

## THE PORTRAYAL OF THE FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN *ANNA KARENINA*, *MADAME BOVARY* AND *AŞK-I MEMNU (FORBIDDEN LOVE)*: QUESTIONING GENDER ROLES

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In various literary works, different women with different characteristics come into view, which shows that gender issue and the conflict between men and women have been questioned by authors, who aimed at reflecting the gender problem by highlighting the position of females in society. Women are sometimes portrayed as obedient, sometimes as rebellious characters in literary works. Therefore, the social conditions and the cultural norms play a very important role in the depiction of female characters in literature. In this sense, in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Uşaklıgil's *Aşk-ı Memnu (Forbidden Love)*, the focus is on the conflicts not only between women and men but also between women and social norms restricting the lives of females, metaphorically confining them and preventing them from proving their identities. In addition, in these realistic works, the female protagonists are involved in adultery, which causes them to experience psychological problems together with the social ones. As a consequence, in this study, the characteristics of these female protagonists will be discussed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, France and Ottoman Turkey, in a comparative manner, so as to identify the impact of the social pressure upon these female characters, who commit suicide at the end of these novels and to recognize the destructive nature of the patriarchal norms upon females in different environments.

**Keywords:** Gender problem, Adultery, *Anna karenina*, *Madame bovary*, *Aşk-ı memnu (Forbidden Love)*.

### Introduction

The gender problem socially and psychologically confining women in marriage and social life can be observed in literature as one of the most striking topics. Analyzing novels from different countries dealing with gender issue, it is apparent that Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Uşaklıgil's *Aşk-ı Memnu (Forbidden Love)* realistically portray socially and psychologically incarcerated position of female protagonists in their marriages in Russian, French and Ottoman Turkish societies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by depicting their conflicts with their husbands and their beloved ones in their adulterous affairs. As realism reflects real-like characters with their real-like problems in real-like settings, it is obvious that in these three novels the protagonists are depicted in a realistic manner through the reflections of the social problems in their societies.

In this paper, while discussing the reasons behind the problems experienced by the protagonists in their marriages including their contradictions with their husbands, these female characters' committing

adultery and suicide will also be questioned. Moreover, the psychological state of the protagonists, their struggles with the patriarchal and social notions regarding the aspects dominating the male-dominated societies, will be underlined as well in order to clarify the destructiveness of gender roles for women in the realistic novels belonging to different countries.

### **Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina***

Considering the situation of the female protagonist Anna Karenina in Tolstoy's realistic work, what comes to the fore is that Anna, in her marriage, suffers from lack of love as a neglected and ignored female who cannot experience her womanhood, so the romantic desires of Anna lead her to look for real passionate love outside, which results in adultery. In this manner, her love affair with Vronsky can be regarded as her rebirth as seen along these lines:

[...] she was not conscious of degradation. [...] by avoiding Russian ladies abroad, the two never placed themselves in a false position [...]. To possess him entirely was a continual joy to her. His nearness was always pleasant. [...]. She dared not let him see her consciousness of her own inferiority.

(*Anna Karenina* 459)

Even though, her adulterous affair causes her to lead a metaphorically imprisoned life, she has still the courage to experience the pleasures of passionate love. Even if she feels degraded and inferior due to her adulterous affair, she cannot help seeing her beloved, who offers her love and passion. Despite the public opinion and the prejudice against women in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian society, Anna is ready to sacrifice herself for the sake of love. Analyzing the background of her affair with Vronsky, it is obvious that the indifference of her husband, Karenin towards her aspirations, which forces her to be involved in adultery, can be realized along the thoughts of Karenin as seen: “[...] every woman living in Society was liable to such things, but that he had full confidence in her tact and would never degrade himself and her by being jealous (*A K* 107), so she does not feel the necessity to reveal Vronsky's interest in her to her husband. Especially Anna's husband's dwelling so much on his work, the discipline he puts into practice in his life, his harsh manners make Anna become disillusioned. He is described as a man whose “[e]very movement [...] was filled up and apportioned, [and whose motto is] without haste and without rest” (*A K* 108). As a very prominent man in society who “was interested in political, philosophical, and theological books [...]” (*A K* 109), he is unable to show his love towards his wife. Therefore, as Arnold puts it, “[t]he marriage had not brought happiness to her, she had found in it no satisfaction to her heart and soul, she had a sense of want and isolation [...]” (187). Thus, by means of Anna, Tolstoy portrays the panorama of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian society in which marriage institution was corrupted. It is doubtless that the Russian author also sheds light on the situation of human psychology and human weaknesses as Wachtell states:

The [Russian] novels tend to present astute portrayals of general human psychological problems pride, doubt, lassitude, spite, envy. Thus, on the whole, Russian psychological prose is concerned with exploring the ramifications of fairly common human failings through careful analysis of Russians [...] in general. (131)

In this manner, demonstrating the dilemma of Anna, her powerlessness in front of Vronsky and Karenin, Tolstoy gives a detailed portrayal of the psychological conflicts and sufferings of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian society. Particularly the self-centered and powerful nature of men in that period is also demonstrated through the depiction not only of Vronsky but also of Karenin as observed through Karenin's own words in the novel when he learns the love affair of his wife with Vronsky: “I ignore it as long as it is not known to the rest of the world, as long as my name is not dishonoured. Therefore I warn you that our relations must remain what they have been, and that if you let yourself be compromised I shall be obliged to take measures to safeguard my honour” (314). It is obvious that what Karenin is

concerned about is just his honour or respected position in society, which proves that neither love nor Anna has significance in his life; in this sense “[s]he [Anna] is presented as an exemplar as well as a victim of the faults of her society. [...] and even by the end of the novel she is insufficiently percipient to criticize society for its responsibility for her faults” (Brown, C. 180-81). In fact, it is not Anna but the social norms of the Russian society in the 19th century, which is attacked by the novelist, but ironically enough the female protagonist is unaware of the fact that she experiences distress due to the patriarchal notions.

Although Tolstoy does not blame Anna for her miserable state, she is “punished for [her] marital trespasses by [her] husbands’ vindictiveness, by society’s scorn, and by [her] own feelings of guilt” (Paskow 323). The seduction of a respectable lady like Anna, who has a respectable social position in society, makes her condition more tragic, and Tolstoy’s effective portrayal of her fall contributes considerably to the emphasis on the bitterness of reality, vulnerability of women, especially emotionally repressed females because of their weaknesses and due to the pressure of power upon these women in the male-dominated Russian society; as a consequence,

[t]he greatness of *Anna Karenina* lies in the degree to which, along with its depth, it justifies the clear suggestion it conveys of a representative comprehensive. The creative writer’s way of arriving at and presenting general truths about life is that which Tolstoy exemplifies with such resource, such potency [...]. (Leavis 13)

Anna, representing the dilemma, emotional needs and concerns of females, effectively shows the position of Russian women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since Anna has a prestigious status in society, her adultery is a threat that will shatter her public image and her prominent social position as well as it is highlighted: “[...] she would not have the strength to change [her position] for the degraded position of a woman who had forsaken husband and child and formed a union with her lover [...]” (*A K* 289). Moreover, the law of the Church in that period in Russia, preventing the marriage of widows whose husbands were alive, makes Anna’s situation worse as seen along these lines from the novel: “As a divorced wife she would form a union with Vronsky, which would be both illegal and criminal, because according to the law of the Church a wife may not remarry as long as her husband is living” (425). Thus, it is no doubt that her being an admired woman who had a luxurious life before her adulterous affair, is in direct contrast with her depressed condition after her escape from her husband for the sake of her love affair with Vronsky to whom she can not get married due to the Russian legal system. Furthermore, Karenin’s forbidding her to see her son, Vronsky’s rejecting her due to her shattered position in public, lead her to vulnerability, hopelessness, isolation and alienation. As Mandelker suggests, “Her sense of dissonance increases to the extent that she feels alienated from her own identity” (61). On the other hand, Tolstoy does not darken Anna’s image by reflecting her as the symbol of ‘evil’; he reflects the destructive outcomes of patriarchal and social norms turning women’s lives into metaphorical confinement. As underlined by Simmons, he “allows his men and women freedom and avoids as much as possible passing over judgement on their actions. He does not condemn his beautiful, warm-hearted, radiant Anna”(97).

### **Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary***

Linking the vulnerable situation of Anna with another female character in French literature, with Emma, the female protagonist in *Madame Bovary*, even if one can recognize parallelism in terms of the sufferings of these characters in their marriage, adulterous affairs and their committing suicide, there are also discrepancies in terms of their manners and psychological problems; particularly the influence of social notions in their communities upon their inner conflicts and psychological problems cannot be denied as Zipp also stresses, “[t]ragic heroines such as Anna Karenina or Emma Bovary belong so precisely to their particular time and society [...]” (14). In other words, since they are characters in realistic novels, they represent the condition of women in their own time and society, nevertheless there are some differences in terms of their portrayals. First of all, unlike Anna, Emma is not a noble lady and

does not have any opportunity to lead a luxurious life she desires for, so she wonders: “Why could not she lean over balconies in Swiss chalets, or enshrine her melancholy in a Scotch cottage, with a husband dressed in a black velvet coat with long tails, and thin shoes, a pointed hat and frills?” (*Madame Bovary* 29). It proves that she is not satisfied with her social position in society and the financial condition of her husband, therefore she comes to the fore as a victim of materialistic society allowing just upper class women to have appreciation and respect. In this respect, she begins to hate her husband who cannot offer her a luxurious life, which will enable her to have prestige. Thus, she regards her husband as “utterly inadequate to her needs [...] [unable] to understand [her] romanticised desires and despairs [...]” (Fairlie 25). It is clearly seen that in addition to her discomfort related to her life style, she also complains about the manners and the approach of her husband by looking down on him:

Charles’s conversation was commonplace as a street pavement, and everyone’s ideas trooped through it in their everyday garb, without exciting emotion, laughter, or thought [...]. He could neither swim, nor fence, nor shoot, and one day he could not explain some term of horsemanship to her that she had come across in a novel. A man on the contrary, should he not know everything, excel in manifold activities, initiate you into the energies of passion, the refinement of life, all mysteries? But this one taught nothing, knew nothing, wished nothing. (*MB* 30)

It is clear that she despises her husband due to his insufficiencies and disabilities in terms of speaking, social activities, and knowledge, which justifies that she is alienated to her husband due to her dissatisfied desires. As McKenna suggests, “*Madame Bovary* [...] tells us something fundamental about desire and its representation that transcends the historical circumstances composing any individual life” (106). So, she does not hesitate to market her own body to other men, which can be correlated to the situation in France in the period when the novel was written. Since the extra-martial relationships, adulterous affairs, were common among the French in the 19th century France (Verhoeven 151), it is not strange to observe Emma’s love affairs with Léon and Rodolphe in the novel as a result of her unhappy state in her marriage. At the same time, in the novel, Emma’s comparing her husband with the gentlemen who belong to the upper class, also draws attention as seen along these lines:

Why, at least, was not her husband one of those men of taciturn passions who work at their books all night [...]. She could have wished this name of Bovary, which was hers, had been illustrious, to see it displayed at the booksellers’, repeated in the newspapers, known to all France. But Charles had no ambition. (45)

She yearns for a partner who is so intellectual that he will devote his time to reading, who is ambitious for climbing the social ladder, which will enable her to be popular, respected and admired by the public. Therefore, as F. Brown highlights, she leads her life in a dream world and dreams of a high class life to show off at balls among elite people in a respectable community (290). Yet, the conflict between reality and her dream world results in destruction, accordingly Flaubert, “by showing the contrast between her illusions and the truth [...], lets us know in advance that Emma is out of touch with reality and is bound to be disappointed” (Paris 196-97).

In this respect, she suffers from psychological problems as a female in her marriage. Although she seems to be yearning for love and can do anything for the sake of love, in fact she also wants to acquire a better social status, as a result of which she turns out to be vulnerable, depressed and dissatisfied with her present state; her quest for a partner who has a better social position shows that she finds it hard to stand on her own feet alone without the protection of a powerful male. It can be asserted that “Flaubert is concerned with the preservation of the dominance of male over female” (Vanderwolk 2). In this outlook, Emma regards men as a vehicle to be powerful and respectable rather than trying to prove her identity by her own efforts, consequently she needs the patronage of men, so she says to Rodolphe: “I am your servant, your concubine! You are my king, my idol!” (*MB* 147). Her remark justifies that her misusing her sexuality as a weapon to be under the security of a powerful male, makes her feel insufficient leading

to her committing adultery; hence “[a]dultery and the novel go together, with the former giving the latter its sexual subject” (Heath 80). Ironically enough, Emma cannot achieve satisfaction and happiness in her love affairs, since her partners in her affairs do not really love, respect and appreciate her. This also shows the humiliating approach exercised by men towards women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century France.

### **Different Social Positions and Economic Conditions of Emma and Anna**

Unlike Emma, Anna is in an environment in which learned and ambitious men, the friends of her respected and well-educated husband, meet, and she has also the opportunity to be involved in “the society of balls, dinner-parties, brilliant toilettes[...].” (*A K* 125). In this sense, as Durey emphasizes, Tolstoy, although coming from noble class, an aristocratic family, does not depict the upper class life as the ideal (30). In this sense, he portrays Anna as a female who is not comfortable in this artificial surrounding as it is indicated:

Another circle with which Anna was intimate was that through which Karenin had made his career. [...]. It consisted of elderly, plain, philanthropic and pious women and clever, well-educated, ambitious men [...], she felt so bored and uncomfortable in that Society [...]. (124)

Therefore, while Anna is uncomfortable with her condition among the elites, Emma desires for such a kind of life. In this sense, Emma “cannot escape her limitations. Charles’ satisfaction with his modest lifestyle and happiness spells incompatibility [...] [for her]” (Roe 36). Hence, she experiences a metaphorical imprisonment in her marriage she cannot get rid of and does not feel uncomfortable with her romantic relationships with other males, because [e]verything in him [her husband] irritated her [...]; his face, his dress, what he did not say, his whole person, his existence, in fine. Charles seemed to her as much removed from her life, as absent forever [...]” (*M B* 143). However, as Paskow underlines, “[Madame Bovary] is not a cautionary tale warning women of the painful consequences of domestic infidelity” (323), but it is a novel which exposes the social panorama of the 19<sup>th</sup> century France and the impact of the social pressure upon women in this society.

### **Uşaklıgil’s *Aşk-ı Memnu* (Forbidden Love)**

Paying attention to the portrayal of another female protagonist Bihter, the female character in the Turkish realistic novel, *Aşk-ı Memnu*, written by Uşaklıgil, it is undeniable that she also suffers from lack of passion and romanticism like Anna, so both of them can be regarded as females who want to experience passionate love. Especially Bihter’s marriage to Adnan, an older man who can not meet her emotional needs, causes her disillusionment. Her misery due to lack of love and the inevitability of adultery can be observed as follows:

Sometimes leaning over his shoulder, she lay down on his knees like a child needing protection. If her whole marriage had passed in the same manner, she would have loved him honestly and faithfully. But, she was expected to devote not her affection or friendship to her husband but to dedicate merely her love to him and though she regarded herself as totally wrong and cruel, she could not love him. So, this love taken from her without any permission by her lover that she could not resist, would not, could not be devoted to her husband, so she would find herself in a such a kind of vulnerable position that she bodily and emotionally felt repressed and wanted to cry, rebel and suffer due to her misery. (*Aşk-ı Memnu* 204-05)

It is obvious that he regards her husband not as a beloved but as a father figure, as a consequence he cannot meet her emotional needs. What she desires is passionate love that will make her experience bodily and emotional satisfaction. This inadequacy leads her to Behlül, her beloved, who has many love affairs with many women and who does not hesitate to seduce ladies for his own advantage. In this sense, Behlül is like Vronsky who is also indifferent to the emotions of Anna, therefore both of them use their

patriarchal power upon women. Moreover, Bihter experiences her rebirth with Behlül as Anna does with her beloved, Vronsky. On the other hand, while Bihter has no choice but to see just Behlül, Anna has the opportunity to go out and meet new people. In this sense, Bihter's restricted life at home causes her to have love affair with Behlül, since there is no one whom she can see, but Anna finds Vronsky outside as she is involved in social affairs outside. However, both of them have husbands older than themselves as Steve says for Anna: "You married a man twenty years older than yourself. You married without love and without having known love. That was a mistake" (*A K* 421). This shows the unavoidability for Anna of committing adultery, consequently the reason behind the unfaithful approach of Anna and Bihter to their husbands is, in this case, similar.

While analyzing the torments of Bihter, the social condition of her period should be taken into consideration. First of all, the influence of Tanzimat Reforms on society and the process of Westernization in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Turkey, play a very important role in the social conditions of the time (*Türk Devrim Tarihi* 1-2). Uşaklıgil, shedding light on the negative effects of this misevaluated modernization period upon the family life, underlines that how modernization or westernization was misunderstood by the Turkish Ottoman society. When the understandings of freedom and equality in gender relations adopted in the Western society, were wrongly put into practice in Turkish society in that period, women and men getting rid of their repressed states, could not achieve going on their lives in a decent and honourable way by abusing the new understanding, which caused degeneration; Uşaklıgil, by employing such a kind of setting, draws attention to the misunderstanding of the gender roles acquired from the west. As ÖnerToy indicates, "the novelist drew attention to the changes in the understanding of westernization in his novel" (78). Thus, Behlül, representing the idea of freedom in love, flirts with many females; therefore Bihter, because of her desire, like Anna, is tempted by Behlül. Both Bihter and Anna are portrayed as innocent women who are regarded as sex objects by Behlül and Vronsky, who colonize these female characters for their desires.

What should be underlined is that Bihter and Anna find themselves in adultery owing to their hunger for love and passion and because of their husbands' indifference towards their feelings. Especially Bihter's agony as a consequence of her marriage, which is based on materialism, can be observed :

She wanted to love, she would fall deeply in love and achieve happiness. But now she was like buried alive in a grave surrounded by black marble, in the luxurious atmosphere of this magnificent room. She could not breathe and would nearly suffocate; she was yearning to escape from this grave, live and love. (*A M* 212)

It is obvious that Bihter is involved in adultery, because she is suffocated and confined under the barrier of her arranged marriage, so she leads a life as if she were a living-dead, therefore she feels as if she were put into a coffin in which she can not breathe. So she experiences rebirth with Behlül, her beloved and regards him as a saviour who will enable her to get rid of her emotional and psychological oppression. In this sense, "Bihter [...] becomes a victim of her passion" (Yener 85). Thus, her being an adulterous woman is related to her arranged marriage, which is not based on love as she herself indicates:

She would desire such a kind of marriage, which was not based on wealth, luxury or magnificence, but based on love and sincerity; such a kind of marriage warming your soul with the intensity of its emotional depth, giving you children; enabling you to have a husband, home, life and there would be nothing but just love [...]. She wished she could have loved her husband; but she could not and would never love. (*A M* 376)

She suffers from metaphorical confinement as a result of her marriage, which is based on reason, so she thinks that those who enjoy the joy of love despite their poverty are luckier than the ones who have wealth but not love. This desire leads her to the error of judgement, to adultery, as a consequence of which she will realize that she is not really loved by Behlül (*A M* 376-77). Nevertheless, "it is observed that Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil does not portray Bihter [...] as a corrupted and immoral woman"(Arslanoğlu 46); rather than portraying an immoral or evil female, the author draws the portrait of a woman who

suffers from arranged marriage and intensity of her desires, which makes her search for real love. But, her realizing Behlül's insincerity and her reputation as a fallen woman psychologically destroy her, therefore the despising attitude of men towards women and the secondary position of females in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Turkey appear as the problematized topics in the novel.

### **The Struggles of Anna, Bihter and Emma with Marriage Institution and Adultery**

Like Bihter, Anna also comes to the realization that she is just considered to be a sex object by her lover, Vronsky (*A K* 629). Particularly after their escape, Vronsky's lack of love towards Anna can be recognized, because "[t]he pleasures of bachelor's life, enjoyed by him on his previous travels abroad, were not to be thought of now [...]. Intercourse with local Society or with the Russians was, [...], impossible" (*A K* 460). The restrictions he is faced with because of the necessity to hide from the public and the threat against his independence, make him regret; it shows that he abuses Anna as a bait and the passionate love Anna desires for turns out to be destructive, because "[w]hat comes between Anna's meeting with Vronsky and her final act is an interlude of passion, followed by the visible transformation of that passion into something so neurotic, obsessional and destructive" (Armstrong 71), however Anna's finding herself in adultery leading to her destruction does not mean that the novelist aims at punishing her, but it can be regarded as a reflection of the undeniable destructive impact of patriarchal and social norms upon women in that era. Similarly, Uşaklıgil, by creating Bihter, a female searching for real love, but undergoing adultery with disillusionment, does not put the blame on Bihter but on the concept of arranged marriage and the social pressure exercised by the male-dominated society upon women. In this respect, Bihter's unhappiness because of the gap between herself and her husband causes her to experience adultery, which results in frustration.

In contrast, the portrayal of Emma in *Madame Bovary* is different in terms of her psychological problems. Although she is after love and obsessed with enjoying the pleasures of passion, at the same time she has also some materialistic concerns: "[...] the lust of the flesh, the longing for money, and the melancholy of passion all blended themselves into one suffering, and instead of turning her thought from it, she claved to it the more, urging herself to pain [...]" (*M B* 83). This obsession and her husband's indifference lead her to adultery as she also points out: "For whose sake, then, was she virtuous? Was it not for him [her husband], the obstacle to all felicity, the cause of all misery [...]" (*M B* 83). Unlike Bihter and Anna, she does not choose to have an immoral relationship merely for the sake of love and emotions. Because of her psychological problems as a result of her yearnings for wealth and luxury, she finds herself in adultery, therefore "[h]er repent[ing] of her past virtue as of a crime [...]" [and her] revel[ing] in all the evil ironies of triumphant adultery" (*M B* 143) justify that she undergoes a serious depression, which makes her grow pale and become desperate and miserable, as a consequence she tries to get rid of her distress through adultery, however "her husband['s] [being] blind to Emma's infidelities [...]" and to her resultant despair [...] drives her to suicide" (Lottman 110). In this sense, her unhappy marriage and dissatisfaction with her husband's personality driving her to adultery, together with her aspirations for a more comfortable life and better social status, come to the fore as the influential factors causing her disaster.

### **The Portrayal of Husbands in These Three Novels**

Even if the story of these females are in the foreground in these works, the reactions of their husbands to their adulterous state can be defined as striking. When the attitudes of their husbands are taken into account, it is apparent that while Karenin imposes his power upon Anna by not allowing her to see her son, Emma's husband Charles is portrayed as a naive character who is not aware of his wife's relationships with several men. On the other hand, Adnan in *Aşk-ı Memnu*, is reflected as a husband who is not as passive as Charles or as cruel as Karenin.

As observed in these different works, the focus is not on the husbands but on the wives who try to break the social and psychological barriers in front of them and achieve love and freedom. In this sense, portraying their contradictions with their husbands, the novelists also reflect the characteristics of these male characters and their attitudes to their wives so as to underline the problematic issues in marriage institutions in those periods.

### **Destructiveness of Marriage without Love: Female Protagonists' Committing Suicide**

Paying attention to the results of adultery in these three novels, all of them end with the adulterous women's committing suicide because of their powerlessness, anguish and despair. As Orr suggests for the portrayal of death in *Madame Bovary*, "death [...] scenes in classical texts end the work in question and drive home moral points" (106). In this perspective, it would be worth emphasizing that not only the death scene in Flaubert's novel, but also the ones in Tolstoy's and Uşaklıgil's works, demonstrate the destructive effects of marriage without love which is followed by death and reveal the sufferings of women in different communities due to the moral conflicts and social prejudice. Thus, it is clear that marriage which is not based on love, conflicts between wives and husbands, together with the struggles of these women with society, result in nothing but the destruction of these female protagonists.

It is obvious that these female characters in different environments with similar problems experience catastrophe at the end of these novels from the literatures of different countries, consequently their decision to commit suicide is linked with their adulterous affairs imprisoning their social lives and restricting their freedom. In this manner, the only way to escape from the social and the psychological confinement for these female protagonists is to end their lives, so the authors do not criticize these women but the circumstances leading them to such a kind of ruin.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, the portrayal of these three female characters, Anna, Emma and Bihter, from different classes and societies, proves that the novelists highlight the undeniable effect of social pressure upon women and their anguish in Russian, French and Turkish Ottoman communities so as to reflect the oppression of women in the male-dominated societies and their conflicts with men and social norms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy questions the destructive impact of social power imposed upon women and the inevitability of adultery for the Russian women subjected to marriage without love. In *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert makes a social commentary on the moral values in France by referring to the reasons behind the adulterous relationships of French women. In *Aşk-ı Memnu*, Uşaklıgil, by portraying the female protagonist's adultery, sheds light on the corruption in the Ottoman Turkey as a consequence of arranged marriage and misevaluated western reforms. Thus, though these novels demonstrate different cultural values of different countries, the focus on the destruction of the female protagonists due to adultery that forces them to commit suicide at the end of these novels, is identical in each novel; in this sense there appears a wide social panorama reflecting the struggles of women with men, marriage institution, adultery and society itself, therefore it is apparent that Russian, French and Ottoman Turkish women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had a vulnerable and secondary status due to the dominance of patriarchal and social values driving them to destruction and death.

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