to swim. She becomes daring and reckless and wants to swim far into the sea “where no woman has swum before” (TA 46). The swimming scene gives substances to metaphorical suggestions. It is the turning point which offers a sudden access to Edna's potentialities and an expanded vision of her situation. Edna’s
experience of the water is passionately sensuous: “A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given to her to control the working of her body and her soul” (TA 46). As the sight of the sea awakens the sensuous self of Edna, the vast stretch of the water subtly rekindles the yearning in her for sensuous fulfillment and liberation. The sea revives her from the deadening life she has been leading. It is the sea is not the ideal over that promises her the joy of swimming. It is the ultimate end.

Edna swims to where no one has ventured so far, feels her desire for Robert and senses her hatred for all traditional responsibilities of a wife and mother. As Chopin says, “she was seeking herself and finding herself” (58). Edna becomes more assertive after the awakening of her sexuality and rebels against the instinct or possessiveness in Leonce over her. Edna Pontellier makes no attempt to suppress her sexual desires nor does she hesitate to throw off her traditional duties towards her family. She realizes that she cannot lead a lifeless existence by being an inessential adjunct to a man, as an object over which he rules. She craves to be an independent subject to dictate her own destiny. She asserts: I would give up the inessential. I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn’t give myself. (67).

From her very early days, Edna has apprehended a dual life- the outward existence which conforms and the inward life which questions. Edna Pontellier is a powerful woman with an emancipated self-fulfillment of her sexuality becomes her persistent claim and she does not conform to the vegetable existence advocated by the man- made society. She sets out of the “dual life” to which she has been tied to earlier “that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions” (49). The traditional center of authority- husband and family lose their binding power on her. Even
the traditional ceremony, prayer in the church, creates an oppressing and nauseating effect on her. She prefers the soothing voice of the unbound sea to the stifling atmosphere of the church. Edna refuses to accept anything that stands in the way of exerting her free will. Moving to the pigeon house, using the phrase of Virginia Woolf, Edna kills “the angel in the house” and enters into “a room of her own”, the symbol of her freedom. Readings of Septimus’ suicide in terms that Clarissa Dalloway originally deploys when she learns of his death; becomes relevant here:

A thing there that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death (202).

When Edna comes to the belief that death is the only means available to keep from being overwhelmed by life, she becomes destructive of the positive life-oriented force that has been driving her. She explains that to keep herself intact, she must lose herself (TA 113-14). Suzanne Wolkenfeld states that “The vision of life that emerges from the novel constitutes an affirmation of the multiple possibilities of fulfillment, an affirmation made with a clear and profound grasp of the problematic nature of reality” (220). One can agree with this statement even if one must qualify it, as does Wolkenfeld, by giving reasons for Chopin's need to show that Edna cannot rally the forces within or without herself sufficiently in the end to keep alive. Despite the novel's life-orientation signified by a sexual awakening and the numerous other areas in which a new awareness
occurs, Chopin's artistically written novel underscores and perpetuates the link between women and death (Bassein 119). More than this, it puts this artistic rendering of Edna's life and her movement toward suicide beside some very important realizations that every woman needs to make (119). Eight of ten common characteristics that Edwin Shneidman has applied to most suicides can clearly relate to Edna's suicide the common:

- Stimulus in suicide is unendurable psychological pain.
- Stressor in suicide is frustrated psychological need, purpose of suicide is to seek a solution, goal of suicide is cessation of consciousness, emotion in suicide is hopelessness, internal attitude toward suicide is ambivalence'
- Cognitive state in suicide is construction. Action in suicide is egression (Shneidman 124-29).

Elaine Showalter in her essay "Tradition and the Female Talent: The Awakening as a Solitary Book" remarks: "Can Edna in Kate Chopin, escape from confining traditions only in death? Some critics have seen Edna's much-debated suicide as heroic embrace of independence and a symbolic resurrection into myth" (186). A feminist counter part of Melville's Bulkington: with the cry "Take heart, take heart, O Edna, up from the spray of thy ocean-perishing, up, straight up, leaps thy apotheosis". Readers of the 1890s were well accustomed to drowning as the fictional punishment of female transgression against morality, and most contemporary critics of The Awakening thus automatically interpreted Edna's suicide as the wages of sin (186).
Suicide is perhaps the most profoundly ambivalent of all human acts, and one which here confirms the irresolvable ambiguities of Edna's own role in the novel. It represents active passivity, a decision no longer to decide (Treichler 7).

Anita Desai is one of the powerful contemporary Indian English women novelists. Desai appears on the Indian literary scenes with a new voice and adds new dimensions to the achievement of Indian women writers fiction. The novels of Desai mark an important phase in the growth of existential and psychological fiction in Indian literature in English because they capture the atmosphere of the mind and directly involve the reader in a flow of a particular consciousness. Having been influenced by writers like Emile Bronte, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence and Henry James, Desai confess that by writing novels termed as psychological and purely subjective, she has been left free to make use of "the language of the interior". She prefers to delve deeper and deeper in a character, a situation or a scene rather than going round about it. J. Sunita Peacock in "Nanda Kaul's Departure from Patriarchal Indian Society in Fire on the Mountain" Says:

In her first six novels, Desai gives us women all who rebel against the trappings of Patriarchal Indian Society. Some of them (Otima, Sarah, Sita) are successful in breaking the barriers of such a society and gaining an entrance into it. There are others who alienate themselves from such a society (Maya and Monisha), but they reveal their rebellion against patriarchal society while they reside in it, even though it is only for a short period of time. Desai’s success lies in her heroines' awareness of what they are up against when they live in patriarchal Indian society and their
success comes from their resolve to either live in, or leave, the dominant culture(11).

She, with her writings shows a departure from current modes of fiction writing in India and an earnest effort to break new grounds—a shift from the external world to the inner world of an individual. "AnjuBalaAgarwal in Exploration of Feminine Psyche in Anita Desai’s Novels" writes:

Desai depicts women not only a symbol of growth and progress but also as withdrawal, regression, decay, death, and destruction. Women like Maya, Monisha, and Sita represent withdrawal as their emotions are not comprehended by others. So much so that this emotional imbalance causes frustration and leads to death as in the case Maya and Monisha(33).

Anita Desai is specially noted for her sensitive portrayal of the inner life of the female characters. Several of Desai’s novels explore tensions among family members and the alienation of middle-class women. She explores the intricate facts of human experience bearing upon the central experience of psychic tensions of characters. A concerned social visionary Anita Desai is a shrewd keen observer of the society and the position of the women in the contemporary society draws her keen attention. The novels of Anita Desai are noted for the profound probing into the inner life and feelings of the women, bounded by the shackles of the middle class. They are the explorations of the family problems, which perhaps is the chief cause behind the estrangement of the women from their family.
Anita Desai writes mostly about the miserable plight of women suffering under their insensitive and inconsiderate husbands, fathers and brothers. The man-woman relationship drives the characters into alienation, withdrawal, loneliness; isolation and lack of communication that frequently pervade all her novels. Most of her protagonists are alienated from the world, from society, from families, from parents and even from their own selves because they are not average people but individuals. The novel deals with the incompatible marriage of Monisha and Jiban. Monisha’s husband is the prisoner of conventional culture. He believes that a woman’s most important role besides child bearing are cooking, cutting vegetables, serving food and brushing small children's hair under the authority of a stern mother-in-law. Monisha feels that her privacy is denied to her. Her husband is busy with his middle rank government job sparing no time for Monisha and has no desire in sharing her feelings. As a result, women are left to wallow in drudgery, whereas men are made for the world-to actively participate in worldly activities. Patriarchy states that the highest value and the only commitment for a woman is the fulfillment of her own feminity and that only domesticity can honour her with such a fulfillment. Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* gives an account of the daily life of a woman:

She is trapped simply by the enormous demands of her role as modern housewife: wife, mistress, mother, nurse, consumer, cook, chauffeur, expert on interior decoration, childcare, appliance repair, furniture finishing, nutrition. Her day is fragmented as she rushes from dishwasher to washing machine, to telephone to dyer to station wagon to
supermarket…she has no time to read books…even if she had time, she has lost the power to concentrate (30).

*Voices in the City* is Desai’s novel which best confronts the feminist issue of patriarchy as found in the joint family and the “psychological warfare” used by its members. Monisha’s story is one of protest against the restrictions on her life by her husband’s family. Her forced subservience as she greets her new “many headed family” combined with her feeling of interaction set the stage for the battle she must fight in order to maintain her independence and self-esteem. Jiban, her husband, encourages her to act submissively.

In the small of my back, I feel a surreptitious push from Jiban and am propelled forward into the embrace of his mother…who, while placing her hand on my head in blessing, also pushes a little harder than I think necessary, and still harder, till I realize what it means, and go down on my knees to touch her feet appears to receive my touch, then another. How they all honour their own feet! … But it is not that they intimidate me—but the bars at the windows (VC 109).

Monisha in *Voices in the City* is an intensely sensitive women, an appreciator of fine arts, but is oppressed by her censuring in – laws. As a private person, she fiercely guards her own like her personal diary and she cannot accommodate herself within her in-laws large, extended joint family. Monisha is the worst affected, in the family, married to a ‘blind moralist’ a man with a limited mind, ‘minute-minded’ and limited she finds her life deprived of any ‘purposeful meaning with nothing to define her person, she is
turned into a sleepwalker, ghost, some unknown and dead entity (VC 146), she often seeks to ‘get away and be alone’ (VC148). As rightly expressed “Monisha in *Voices in the City* is a study in female alienation. Against the back drop of the huge, palpitating city of Calcutta, Monisha stands out as a modern Indian woman, uprooted from her natural surroundings in Kalimpong. She has no kin in her new abode at her in-laws place. As she is educated, intelligent, sensitive and well-read she cannot fit into the worn-out pattern of joint family and convention. (Pathak, 22).

Every aspect of her life is laid open to her husband’s family, including her inability to have children: “Like a burst of wild feathers, released full in my face, comes the realization that they are talking to me, my organs, the reasons I cannot have a child … laid bare to their scrutiny” (VC 113). Monisha feels “a little ashamed” of her defiance towards her family. But she asserts her values of individualism and independence:

> I think of generations of Bengali women hidden behind the barred windows of half-dark rooms, spending centuries in washing clothes, kneading dough and murmuring aloud verses from the Bhagvad- Gita and the Ramayana… Lives spent in waiting for nothing, waiting on men self-centered and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, waiting for death and dying misunderstood… (VC 120).

Monisha leads an equally fragmented and starved life. She is virtually an outsider with no moorings to the family or to herself. The graph of her mental makeup can be constructed from her long-searching and self-confronting entry in the diary. Her relationship with her husband is characterized only by loneliness and lack of
communication. He reckons his wife as worth nothing of consequence. He does not bother to ask his wife, even when he finds some money missing from his pocket.

Monisha’s ill matched marriage, her loneliness, sterility and stress of living in a joint family with an insensitive husband push her to breaking point. The element of love is missing in her life and finally she is driven to commits suicide. However, the persistent cause for her end in suicide is the charge of 'theft' on her psyche. She laments in vain:

I am accused of theft. These pettiest of people, they regard me as meaner than they. They think me as a thief. To be regarded so low by men and women themselves. So low, it is to be laid on a level lower than the common earth. I find that I am alive here (...). I am willing to accept this status then, and to live here, a little beyond and below everyone else, in exile (VC 136).

Monisha craves for privacy and loneliness. Their different temperament also makes her unable to communicate with Jiban. Monisha is acutely conscious of her adverse circumstances and her inability to communicate to Jiban and to others and as result she suffers from a nervous anxiety, which is existentialist. The situation becomes even worse when she finds that her condition is not isolated and that most Bengali women are imprisoned in their aloneness and they fail to seek the meaning of their existence. It is for her a sterile existence, a meaningless existence with adverse effects her psyche. Her life has neither love nor a meaningful existence or co-existence. She questions herself:
But I have no faith, no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing I can give myself to, and so I must stay - the family here, and their surroundings, tell me such a life cannot be lived - a life dedicated no nothing - that this husk is a protection from death. Ah! Yes, yes, then it is choice between death and mean existence, and that surely, is not a difficult choice (VC 122).

Monisha feels totally isolated in her family and is contemptuous of the mean lives traditional Bengali women are condemned to suffer within the confines of their apathetic and indifferent walls. She views her life closed in a container and suddenly concludes it to be a waste and consigns herself consequently to flames. Monisha is constantly haunted by morbid musings about death in the absence of any love for her husband Jiban. She is also not able to establish any life-giving rapport with him. She does not love any love even towards her mother. It is this absence of this eternal love that Monisha feels unhappy in her life. She is depicted as a hypersensitive woman with morbid inclinations. She finds herself trapped in an emotionally bankrupt and joyless matrimonial bond. Monisha is totally dissatisfied with her existence. She adopts strategy of escape into the past. She creates her own world of privacy. In her isolation, she is not free from her ego. She enlarges it. “My silence, I find has the power upon others…” (VC 130).

In searching for a solution to her discontent, Monisha recognizes the stigma of returning to her mother’s home: “I do not fear her disapproval, no. Her disapproval I could adapt myself to, but it is her disgrace in which I will not involve myself” (VC 139). As a compromise between active participation in an encroaching family system and in physically existing from the household, Monisha tries to maintain her separate and
distinct identity by following the ideal of non-attachment proclaimed by the Bhagvad Gita. She enacts that ideal: “I go and massage them [her mother-in law’s legs]. It is not difficult at all… She thinks I am touching her feet. But I am not. I do not touch her, nor does she touch me- there is this darkness in between. They will never reach through it to me” (VC 139). In her relationship with her husband, Monisha says that she fears love and wants to avoid it because she is “frozen with distrust”… “Mine has withered and died away” (136).

Monisha with all her sensitivity and intuitive intelligence remains a fragile character that never fights for her survival, or make free choices. Being an introvert, she is capable of making a logical contact with her inner self and yet she withdraws herself into her own shell, secretly suffocating herself in the midst of the bustling and crowded, typical middle class joint family.

*Voice of the City* has touched upon the essential questions of being through the delineation of psychological strains of individual behaviour. However, the most significant is of the character’s psychological conflicts and dilemmas in its inability to transcend the social conditioning which compels them to view women and analyse their actions as per predefined chauvinistic concepts of behaviour instead of treating them as individuals. After leading a stifling life in crowded Calcutta, she hopes for a better and freer life in Kalimpong and in Darjeeling. S. S. Mishra in “Fictionalization of Existential Predicament of Indian Women: A Thematic Study of Anita Desai’s Novels” describes the factors that forces her to her self-annihilation
The insufferable cacophony of overcrowded, apathetic Calcutta, 
Monisha’s claustrophobic and oppressive lack of privacy, her incapacity to 
bear a child, her total in communication with her nonchalant husband, 
absence of love in her life, the resultant formatting loneliness within and 
the suspicion of her father in law are the sources of her mental tension. 
She shrieks in agony there is no escape from it and it makes her feel the 
futility of her hollow existence and ultimately drives her to suicide. (17)

Monisha’s parents had forced her into a marriage, thinking that “it would be a 
good thing for her to be settled into such a stolid, unimaginative family as that, just 
sufficiently educated to accept her with tolerance” (VC 199). But Monisha’s nephew, 
Nikhil is exasperated by this social system. He opines that it is detrimental to the 
individual growth and freedom. It is an equally shattering experience for Monisha, more 
psychologically than socially. She gets the first psychological assault at the reception 
“arranged by the heads of this many headed family” (VC 109). She is made to touch the 
feet of a large number of aunts and uncles. Later, she is made to confine herself to 
cooking and washing. She admits: “To sort the husk from the rice, to wash and iron and 
to talk and sleep, when this is not what one believes in” (VC 121). It becomes her 
existential crises. Her unhappiness results in her existential quest for meaning in life and 
hers ultimate frustration. She is not able to get over her neurotic despair. In fact, all her 
efforts are directed towards alleviating her personal crisis. Monisha’s case is not much 
different than that of Maya in Desai’s Cry the Peacock.

Monisha feels not only superior to others but also wants to perfect herself an 
image of a detached woman. She seeks just an escape from conflict-inner as well as
outer-by actualizing her image of a silent sufferer. She builds around herself a wall of fantasy and she loses her ability in the moment. Her obsession is to “keep it all to yours eye, a secret quite private, all your own, to keep and gloat over. It will hurt so much to show” (VC 114-115). The retreat into the self-weakensMonisha’s involvement in the living world. Even her silent advice to her brother is “Cast away involvement … cast it away and be totally empty, totally alone” (VC 129). R. Kalidasan in “Quest for Self: A Study of Anita Desai’s Voices in the City” observes:

“A sense of emotional insecurity gets permanently etched on Monisha’s consciousness due to the callous and apathetic behaviour of her husband and his family members. She draws into her private inner shell when she finds her husband uncaring and unresponsive; the emotional hiatus between herself and others renders her an exile in her own home. Monisha is bitterly disheartened to see life’s inscrutability gets gloomy and pessimistic day by day. As a result, Monisha comes to acquire an abnormal personality” (117).

Her aloofness becomes her wisdom. Her passivity acquires the colour of an independent personality. She says: “I am too silent for them I know, they all distrust silence” (VC 130). During girlhood, her parents interpret her silence and aloofness as an inclination towards morbidity.

Monisha withdraws herself into an exile. Solitude suits her temperament. She “willingly accepts to live there a little beyond and below everyone else, in exile” (VC 136). The urge to hide is ingrained in her. It is presented symbolically as the desire to live
underground in the lanes of Calcutta. Locked in her room, she reads books and feels self-important. At night, she creeps up the top most floor and enjoys communion with the vast darkness/emptiness. This is her hour of freedom, but what she considers freedom is just a flight from conflict. She fears the aggressiveness of her in-laws. She undergoes a tremendous amount of psychological tussle. She does not get freedom because she does not acquire self-knowledge. Only a brief moment of self-discovery enables Monisha to know her real self in the brilliant black eyes of the street dancer. Suddenly she is scared that a “glance of those enormous and brilliant black eyes would dissolve and disintegrate her into a meaningless shadow” (VC 237). As the rustic dancers beat their drums, she awakens to a greater truth about her life. She has so far led a barred, enclosed existence devoid of all human feelings. The consciousness of having been emotionally crippled and the inability to share feelings with others on human level, isolate her. On introspection, Monisha is terrified by her emotional vacuum. Indira Bhatt in “Voices in the City: A Study of Monisha’s Plight” affirms:

“Monisha dies; screaming for life, for the first experience of real feeling of pain awakens in her a desire to live. It is true she loves to realize herself as an unfettered individual and to become at any stage a complacent, purring, wife who adjusts herself to a glided life. She is too silent for the family and the world distrusts her silence. She wants to be herself and not to compromise” (143).

Monisha’s brother explains her death in heroic terms: as a "talented heroine", Monisha moral sensitivity and intellectual acuity would not allow her, in good
consciousness, to continue an existence which denied her the expression of her own values and the opportunity to experience true intimacy:

She had died from an excess of caring, in a fire of care and conscience, and they too must accept, with a like intensity, the vigilance or incomprehension to drift by, but to seize each moment, each person, each fragment of the world, and reverence it with that acute care that had driven Monisha to her splendid death (VC 248).

Anita Desai creates characters who feel a terrible isolation in the suffocating darkness of their life in which no deep communication is possible. There is a dreadful attractiveness in this eternal suffering the characters undergo. Monisha's silence is deep-rooted, she does not wish to communicate, nor does she seek any positive relationship with her husband. There seems to be a gap, an abyss which she thinks cannot be bridged, and life cannot be made meaningful. They are in search of silence and solitude which the society they inhabit will not offer them. Theirs is a self-created tragedy. They cannot identify with what they are, and they are always in conflict with objects around them. When Jiban meets Monisha's family after her death, he admits to them, "If this terrible thing is the fault of anyone-it is mine" (VC 246). By aligning himself with his family, Jiban confirms the superior the claims of the joint family and his own male self-interest over the marital relationship which denies Monisha the ability to satisfy her own "signifying self". A self-inflicted death is a befitting end to such a life. Monisha's tragedy represents the plight of many unfortunate young women who having nothing else to fall back upon, "If I had religious faith, "she herself says,” could easily renounce all this. But I have no faith, "no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing I can put myself
to, and so I must stay. The family here, and their surroundings, tell me such a life cannot be lived- a life dedicated to nothing- that this husk is a protection from death” (VC 122).

All four women in the above examples feel an unbearable boredom with their lives as married woman. The men they are married to are able to offer them much but not the most significant matter, love. Apart from the particular individual constellation of personality and other narrow specifics, it is the intense pressure of male dominance in a patriarchal society where their only way out becomes adultery. The only way out of their emotional abyss is suicide.