CHAPTER IV

SUICIDE WRITERS AND LITERATURE: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Gender is a much debated issue today, referring to ways of seeing and representing people and situations based on sex difference. While sex is a biological category, gender is a social and cultural category influenced by stereotypes about 'female' and 'male' behaviour that exist in our attitudes and beliefs. Such beliefs, are often held to be culturally produced' or 'constructed' (Goodman vii). The term gender refers to the social, cultural, and psychological traits linked to males and females through particular social contexts (Lindsey 4). Gender is very much closely related to sex, yet non interchangeable. Sex refers to the biological characteristics distinguishing male and female based on chromosomes, anatomy, hormones, reproductive systems, and other psychological components (4). In short, sex can be the point of departure of gender. Thus if we try to define what it is to be a man or a woman, it is necessary to differentiate what are the biologically ‘natural’ characteristics of each sex and what is the socially and culturally expected behavior of each gender (Hytonen 12). Furthermore, gender is more a social rather than a biological construct. It deals with a particular social position and roles that an individual holds and performs rather than biological attributes. To be more specific, a role is the expected behavior, performed according to social norms, shared rules that guide people’s behavior in specific situations (Lindsey, 2). The concept of role is based on the society’s construction, is a socio-historical construction, thus it is never fixed and influenced by the historical periods of the society itself. The Oxford Dictionary
of Psychology defines perception as “the act, process, or product or perceiving, the ability or capacity to perceive, or a particular way of perceiving (560).

When we refer to the study of literature and gender, it is not only with reference to a literary analysis of texts with regard to the sex (female or male) or sexuality of authors, but also a wide study of literary texts as they are written, read and interpreted within cultures by women and men(vii). The school of feminists called the ‘difference’ feminists has been working on the assumption that women and men really are different in significant ways. When feminists speak of ‘difference’ it is usually in the sense that Rich outlines in "Of Women Born" that of women's difference from men. Through both the sexes- male and female are subsumed under the human species their experiences are differential, and the patriarchal system has been entrenched with the Freudian dictum that ‘anatomy is destiny’. Women have been associated with gendered notions or behavioural pattern which have severely circumcised and restricted women’s mobility from the ‘private’ to the ‘public’ sphere. Though the notion of suicide is understood as explicitly individual and a deliberate act of choice and action, the reason for being pushed to commit suicide may vary greatly. The World Health Organization (2004) has estimated that about 1 million people die by suicide each year, the true figure being considerably higher. This statistics on suicide is held to far exceed the number of death due to homicide and war combined. In most European countries the number of suicides is greater than the number of deaths due to road traffic accident (Hawton 1).

Suicide rates differ from country to country, while Eastern Europe and some Asian countries notably China and Sri Lanka report high rates, relatively low rates are found in Latin America and certain Muslim countries. In Europe, rates are reported to be
higher in countries in the north, and lower in countries in the south, and lower in
countries around the Mediterranean. However little information is available on suicides in
many African countries (1).

In general, gender pattern for suicide rates in males considerably exceed that of
females. In rural China suicide is more common in females than in males (1). Gender has
come to manifest itself in the material act of taking one's own life. Data has shown that
more men than women complete suicide, whereas more women than men attempt suicide
(Jawaski: 47). Traditionally, men prefer to use methods more dangerous and lethal such
as firearms whereas women prefer to use less violent methods like drug overdoses. The
use of firearms and related violent means to obliterate life is considered to be male,
masculine and active, while adapting softer methods such as drug overdoses, gas, and
drowning are viewed as more feminine, reactive and passive(48). Several studies reveal
that suicides and intentions are gender specific. For examples, women's suicides are after
interpreted through the lens of relationship breakdown, as a result of emotional turmoil,
in contracts men's suicides which are viewed as signals of courage, pride and resistances
against external circumstances such as economic hardship, severe physical illness and
social isolation.

It is also assumed that men assert their independence and physical process in
crisis, but women internalize crisis by becoming depressive, dependent and passive
(Jaworski 48). It is also found that woman engaged with suicide due to sexual and
emotional abuses, neglect and economic hardships, where men engaged with suicides as a
result of emotional breakdowns and social isolation. Based on suicide completion rate
differences, it has typically been argued there is more lethal suicidal behavior on the part
of men than female. However, some researchers have debated on the extent, nature, and interpretation of the suicide rate differences between males and females. It has been asserted that men and women are equally prone to self-destruction, but merely chose different methods of suicide expression, because of their gender, that results in different levels of fatality (Garland and Zigler, 93). They argue that gender roles dictate that men do not “fail” at suicide, which leads them to choose highly lethal methods of self-destruction. Conversely, gender roles for women encourage delicacy and attention to appearance, even in death. As a result, women may be more likely to choose a method that will not result in blood or disfigurement (e.g., pills rather than guns). These methods tend to be less likely to result in fatality, even if the intention to die was equally high for the woman. Individuals who unexpectedly survive an intentional and lethal suicidal act are not counted in the completed suicide rates. Since women appear to be more likely than men to select suicide methods that allow time for discovery and intervention (e.g., overdose), women might be more likely than men to survive what could be a completed suicide.

Kushner (1985) has argued that cultural notions of femininity, in conjunction with societal beliefs that women’s suicidal behaviors are a direct reflection of relationship failures may provide subtle incentives for family members, physicians, and public health officials to underreport female suicide completions. Furthermore, motherhood in many cultures is considered a sacred gender role. Many cultures hold the value that mothers are not supposed to abandon their children, so there may be additional reasons to underreport female suicides in which children may be deserted or left. However, this stands in contrast to some data revealing that single mothers in some countries might be at
particular risk for suicidality (Weitoft, Haglund, & Rosen, 2000). As a contrast, male suicide has been viewed in some cultures as a legitimate answer to economic difficulties and other potential humiliations. Explanations of men’s suicides have often focused on issues of performance and achievement (Canetto 93), rather than love, which is evoked for women’s suicides. Male suicide has also, at times, been socially sanctioned as a patriarchic duty (i.e., Kamikaze). Certainly, these gender and culture values can affect how a death is classified.

The link between suicidal behavior and affective and mental health disorders is well established. There is also a link between suicidal behavior and drug and alcohol use and abuse. Suicide prevention efforts are also likely to be enhanced by continued expansion of access to efficacious treatment for depression, alcohol and drug abuse, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and personality disturbances. Continued gender disparities in access to treatment, support for treatment, administration of treatment, and social acceptance of treatment are all likely to manifest themselves in sex differences in rates and types of expression of suicidal behavior.

However, concern over the high and increasing rates of male lethal suicidal behavior should not ameliorate concern over the high risk that some women face for suicidality (Horton 34). Female suicide has been linked to rates of domestic violence, isolation, the occurrence of rape, illegitimate pregnancy, and economic and power restrictions. The sense of hopelessness, entrapment, and/or fear that is felt by these women may be important determinants of emergent suicidality (Stark & Flitcraft 16). Generally, female suicide rates are higher in countries without social status for women. Raising the social and economic status of women, increasing crisis and long-term
services for women in abusive relations, and expanding both the formal and informal economic and social support offered to women should reduce the rate of female suicidal behavior.

Literature encompasses much that is life and life at times strangely emulates the aspects of literature. The mind that creates the literature is most often the victim of the creative genius that impulse the work into existence. As Caroline Kohopines, "the link between creativity and mental illness is reaffirmed when one considers the high incidence of psychosis amongst the plethora of creative luminaries"(214). Woody and Claridge refer to two hypotheses on the link between creativity and psychoticism: "that creativity and psychopathology share a similar origin; hence the biological link; that creative individuals and psychotics have some personality traits and thinking styles, hence the behavioral and cognitive links (241).

However writer’s suicides cannot easily be predicted, but when dwelled into, in retrospect one can trace a long extended history of a self-destructive behavior. Some critics have argued that Virginia Woolf, Hemingway, Plath, Sexton were victimized by the creative process, and they themselves believed that writing held in check their suicidal feelings and prolonged their lives"(Berman 16). The list of suicide writers in the twentieth century is long and includes established writers like John Berryman, Hart Crane, Hemingway, Jack London, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, John Kennedy, Toole and Virginia Woolf.

Like Edna's suicide in The Awakening, which first appeared in 1899, where Edna swims into the unknown, Virginia Woolf wrote the third of her suicide letters, and walked
the half-mile to the River Ouse, filled her pockets with stones and quietly walked into the water. The verdict was "suicide with the balance of her mind disturbed", the concluding words of _The Waves_ fromed her epitaph, "Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death". (Schulman 567). Besides Virginia Woolf's suicide, Sylvia Plath remains "the most haunting twentieth century literary suicide" (Berman 137). As the counter part to the romantic English poet, Thomas Chatterton whose suicides in 1970, at the young age of eighteen symbolized, artistic martyrdom. Plath was an intense mother to the last, her maternal instinctive care for the children made her carry a plate of bread and butter and two mugs of milk, should they wake up, then coming back to the kitchen, she tried sealing the door and window as best as she could with towels so that there will not be a seepage of gas to the children’s room, opened the oven laid her head in it and turned on the gas.

The male suicide usually roused shock and indignation, the female suicide, which are far less common provoked horror and outrage. As Berman opines unlike men, women were expected to devote themselves to their children and were bound to a higher moral responsibility. Women were deemed to have greater fortitude and patience than men and thus were required to endure life's inevitable suffering" (48). Hence suicide by women was societally less acceptable. Plath's mother, Aurelia Schober Plath refused to believe her daughter's death was suicide. She was simply horrified by her daughter’s suicide, the grieving mother told the newspapers that Sylvia died from a respiratory infection. Sylvia chose not to take her children with her, but the reverse happened for Assia Weevil a woman with whom Hughes had an affair after leaving Sylvia. In 1969 she gassed herself and her two-year old child Shura, fathered by Hughes in the kitchen of her flat. She was
severely depressed about her relationship with Hughes, whom she feared would soon leave her, as he had left Plath. In a strange twist of fate, forty seven years later, Sylvia Plath's son Nicholas Hughes, long afflicted with bouts of depression committed suicide on 16 March 2009; he was 47 at the time. A professor of fisheries and ocean sciences, at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, to pursue a career in poetry at home. A family friend recalled to the times of London:

Nick wasn't just the baby son of Plath and Hughes and it would be wrong to think of him as some kind of inevitably tragic figure. He was a man who reached his mind-forties, an adventurous marine biologist with a distinguished academic career behind him and a host of friends and achievements in his own right. That is the man who is mourned by those who knew him.(Wagner 119).

The deaths of Assia Weevil and her child, and Plath’s son Nicholas Hughes, maybe appear to follow or imitate the death of Sylvia Plath still, the desperate cry for help, looking for an extended hand of concern and care, somebody to tidy over their chaotic emotions, emerges to be clear signals that the tendency to suicide happens outsides their own control. Most clinicians call this as the, contagion effect-suicides' ability to "infect" other people, rendering them susceptible to self-death (Berman 1).

Anne Sexton was another brilliant poet, who grew up in the same suburban town of Wellesley, Massachusetts much like Sylvia Plath. The two first met in Robert Lowell's 1958 graduate poetry seminar at Boston University. Both went their separate ways, as the seminar ended and except for a brief exchange of letters, they had no other contacts and
were never to see each other again. Plath's suicide in 1963 came as a shock and cast a long shadow on her own life from which she was unable to emerge. It is claimed that Anne Sexton refused to glorify mental illness or suicide as she viewed herself as a survivor. She finally seemed to have a belief that her creative ability saved her life (3). She appeared to be mesmerized by the life and death of Sylvia Plath, if it was a case of 'contagion' or 'infection' is questionable, but there was no doubt that in her later poems, there was a darkening of Sexton's vision and an increasing attraction to death. The news about Sylvia death had created in her a "terrible taste for it, like salt" (Complete Poems 127). The poem she had written as "Sylvia's Death", a few days after Plath's death, glamorizes suicide as an irresistible longing and the poem embraces suicide as a solution to the problems of life. She continued to portray death as more attractive than life itself. Most of her later poems are pro-suicide poems reflecting her intense suicidal tendencies.

For both Sylvia Plath and Ann Sexton, the therapeutic sessions with the psychiatrist did not improve their mental makeup. For Sexton, there was the combining of the personal with the political; there was the sexual and emotional entanglement with her psychiatrist. The relationship peaked Sexton's own level of confidence and security, but when the affair terminated, it left her more vulnerable. Her decision to divorce her husband, and the splintering of the family in 1973, further contributed to her decline. The addiction to alcohol and a variety of sleeping pills and tranquilizers worsened her condition, and she openly declared her desire to kill herself, like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, she carefully planned her end, and on 4th October 1974, she asphyxiated herself in her automobile.
Charlotte (Anna) Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) was one of the most prominent feminists and social thinkers at the turn of the century. An American short story writer, essayist, novels and autobiographer, her text on *Women and Economics*, brought her wide acclaim and popularity. She was considered the leading intellectual of the women's movement. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* shows the status of nineteenth-century women within the society, her feelings of disintegration and rebellion against her imprisonment and submission to laws established by and for men. This short story tries to show that madness works in this story to disclose the oppressive control of gender on women of the nineteenth-century. The woman, in an attempt to escape her imprisonment may flee into madness. This use of madness appears to transform the negative construct of female insanity into a necessary affirmation of the female self, breaking the fetters of isolation and oppression that enslaved her. Nineteenth century female writers project into their works, mad diabolical heroines, to discuss problems that women from Victorian times encountered in their everyday life. Those women writers most frequently are the counterparts to the main characters of the literary works. They represent deeper nature of the main heroines, their desires and needs. Moreover, the mad protagonists can be seen as the authors’ doubles reflecting also their rebellion against and opposition towards the patriarchal system by which they were surrounded.

*The Yellow Wallpaper* has been read as a powerful feminist text that attacks the patriarchal invasion of women who try to express themselves. Towards the end of the story, her madness is seen as a higher form of sanity and her search for meaning in the wallpaper is seen as the quest for liberation. Her crawling is seen as a sign of rebirth of revival and her husband’s fainting is a proof that she has outwitted him. Patriarchal
power has been cowed down by the stern persistence of the protagonist. Elaine R. Hedges in her essay “Out at Last?” “The Yellow Wallpaper” “After Two Decades of Feminist Criticism” says:

The wallpaper, as the story’s key metaphor, has been read as inscribing the medical, marital, maternal, psychological, sexual, socio-cultural, political, and linguistic situation of its narrator-protagonist; as an image of the situation of the woman writer and hence a way of understanding the dilemmas of female authorship; as revealing the relations between gender and reading and gender and writing; and as a description of the problems of female self-representation (222).

In the Yellow Wallpaper, Gilman portrayed with dramatic intensity and authenticity a young woman's mental breakdown. Gilman's life also follows a familiar pattern in a women's life. Known for her fierce advocacy of women’s independence, she suggested that women should work outside of the home to fully develop their potential. As with Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, the birth of their children pushed them into some kind of despondency, Perkin’s birth of her daughter, throws her into one such desperate mood. She removed herself from the care of her neurologist S. Weir Mitchell who had prescribed "complete bedrest" and limited intellectual activity, and eventually left her husband, and travelled to California and supported herself with lecturing and writing, continuing her dedication to various causes. She spent the last year of her life with her daughter Katherine and her family, having learned that she suffered from inoperable cancer as her disease advanced, Gilman chose to end her own life rather than suffer for no worthwhile reason. On August 17, 1935, Gilman ended her life with chloroform as she
did not want to suffer the final ravages of her disease. She left a typed note, an extract from the last chapter of her memoirs. "When all usefulness is over, when one is assured of imminent death, it is the simplest of human rights to choose a quick and easy death in place of a slow and horrible one"(333). In accordance with her wishes, no funeral service was held, after a quiet cremation, her ashes were scattered on the Southern California hills.

Of the three suicides of women writers, popular and renewed for their creative intelligence—Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton—except, Virginia Woolf who had no children, the other three had to face the trauma of settling between two demanding needs their role as wife and mother and that of a creative artist. The former was one of despondency; the latter was of autonomy and liberation. Most of the time, these women of genius and creativity found it difficult to prioritize the familial demands and still find a personal space of a room for venting their creative impulses. Combined with this factor is their physical and mental illness, insecurity and vulnerability, betrayal and disappointments.

If a study of literary suicide is attempted the ratio of men committing suicide is higher. It has been reasoned that man is subjected to a higher mental pressure. Belonging to the 'public sphere', the man has to live a perpetual life of competition, rivalry and fear, the woman is mostly confined to the domestic role and the uncomplicated manner of her existence ensures strength of her willpower making her mentally and morally superior to men. Although she is more emotional, her inherent timidity and devotion to the family makes her less prone to suicidal impulses. Regional Skelton sums up this phase of a woman's existence.
Her affection for home and children is greater, and the religious sentiment has diminished less in woman than in man, her intellectual faculties are usually less developed, and hence also her sensibility to mental pain: inured to continual petty troubles, her patience is fortified to resist greater ones. It is without surprise, therefore, that we learn that there are four times as many men as women suicides. In the large town, however, these factors tending to the exemption of women from suicide largely disappear (Qtd in Kushner)

One of the assumptions is that women are equally or even more prone to suicide than men, still women have less will power to pull it through. The feminine lack of courage and natural repugnance to personal violence and disfigurement are reason for the more unsuccessful suicide attempts among women. Many studies reaffirm that women frequently opted for less violent means of self-destruction usually by drowning or poison. With the gradual shifting from the private to the public sphere, the progressive sex roles women took on led to a confusion of gender roles. Educated women were emancipating from the age old shackles of tradition and due to forced circumstances, were to become the breadwinners for their families. This push of the woman into the active sphere was expected to increase the female rate of suicide to that of men, due to increased tensions and competition. What can be deduced from the three women writer’s suicides is that they took larger roles in having to compete with the world of male writers. Either their husbands deserted them, or they voluntarily deserted their husbands, as they continued alone and lonely in their grim struggles to succeed.
Male suicidal writers far outnumber the ratio of female suicides. John Berryman, was haunted by his father's suicide. He struggled to come to terms with it in his book *The Dream Songs*. Much as he resisted the 'mad drive to commit suicide', he continued to abuse alcohol and to struggle with depression, as he had done much through his adult life. On the morning of 7th January 1972, he killed himself by jumping from Washington Avenue Bridge in Minneapolis, Minnesota into the west bank of the Mississippi River.

Paul Celan, was a Romanian poet and translator. Born in a Jewish family, he became one of the major German –language poets of the Post-World War II era. He committed suicide by drowning in the Seine River in Paris on 20th April 1920. Hart Crane, an American poet and one of the most influential poets of his generations was greatly influenced by the poetry of T.S Eliot. Crane wrote modernist poetry that was difficult, highly stylized and ambitious. He committed suicide at the age of 32. A heavy drinker, Crane suffered from bouts of alternating depression and elation. Crane is said to have jumped overboard into the Gulf of Mexico, after exclaiming "Goodbye everybody", before throwing himself overboard.

Romain Gary was a French novelist, diplomat, film director and born in 21st May 1914. Gary died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound on 2nd December 1980 in Paris. Grey’s first wife was the British writer, journalist, and Vogue editor Lesley Blanch. They married in 1944 and divorced in 1961. From 1962 to 1970 Grey was married to an American actress, Jean Seberg, with whom he had a son. He left a note which said specially that his death had no relation to Seberg's suicide. Randall Jarrell was an American poet, literary critic, children's author, essayist, and novelist. Towards the end of his life, in 1963, he suffered from depression. Randall spent his days in front of the
television weeping. He sought help from a psychiatrist who prescribed the anti-depressant drug, Elavil. The drug made him manic and he was again hospitalized. Soon afterwards he slashed a wrist and returned to the hospital. It is said that on 14 October 1965, Jarrell was struck by a car and killed. Some of the people closest to him were not entirely convinced that his death was accidental and suspected that he might have committed suicide. In a letter Robert Lowell wrote, “There is a small chance that (Jarrell’s) death was an accident… [but] I think it was suicide, and so does everyone else, who knew him well”. William MotterInge was an American Playwright and novelist. He became known as the "Playwright of the Midwest”. Inge committed suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning on June 10, 1973 at the age of 60. Primo Michele Levi was an Italian Jewish writer. He was author of several books, novels, collections of short stories, essays and poems. His best known works include If This is a Man (1947) and his unique work, The Periodic Table (1975). He committed suicide by falling from the interior landing of his third-story apartment in Turin on 31st July 1919. Depression is one of the chief reasons that he was suffering and the factors likely included responsibility for his elderly mother and mother-in-law with whom he was living in the same apartment and the traumatic effects of his experience on his memory. Nicholas Vachel Lindsay was an American Poet. He is considered the father of modern singing poetry. Lindsay sank into depression on 5th December 1931 he committed suicide by drinking a bottle of Lysol. His last word were "They tried to get me; I got them first'. John Griffith Jack London was an American author, journalist, and social activist. His famous works include The Call of the Wild and White Fang as well as the short stories To Build a Fire, An Odyssey of the North, and Love of life. He committed suicide on 22nd November 1916, by uremic
poisoning. Griffith suffered from scurvy in the Klondike, and he was in extreme pain. He took morphine and it is possible that an overdose of morphine may have contributed to his death. Ross Franklin Lockridge was an American novelist of the mid-20th century. He is noted for *Raintree Country* (1948) a widely praised novel. Suffering from severe depression, Lockridge committed suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning shortly after the novel's publication. John Kennedy Toole was an American novelist from New Orleans, Louisiana, whose posthumously published novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Toole's novels were rejected during his lifetime. After suffering from paranoia and depression due in part to these failures, he committed suicide at the age of 31.

Yukio Mishima, a Japanese author, poet, playwright, actor and film director, is considered one of the most important Japanese authors of the 20th century. He was nominated three times for the Nobel Prize in literature. He gave an address to the soldiers during a coup; his speech was received with mockery and jeers. He finished his planned speech after a few minutes, returned to the commandant’s office and committed seppuku (suicide). Vladimir Mayakovshy, born in Bagdadi, Georgia on 7th July, 1893, was the author of plays like *The Bedbug*, and *The Bathhouse*, which were thinly disguised satires on Stanlin’s authoritarianism. He committed suicide in Moscow on 14th April 1930. In his suicide note he wrote:

Do not blame anyone for my death and please do not gossip. The deceased terribly dislike this sort of thing. Mamma, sisters and comrades, forgive me-this is not a way out (I do not recommend it to others), but I have none
other. Lily-love me… Comrades of VAPP- do not think me weak-spirited.

Seriously- there was nothing else I could do.

Ernest Hemingway's was a great American writer with a stronger ambivalence toward suicide, a subject that haunted his life and his fictional characters. "His protagonists are among the most suicideophobic in literature, and while they do not all succumb to this fear, many initiate events leading to predictable deaths. Hemingway was the most famous writer of his age, a larger than life figure whose greatest fictional creation was his own public persona of heroic invincibility and disdain of death” (Berman 101). His suicide in 1961 was, as Norman Mailer observed "the most difficult death in America since Roosevelt" (qtd. in Raeburn 171). Ernest Hemingway's fascination with suicide appears in his earliest short stories, including his juvenilia. There was a strong genetic predisposition to "nervousness" on both sides of Ernest Hemingway's family. Kay Redfield Jamison notes in Touched with Fire that three generations of Ernest Hemingway's suffered from depression or manic depression, both illnesses that can lead to suicide. In addition to Dr. Hemingway's suicide, three of his children later died by their own hand: Ernest, Ursula, and Leicester. Two of Ernest Hemingway's sons have also suffered from serious mental illness, and recently his granddaughter Margaux Hemingway committed suicide at the age of forty-one."When Ernest Hemingway put the muzzle of his double-barreled shotgun to his forehead the morning of a much later July, he suffered from all of his father's ills: erratic high blood pressure, insomnia, hypertension, mild diabetes, paranoia, and severe depression" (Reynolds 16). His awareness of manic-depressive illness can be seen in the posthumous novel Islands in the Stream (1970), which contains a curious discussion of an alcoholic who talks incessantly
about killing himself. One of his friends recalled, "His suicide had elements of self-pity and revenge, but was inspired by desperation and derangement. It was a careful and courageous act"(559). Hemingway's father committed suicide in 1928 and it is impossible not to read The Doctor and Doctor's Wife as a chilling autobiographical premonition. The story becomes doubly prophetic in the light of Ernest Hemingway's own suicide thirty-three years later (Berman 105).

Years of traumatic injuries and heavy drinking took a terrible toll on Hemingway's physical and mental health, and toward the end of his life he became paranoid and delusional. The electroshock treatments he received at the Mayo clinic resulted in a terrifying loss of memory and the complete inability to write. The use of lithium for the treatment of manic depression was still in its infancy, he was suspicious of any drug that might harm his creativity, despite the fact that he spent his entire adult life self-medicating with alcohol. Leicester Hemingway described his brother's suicide as the "final positive action of his life, like a samurai who felt dishonored by the word or deed of another, Ernest felt his own body had betrayed him"(Hotchner 283). Ernest Hemingway's suicide contributed to the suicides of his siblings Leicester and Ursula. It is well known that suicide heightens the risk of other suicides in a family, apart from genetic factors, suicide is a learned act, and the death of one relative may teach another that suicide is an acceptable solution to the pain of living (Berman 135).

It emerges very clearly that among male writers suicide, depression is one of the chief reasons for the ultimate decision of committing suicide. The symptoms of depression abetted with alcoholism pushes people to the edge, provoking suicidal tendencies that lies fathoms deep in their consciousness. While this is mostly the case
with the suicidal male writers, the pressure of domesticity and bearing and rearing children takes the toll on the female writers who also become victims of apathy, and depression. William Styron in his famous book *Darkness Visible* explains:

> Depression is a disorder of mood, so, mysteriously painful and elusive in the way it becomes known to the self-to the mediating intellect-as to verge close to being beyond description. It thus remains nearly incomprehensible to those who have not experienced it in its extreme mode… (Styron 7).

*The American Heritage Dictionary* defines depression as a psychiatric disorder characterized, by an inability to concentrate, insomnia, loss of appetite, feeling of extreme sadness, guilt, helplessness and hopelessness, and thoughts of death. Also the relationship between art and the mental condition of melancholia or depression has existed for as long as humans were able to express themselves in all forms of artistic endeavor. In her book *Touched with Fire: Manic Depressive Illness and Artistic Temperament*, Kay Redfield Jamison wrote,

> “To assume that such diseases usually promote artistic talent wrongly reinforces simplistic notions of the 'mad genius',… All the same, recent studies indicate that a high number of established artists meet the diagnostic criteria for depression…In fact, it seems that these diseases can sometimes enhance or otherwise contribute to creativity" (Jamison 62-67).

Many artists and producers were themselves influenced by depression during their creative efforts. Depression was not typically considered an obstacle to creativity but
rather a force that led to artistic innovation by stimulating an intensity of emotion, which in turn fostered the artists’ creative powers. Over time, however, an artist's depression became less the muse or inspiration than the debilitating illness that it is. Ernest Hemingway in a letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote, "That terrible mood of depression of whether it's any good or not is what is known as The Artists Reward" (Mellow 390). An early example of depression in found in the poem *A Brief of Sorrow* published in 1600 by Nicholas Breton:

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Muse of sadness, neere deaths fashion,
Too neere madness, write my passion.
Painespossessemee, sorrows spill me,
Cares distress me, all would kill me.
Hopes have failed me, all have spoiled mee.
... Death hath took mee, all dispatchtmee(12).
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Depression inspired not only the Elizabethan poets but many other great writers and poets also. Cowper was an English poet and hymnodist. He suffered periods of severe depression. In 1752, he sank into his first paralyzing depression, and he wrote about this episode thus:

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(I was struck) with such a dejection of spirits, as none but they who have felt the same, can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair. I presently lost all relish for those studies, to which before I had been closely attached; the classics had no longer any charms for me; I had need of something more
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salutary that amusement, but I had not one to direct me where to find it (Hayley 508).

John Keats (1819), one of the famous poets of the English Romantic movement, wrote the following in a letter to his brother George and sister Fanny: "Circumstances are like clouds continually gathering and bursting. While we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events-while we are laughing it sprouts it grows and suddenly bears a fruit which we musk pluck" (Motion 22). Keats struggled with depression during the latter part of his life. His depression was made all the worse by his wife leaving him and the harsh criticism of his work by the London literature critics. He was inspired to write his *Ode on Melancholy* (1819).

The suffering of men and women afflicted by depression has inspired many books. Some accounts were fictional and others biographical of the fictional greats who struggled with depression, few are better known than Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* whose symptoms practically define depression. Some scholars have argued that Shakespeare’s description was so accurate that he must have suffered from depression himself. In *Hamlet* he writes

> Oh God, God
>
> How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
> 
> Seem to me all the uses of this world?
> 
> Fie on’t, ah fie, ’tis an unweeded garden
> 
> That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature
> 
> Possess it merely (Act I scene 2)

Again quoting from *Hamlet* Shakespeare writes this about suicidal thinking
Oh that this too too sullied flesh would melt
Thaw, and resolve itself into dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon ’gainst self-slaughter

There are numerous suicides in literature as with writers in life. The first of all literary suicides that of Oedipus’s mother Jocasta, who finds it an honorable way out of an impossible situation. Jocasta is an integral part of the play, *Oedipus the King*, by Sophocles. Her actions and thoughts are important to the reader as well as the characters within the play. Jocasta is trying to help relieve Oedipus of his fears that come from the oracles. Jocasta states at the beginning of her speech to Oedipus (977-984), that since chance is against him there is no need to worry; he cannot know what will occur in the future. Jocasta, on the other hand, does not follow her own advice, and decides to kill herself instead of living with the guilt of sleeping with Oedipus. Homer records self-murder without comment, as something natural and usually heroic.

Aegeus was mythical king of Athens who was a grandson (on his father’s side) of Erichthonius. His wife was Aithra, princess of Troizen on the Peloponnese. Aegeus thinks his son has been slain by Minotaur. He committed suicide by throwing himself off a cliff into the sea (Alvarez 76). Erigone hanged herself from grief when she discovered the murdered body of her father Ikarios -causing an epidemic of suicides by the Athenian women. Leukakas jumped off a rock to escape from the rape by Apollo. As an answer to the Delphic oracle, Codrus enters the enemy camp in disguise, and allows his slaughter by a soldier. Charondas, the law-giver of a Greek colony in Sicily takes his own life as he has broken one of his own laws. Lycurgus of Sparta starved himself to death to help his
people honor the oath they gave him. One of the qualities that emerge from all these suicides and their motivation is that of a certain nobility of motive. The ancient Greek took their own lives for best possible reasons: grief and high patriotic principles or to avoid dishonor (Alvarez 77).

Beginning from the ancient literatures one can go through and find that all literature despite the region, religion, topography, language, cultural and social ethics, are filled with countless numbers of suicidal characters. The first literary work that created an epidemic was Goethe's novel, *The sorrows of Young Werther*(1774). Before the novel, suicide for reasons that was higher-minded than money was taught to be a lapse in taste, now that shortcoming was set right, when suicide was proclaimed to be fashionable. In Goethe's confessional novel about a passionate youth who kills himself because of unrequited love, Goethe based some of the details of Werther's suicide on a friend who took his own life, but the novelist was also writing about his own tormented feelings. He was actively suicidal when writing the story and "even kept a dagger at his bedside and made repeated attempts to plunge it into his breast"(Steinhauer 20). Goethe may not have romanticized suicide to the extent that Werther does, but he identifies so closely with his hero that he blurs the separation between author and character. Werther views himself as a Christ-like martyr and, before shooting himself, tells his beloved Lotte, who was modeled closely on Goethe's Charlotte that she will be better off without him. Werther also offers a long philosophical justification of suicide, claiming that it leads to eternal freedom(Berman 26).Goethe was later embarrassed by the novel and distressed that it provoked numerous readers to imitate the event. "Sentimental young men sported Werther's costume: blue coat and yellow trousers and vest; some lovelorn creatures
followed his example and committed suicide with copies of the novel in their pockets" (Steinhauer 24).

Emile Durkheim argued in his monumental 1897 book *Le Suicide* that the suicide rate is not influenced by imitation or suggestibility, and that the contagion or the ability to ‘infect’ others is not always a concrete proof of driving someone to suicide. This view remained unchallenged until David Philip demonstrated in his 1974 essay, “The Influence of Suggestion on Suicide” that the suicide rate increases after the publication of suicide reports, much as the “werther” effect. In this manner, even suicide literatures can be said to affect the weak and young mind, propelling them to this end.

Leaping over centuries of suicidal literature if one arrives at the eighteen century the romantic poets were in love with the romantic aspects of suicide. Suicide appealed to their sensual moods and amounted to be more of a symbolic suicide. The only suicide in Victorian fiction of the notions of a self-destructive female is Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* (1847). After revealing the secret of her existence, Mr. Rochester characterized his wife as a victim of hereditary insanity, "she came of a mad family", idiots' and maniacs through three generation. A beautiful Creole woman from a prominent West Indies family, Bertha was married to Mr. Rochester in an effort to consolidate the wealth of the two families. Suffering from hereditary insanity that had been kept secret from Mr. Rochester, Bertha began to spiral into madness and violence shortly after their marriage.

Eventually, Bertha is imprisoned in an attic in Thornfield under the guard of Grace Poole, a confinement meant to ensure both her own protection and the protection of the other inhabitants of the house. Bertha occasionally escapes from her prison and wreaks
havoc in the house; her last outburst involves setting fire to Thorn field and leaping to her own death. As the representation of the classic Gothic figure of "The Madwoman in the Attic," Bertha is both pitiable and terrifying and supports Bronte's critique of gender inequalities and Victorian marriage during the period. The character of Bertha Mason is shown through the eyes of Jane Eyre as a lunatic, a madwoman who is grotesque in her wildness and the inability of Rochester to control her. Yet her madness was not a sudden leap into insanity; it was through Rochester that Bertha was first declared insane and placed into confinement, which led to her eventually becoming actually insane, overwhelmed with grief and anger. The tale of Bertha's madness is told through Rochester; he discovered shortly after the marriage that Bertha had a family history of madness; when “the honeymoon [was] over, [he] learned his mistake” (Bronte 260). This punishment exemplifies the typical views of passionate women within the 19th century; for women “passion means aggression, or self-destruction...passionate women are profoundly discontented. They cannot win happiness; the comfort of hearth and home with which the good women are rewarded cannot be theirs” (Calder 111). Bertha, to find her freedom, attempts to burn down her hated prison and leaps to her death rather than suffer returning to the arms of Rochester. Emily Bronte’s Cathy, in The Wuthering Heights true to her own personality, refuses to allow herself to become healthy and wastes away within her bed, turning from life and embracing death. While Bertha's suicide is much more dramatic, owing to her vibrant and rebellious nature, Cathy simply gives up the fight for life, allowing death to come creeping over her. In the rewriting of Jane Eyre, as Antoinette in Jean Rhys’ Wide Sargasso Sea Bertha is still the mad woman in the attic. Antoinette’s attempt to merge with white identity ends up in frustration. It is only
“at the end that she sees, in the light of the fire, the entire vista of her life and recognizes her own identity in the form of her childhood friend Tia, and this time she does not fail to respond” (Kundu 79). As a creole woman under the oppression of racial, imperial domination, realises that ultimately her identity is with the black women in the island and not with the people in the metropolitan white. The unhappy marriage and the attic life cause the loss of memory of self-knowledge she had once attained. During her attic life in the absence of a mirror she feels lost and she does not know how to relate herself to the world around her. Antoinette’s attempt to merge with white identity ends up in frustration. Racial or otherwise, the woman is still trapped in a ‘noman’s land’ without a face, or substance, forced materially or metaphorically into a non-existence state.

In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Manson is no longer a woman, nor even a human. “She is reduced to the bestial and rendered almost invisible and inaudible like “the trope of blackness in Western discourse that has signified absence at least since Plato”” (Gates 315). The Creole woman represents a deeper alienation and effacement. “It seems to be tripled otherness; she is marginalized thrice over, being the other of the other of the other. The question of identity also becomes extremely complex as well as urgent since she presents the highly problematic situation of one who belongs neither to the centre nor to the periphery” (Kundu 68). One can demonstrate the problem of voicelessness in Jane Eyre. The reader of *Jane Eyre* becomes complicit in the watching; Antoinette feels these eyes upon her, viewing her as a ferocious lunatic. Even Antoinette watches herself in horror, as she dreams that she looks at herself in the mirror and sees not herself but a ghost. Jean Rhys thus constructs a world of scrutiny, as we spy Antoinette from all
different angles: from Grace Poole’s viewpoint, from Rochester’s, from Antoinette’s own—and also from our own, as readers of Jane Eyre.

Like the Dadaists who viewed suicide as an art for Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) is a story of a boy, who had traded his soul for everlasting youth. He commits suicide because he wants to get rid of the only evidence of his monstrosity. Yet his self-destruction is not an attempt to preserve moral integrity but rather an aesthetical act. In a fit of rage and in the last attempt to get rid of his new found (self) consciousness, Dorian stabs at the painting, nevertheless the blade plunges into his own heart. The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson depict the duplicity of human nature and the monstrosity that can hide behind a respectable facade. Hyde is a secret so terrible, that it must remain so at all costs. Barbara claims that this act is "not only revealing human nature's deeply intertwined double nature" he also castigating Victorian hypocrisy: (Gates120). She hints at the tendency of Victorian society to suppress or at least hide everything that was in conflict with the system of its values and at the discrepancy between what these values preached and what was widely practiced. The double life of the respectable Dr Jerkyll is never revealed in public. He commits the ultimate sin, but he somehow dissolves in this act and his reputation is never tainted by suicide. He writes down his confession, yet it is read only by his closest friend. To the rest of the society, he will remain the philanthropist doctor, who had vanished inexplicably and the corpse of "a self-destroyer", which Utterson finds in the doctor’s cabinet will forever bear the monstrous face of Mr. Hyde.

Thomas Hardy was an author of critical realism in the 19th century England. As a poet and a novelist, he represents a distinguished figure in British literature. Thomas
Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* and *A Grave by the Handpost* reveal Hardy’s literary treatment of suicide. Hardy shows that the death wish is the aftermath of iniquity in society and personal defects. Also, suicide appears as an outcome of exaggerated egoism turned to anomie. Thus, *Jude the Obscure* includes four serious suicidal acts—three of them are made fatal, that is, Jude’s mother’s suicide, Jude’s, and Jude’s son’s, while Sue’s suicidal act is not so. Hardy’s *A Grave by the Handpost* includes two suicides—the Sergeant and his son Luke. Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) is tale of a young man who just wants to follow his dreams, his start predestined to fail miserably. Hardy's grim story resembles Greek tragedies. The novel centers around a hero doomed right from the beginning, and all his intentions, lead him and his family to an inevitable catastrophe.

When Jude and Sue move to Christminster, Father Time slowly ceases to be little and his despair grows with him. After he learns that the impoverished family of five is expecting a new child, he murders his two younger sisters and commits suicide by hanging.

This inevitable tragedy of nurture and nature brings Sue's and Jude's relationship to a bitter end. The boy's face expressed the whole tale of their situation. On that little shape had converged all the inauspiciousness and shadow which had darkened the first union of Jude, and all the accidents, mistakes, fears, errors of the last. He was their nodal point, their focus, their expression in a single term. For the rashness of those parents he had groaned, for their ill assortment he had quaked, and for the misfortunes of these he had died.

Sue and Jude are drawn to self-destruction by several reckless choices, ending up in disastrous relationships, Jude's suicide note "Done because we are too many"(2), is a powerful indictment on society that drives its (unwanted)children, toward self-
destruction. The novel ends on a note of absurd mechanism, as "the coming universal wish not to live"(2). However, their suicide attempts are nothing but a footnote in Hardy's much more complex commentary on the nature of the society in which his characters live in. The story “A Grave by the Handpost” is about a father and son bond, Luke Holway and Sergeant Holway. On Christmas Eve a choir of carol singers in Chalk-Newton was going round singing for people. They find the grave of the sergeant. They sing a carol as a sign of respect to him because he didn't have a Christian burial. Before they were about to sing, the son of Sergeant Holway, Luke Holway arrived and found that the letter he wrote to his father had killed him. He felt so guilty that he wanted to kill himself. But the carol singers convinced him and sent him back to the army and to make his father proud. He asked the carol singers if they could move his body to a church .He then went straight back to the army. The person in the choir who promised to move his father's body to a church did not keep his promise to Luke. He felt that Luke would not return alive from the war. But years later Luke returned from the war and went to look for his father's body. He looked around the church and couldn't find his father's grave. When he found out they hadn't buried his father Luke got very upset and he killed himself. The suicide of the old age is illustrated in the first while the suicide rising out of a sense of guilt is shown in the second.

Jack London (1876-1916), is a modern writer in America and one of the most famous realist novelists in the world. He wrote many novels, among which Martin Eden, is the most famous and successful one. Martin Eden is regarded as the writer’s autobiographical novel. Jack London uses this image to describe a tragedy of the intellectuals. Martin Eden tells how the protagonist changes from a poor sailor to a famous and wealthy author
through making constant effort to improve himself. When he squeezes into the upper society, however, he finds everything deceitful. He is bogged down in the morass of ideal disillusionment so that he is unable to extricate himself, and he finally drowns himself. The investigation of Eden's suicide, in Jack London's semi-autobiography Martin Eden and its exhibition of the artist's deadly and consistent struggle to achieve his literary aspiration are explored. Eden is opposed by the capitalist prejudiced society; the matter ends this struggle in Eden's suicide which is a final decision.

Graham Green is a writer, who has ventured into most forms of literature, as well as literary criticism. Throughout the novel *Doctor Fischer of Geneva or the Bomb Party*, Greene uses the human body as an emblem of social deterioration. Society is diseased both inside and out. Bodily decay and mutilation are symbolic in the novel. Suicide is highlighted several times in the novel. Doctor Fisher, his wife and Madame Faverjon, one of the toadies, all commit suicide. Anna Luise's death, on the other hand, was altruistic and accidental. The others took their lives to escape the futility of their existence. Jones's attempted suicides are like the others, based on greed. He is greedy for death. John’s attempts at killing himself are bungled because he based the first attempt on the poor research of a detective novel. Anna-Luise is the only one who chooses death for altruistic reasons. Doctor Fisher kills himself after giving away his wealth. His act is the result of his studies of the rich. He says to Jones:

I want to discover, Jones, if the greed of our rich friends has any limit. If there's a 'Thus for and no further. If a day will come when they will refuse to earn their presents (60).
When offered more money the toadies acquiesce to their greedy impulses, despite the risk of death. Jones attempts suicide to be close to Anna-Luise, first by mixing aspirins and whiskey and then trying to buy the last cracker at the party—the one presumed to have a bomb contained in it. Fate intervenes both times to prevent his death. He wants death because he wants love. Jones shows that people try to die for love, despite what Doctor Fischer said: "Money makes a difference certainly. Some people will even die for money, Jones. They don't die for love except in novels" (105).

In Greene's *Dream of a Strange Land*, the attention is divided between the victim and his physician. The latter is faced with a painful dilemma: should he break the law to save the life of his patient, desperately poor, or should he break the law to procure an evening of pleasure for a very powerful and important man? His solution of the problem was perhaps anticipated by Proust when he described Dr. Cottard as willing to forego an entertainment "for a government minister's cold but not for a working man's stroke." (4) In *Dream of a Strange Land*, Greene presents a patient who suffers from leprosy and abandoned by his doctor who shows the capitalist’s prejudice and deprives him of cure. To him death is the only cure.


*Lie Down in Darkness* is the story of a Southern family struck through with envy, vengeance, sorrow, and bitterness. It is a family marked, even years before it occurs, by
the suicide of one of the young Loftis daughters in the humid days after the United States dropped atomic bombs. This novel mainly focuses on American family's inexorable drift toward madness and self-destruction. Milton Loftis is a Virginia attorney in his fifties who is devastated by the suicide of his beloved daughter Peyton. His wife, Helen, is a nervous, straitlaced woman whose frail health collapses as a result of the earlier death of her older daughter Maudie born with severe physical and mental disabilities (Berman 216). Helen Loftis struggle against depression which begins long before the deaths of her two children, her adored Maudie, who she has always favored and fiercely protected, and Peyton, with whom she has fought bitterly her entire life. Helen's psychological conflicts take the form of physical complaints, and she becomes as dependent upon sleeping pills as her husband is on alcohol. Helen's only passion in life is Maudie, who remains childlike and passive until her death at the age of twenty from tuberculosis.

*Set This House on Fire* is a the story told from the points of view of two characters: Peter Leverett, a young New York lawyer who has felt vaguely responsible for the violent death of his wealthy friend, Mason Flagg, years before in Italy, and Cass Kin solving, an American alcoholic painter who was mysteriously involved with Flagg. From the vantage point of the present, the two men reconstruct, together, the events which led to the rape and murder of an Italian peasant girl with whom Cass was in love and the supposed suicide but actual murder of the self-indulgent and egotistical Mason Flagg. William Styron has crafted an electrifying and deeply unsettling novel of rape, murder, and suicide. The movement toward self-destruction in *Set This House on fire* is opposed by a stronger movement toward self-preservation. Cass's murder of mason Flagg is a crime for which he must repent the rest of his days, recognizing, as he does, that "to
kill a man, even in hatred, even in revenge, is like an amputation. Through this man may have done you the foulest injustice in the world, when you have killed him you have removed a part of yourself, forever”(446).

*Sophie's Choice* is William Styron's darkest and most autobiographical novel (1980). Sophie is the daughter of a prominent anti-Semitic Polish professor, yet despite her family position she and her two children are shipped to Auschwitz in 1943. She encounters a sadistic doctor who forces her to make a horrifying choice: she must decide which child will live and which will perish in the gas chambers. It is, an impossible choice, but one she must nevertheless make lest she lose both children. She chooses to save her son though he later perishes. After survival Auschwitz Sophie's guilt is overwhelming that she cannot live with herself. She is sent to Swedish displacement camp in 1945 where she tries to kill herself by cutting her wrist with a piece of glass. She chooses a church for the suicide in order to rage against God, as she believes God has abandoned her. After Nathan forsakes her a more serious suicide attempt occurs when she tries to drown herself at Jones Beach. Finally Nathan and Sophie took their own lives by taking sodium cyanide together. The papers write the suicides off as a statement of love and devotion. This final effort to avoid any suggestion of sadness is another example of how people choose to sugar-coat problems and live the 'good life'. The novel explores the way people moved on with life after the Great Depression, and World War II. In the novel *Sophie's Choice* human nature and societal pressure are shown to come together in a fatal interaction. The expression of grief and the consequences of bottling up emotions are displayed with both of these characters. Sophie's life had many stresses in it. Styron mentions that three of his major characters commit suicide, including Cass Kinsolving,
the tormented hero of *Set This House on Fire* who remains obsessed with self-destruction (Berman 215). Like Woolf, Sylvia Plath, Hemingway, Anne Sexton, and William Styron has preoccupied with suicide from the initial stage of their writing career. His artistic interest in the subject arises from his own inner conflicts.

*Darkness Visible* (1990), by William Styron, is evidently a portrayal of his struggle with depression and suicide. It is Styron's extraordinary account of his descent into mental illness. *Darkness Visible* situates the writers' suicide attempt in the larger context of the many nineteenth-and twentieth-century artists who have taken their own lives. The publication of *Darkness Visible* helped break the silence around depression, which many suffered in solitude. It also tackled head-on the pervasive assumption that depression is simply down to individual weakness, particularly when it drives people to suicide. Styron notes at the beginning of *Darkness visible*, "nearly incomprehensible to those who have not experienced it in its extreme mode"(7). At the end of the book, observing that "the horror of depression is so overwhelming as to be quite beyond expression, hence the frustrated sense of inadequacy found in the work of even the greatest artists"(83). He points out, among the most debilitating symptoms of depression, "confusion, failure of mental focus and lapse of memory"(14). He likens the pain to drowning and suffocation, metaphors also used by Sylvia Plath in *The Bell Jar* to describe her suicidal depression.

By and large, suicide is uniquely a human phenomenon, which animals never resort to. Studies on gendered notions of suicide have concluded that men and women resorted to different methods of self-destruction. Both men and women tend to select hanging more frequently. However as Katrina Jaworski points out:
Where males engage in car exhaust poisoning and firearms following hanging, drug overdoses and car exhaust poisoning dominate female methods of suicide. Drug overdoses are least popular amongst men, firearms with women—an echo from the past where more women committed suicide through poisoning and more men committed suicides by employing firearms”(54).

Among the numerous personal and political reasons that motivate suicide, all male suicides are usually associated with mental diseases and depression. While for women suicides is mostly personal. Kushner has argued that the cultural notions of femininity along with societal beliefs state that women suicidal behaviours are a direct reflection of relationship failures (5). Women are thought to “attempt suicides and commit suicidal gestures as a “cry for help”. The frequent suicidal attempts by writers like Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, Ann Sexton, can be viewed as a cry from within to be rescued. They flirt with death in the belief that they will be saved after all. Men’s suicides, on the other hand, have often focused on issues of performance and achievement rather than love. Jennifer LangtinrichsenRohting rightly points out

“Male suicide has…at times been socially sanctioned as a patriarchic duty. Certainly these gender and culture values can affect how a death is classified. Generally because of these gender roles, it has been thought that women’s suicides are under reported (6).
In an essay titled ‘Sorties’ Helen Cixous, begins a pertinent question of where is she? Basing her argument on a dual, hierarchical opposition, she cites her classification of the woman’s place:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity/Passivity</th>
<th>Father/mother</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun/moon</td>
<td>Head/heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture/Nature</td>
<td>Intelligent/sensitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day/ Night</td>
<td>Logos/ pathos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He is the “from, convex, step, advance, seed, progress”, She is the “matter, concaves, ground -which supports the step, receptacle” (287). Assuming to deconstruct these symbolical metaphysical logocentric coding, Helen cixous’s *The Laugh of the Medusa* affirms that “women must write herself, must write about women and bring women to writing…women must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement” (334). Coping with a profession that was essentially phallocentric women had to compete and descent into a space that was long been circumscribed out of her reach.

Among all professions, creative writing and writing itself, is one which takes a heavy toll on the abilities of a person. In a world of competitions, right strife and winning, writers become victims of untold stress and sufferings. While within the patriarchal setup, men always have the leisure and comfort of the private zone of the family; whereas women who took up writing as a profession were looked upon as a suspect. For the emerging brand of women writers, the task ahead of them was
formidable and tough. The home front still continued to define them, their first duties as they had psychologically inhered into their sub consciousness, was towards the family husband and children. Even for the solitary unwed women or the childless, the family formed the core of their existence. With the notions of liberation and autonomy very much in the air the ideal family as a social unit and institution was collapsing and breaking down, women in the quest for self-independence and self-assertion were quietly opening the closed doors to an exterior they had never chanced on before. At times this led to the breaking up of the family, the women abandoning their husbands, drifting away into unknown spheres to experiment and exercise their potential, and finding a space of their own choice.

Whatever reasons may be attributed to the differential aspects of suicide, the fact remains it concerns a life. Women who give birth to a ‘life’ were essentially people, who require emotional stability and support, filial bonding and kinship, familial sustenance and continuity. When betrayed, rejected, abandoned or neglected, a sense of anger, frustration and dejection pushes them into a floundering state of mind. This was exactly the state of mind in which the women suicide writers found themselves. Finding no secure ground for an emotional relationship, they found an emotional outlet in their creative writings, a vent that allowed them to express their intense hatred, anger, and pain. Suicide emerged as their final act of defiance and revenge a notional self-justification they failed to receive in real life.

Most of the poems, novels, plays and other literatures of these women writers were autobiographical in nature. As they battled with emotional turmoil of breakdown in relationships, loneliness, a sense of being forsaken and deserted, they found in writing a
therapeutic healing, which of course, was no real healing. As they wrote themselves out in fiction, poetry short stories, diaries, memoirs and letters, the only culminating escape route to their concept of freedom was suicide and the darkness of death. While a few women writers could embrace and celebrate a cerebral fantasy of death like Emily Dickinson who claims “Because I could not stop for death. He kindly strapped for me(1-2), for other traumatized writers like Perkins, Woolf, Plath, and Sexton achieving death through suicide was a forced self-driven act, for a known or unknown reason.

Hence whatever be the gendered notions about suicide, and if we can classify it into such categories as male suicide or female suicide, the interior reasons may differ, as men and women face a different set of problems and difficulties, but as pointed out before, suicide is eventually about taking one’s own life, be it a male or a female a ‘life’ is a ‘life’ and the ethical question if it has a 'logical' right or the ‘rational’ reason for its existence will remain an ethical and moral question, to which no solutions or answers would ever evolve.