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FICTION, REALITY, AND FEMALE SUICIDE

DISSertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
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1997

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1997
What the Living Do

Johnny, the kitchen sink has been clogged for days, some utensil probably fell down there.
And the Drano won’t work but smells dangerous, and the crusty dishes have piled up

waiting for the plumber I still haven’t called. This is the everyday we spoke of.
It’s winter again: the sky’s a deep, headstrong blue, and the sunlight pours through

the open living-room windows because the heat’s on too high in here and I can’t turn it off.
For weeks now, driving, or dropping a bag of groceries in the street, the bag breaking,

I’ve been thinking: This is what the living do. And yesterday, hurrying along those
wobbly bricks in the Cambridge sidewalk, spilling my coffee down my wrist and sleeve,

I thought it again, and again later, when buying a hairbrush: This is it.
Parking. Slamming the car door shut in the cold. What you called that yearning.

What you finally gave up. We want the spring to come and the winter to pass. We want
whoever to call or not call, a letter, a kiss—we want more and more and then more of it.

But there are moments, walking, when I catch a glimpse of myself in the window glass,
say, the window of the corner video store, and I’m gripped by a cherishing so deep

for my own blowing hair, chapped face, and unbuttoned coat that I’m speechless:
I am living. I remember you.

Marie Howe
ABSTRACT

Men make most completed suicide attempts and women most uncompleted ones—but fictional suicide is predominantly committed by women. This dissertation moves beyond earlier observations about art's feminization of suicide to explore the individual and collective, fictional and real, theoretical and pragmatic consequences of a range of suicide narratives, including: *The Blithedale Romance*, *Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karenina*, *Constance Ring*, *The Woman Who Did*, *The Awakening*, *The House of Mirth*, "Patriotism," "To Room Nineteen," "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan," *Children of Light*, *Heathers*, *Thelma and Louise*, and *The Virgin Suicides*. Using feminist, structuralist, Marxist, psychoanalytic, and rhetorical strategies, I compare trends in real and fictional suicide and discuss the female suicide master narrative—the pattern of fictional female suicide that emerges from shared techniques and that informs these trends. Its protagonists are young adults who are detached from their children; financially secure, but dependent on men; and heterosexually passionate. They rarely seek help, indicate their suicide intentions, fear, resist, or plan their suicides; and they die after interrelational rupture with men, impulsively, on their first attempts, and at the story's end.

The master narrative's strength is evident in its reflexive intertextual dynamics, narrative coherences, and in its covert, collaborative overdetermination of female suicide. Through its formulaic techniques, manipulative reflections and deflections of reality, and its diverse ambivalences, it reveals cultural anxieties about women. But it also supports disturbing myths, models, and prescriptions for women, especially regarding their relational usefulness and needs—and their fates when they deviate from traditional roles. Moreover, its texts become analogous to the
pornographic by collectively minimizing each protagonist; thematizing women's worth in relation to men; replicating and honoring androcentric desires, constructs, and narrative dynamics; and linearly leading us to women who become passive and reclined as they honor patriarchal constructs.

Most importantly, social science research of the last three decades supports the hypothesis that, through suicide contagion, the master-narrative promotes and facilitates suicidal acts in real women. Thus, it also invites us to explore larger issues about narrative, including: narrative consequences, dynamics, ethics, reliability, and liability. Finally, through its mergings of myth, ideology, and technique, it shows how narrative can be socially and epistemologically constructed and constructing, sometimes fatally so—and it compels us to reconsider why and how we write, read, and discuss narrative, especially female suicide narratives.
In memory of Nanni,
Elizabeth Anne Zaccagnini Gasparro
who lived with gusto, strength, and remaining presence
1894-1994
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Confusing Confluences: Female Suicide in Art and Life

"But surely no woman would ever dare to do so," said my friend. "I knew a woman who did," said I: "and this is her story."

_The Woman Who Did_

During one busy, but serendipitous week when I was preparing for my candidacy exams, I read _Anna Karenina, Madame Bovary_, and _The Awakening_, and I was struck by the texts' similarities in character, plot, and structure, and, especially, by the role of heterosexual interrelational distress on the protagonists' suicides. My curiosity became discomfiture as I pondered treatments of suicide in literature and recalled some of the statistics I learned in my teacher certification and nursing courses. For instance, female protagonists almost always complete suicide on their first attempts, but seventy-five to ninety percent of all _non_-fatal suicide attempts are made by women (Roy 1989 1423-24; Rich et al.; Kaplan and Klein 262). Furthermore, even though studies consistently indicate that, throughout time and across cultures, men commit suicide three to four times more than women (and sometimes as much as seven times more than), fictional representations of suicide predominantly involve women. Indeed, according to David Lester:

One of the clearest phenomenon in suicidal behavior is the difference in the suicidal behavior of the sexes [sic]. Males complete suicide at a higher rate than females while females attempt suicide at a higher rate than males. This
difference has been known for centuries and has been consistently reported. (1988 ix)

While Lester's quote applies to global trends, Ronald L. Akers seems more specifically to describe Western trends:

The typical attempter is a white female in her twenties, single or currently married, not employed outside the home, who attributes her suicidal actions to marital difficulties and attempts to take her life with barbiturates. The typical suicide, on the other hand, is a white, forty-year-old unskilled or semiskilled male who takes his life by hanging, carbon monoxide, or gunshot and who either in a note or prior to his death indicates marital problems or ill health. (Akers 276 cites Schneidman and Farberow 1961 45)

This discrepancy between fictional and nonfictional occurrences of suicide inspired me to explore several abiding questions throughout this dissertation. What compels the feminization of fictional suicide? How do these narratives relate to each other, to the collective of female suicide narratives, and to real female suicide, especially in their similarities and in their reflections and deflections of historical trends in suicide? What are the meanings and consequences of the texts' manipulations of historical trends, and what do the texts' characterizations, themes, and structures suggest about culture's larger anxieties about and prescripts for women? Now, several years, texts and statistics later, this dissertation proposes some presumably controversial answers to these questions.

There is, indeed, a diachronic, cross-cultural female suicide masternarrative—a typical pattern for the fictional story of a woman's suicide that arises from the convergence of similar action, techniques, tropes, themes, plot elements, and characterizations across the class of female suicide narratives from the last two centuries and that informs fictional depictions of female suicide, as well as understandings about and occurrences of real suicidal behavior in women. The masternarrative's protagonists are young adults who are detached from their children; financially secure, but dependent on men for that security; and heterosexually passionate. They rarely seek help, indicate their suicidal feelings or intentions, fear, resist, or plan their suicides; and they die after interrelational rupture
with men, impulsively, during their first attempts, and almost always at the end of
the narrative.

The female suicide masternarrative’s strength is evident in its reflexive
intertextual dynamics, narrative coherences, and in its covert, collaborative
overdetermination of female suicide. Through its formulaic techniques, manipulative
reflections and deflections of reality, and its diverse ambivalences, it reveals cultural
anxieties about women. But its effects also transcend the boundaries of fictional
narratives to inform and advance larger culture and realities—including personal and
institutionalized understandings, assumptions, and "knowledge" about women and
about female suicide. For instance, the female suicide masternarrative supports
disturbing myths, models, and prescriptions for women, especially regarding their
relational usefulness and needs, and their fates when they deviate from traditional
roles. Moreover, its texts become analogous to the pornographic by collectively
minimizing each protagonist; always thematizing women’s worth in relation to men;
replicating and honoring androcentric desires, constructs, and narrative dynamics;
and linearly leading us to women who, to honor patriarchal constructs, die, passive
and reclined.

Most importantly, social science research of the last three decades supports
the hypothesis that, through the theoretical phenomenon of suicide contagion, the
female suicide masternarrative covertly and collaboratively promotes and facilitates
suicidal acts in real women. Because this masternarrative has an unusually powerful
potential to affect real lives and to effect real deaths, it rigorously challenges several
predominant assumptions about life and art—and it has several important implications
for our more general theoretical and pragmatic visions about narrative. It urges us
to explore larger issues about narrative, including: narrative consequences, dynamics,
ethics, reliability, and liability. Through its mergings of myth, ideology, and
technique, it illustrates how narrative can be socially and epistemologically
constructed and constructing, sometimes fallaciously so. And, finally, it compels us to
reconsider why and how we write, read, and discuss narrative—especially female
suicide narratives.
Although these broadly-stated concerns and conclusions may not be self-evident, this dissertation explicates, in some detail, the texts, meanings, and implications of the female suicide masternarrative on behalf of the critical importance of these questions and the critical plausibility of my conclusions. It moves beyond earlier observations about art’s feminization of suicide to explore the individual and collective, fictional and real, theoretical and pragmatic consequences of a diachronic, cross-cultural range of suicide narratives, including films, songs, short stories, and novels.

* * * * *

Although representations of dead and suicidal women have abounded in the narrative and visual arts at least since antiquity, limited work has been done on the subject of dead or dying women in art, especially women who have committed suicide. In The Savage God: A Study of Suicide (1971), a book about the power suicide "has exerted over the creative imagination" (166), A. Alvarez noted the paucity of work on suicide in literature: "no doubt much could be learned from such a study" about "suicide in literature," about the author, characters, and the habits and expectations of their periods (166). More than a decade later, in 1984, Beth Ann Bassein, in her Women and Death: Linkages in Western Thought and Literature, also noted that "There are not a great many scholars who have analyzed the inevitable and 'honorable' end, that of death, which until recent times was meted out to women in fiction who committed adultery" (ix).

However, in the past decade, important work has been done on the subjects of death, suicide, and women. While my work with female suicide texts differs from earlier work on women and death in relation to genre, historical period, methodology, and focus, the earlier work and mine share some points of convergence—which, moreover, suggests that the intertextuality and narrative consequences I describe in relation to this dissertation's corpus extend to a range of texts that exceed my focus here.

However, because of the larger differences in our efforts, my references to earlier work on women and death in art will be fairly brief. But, because this work
also describes an important context for my own critical visions and for the artistic visions in the works I explicate, let me devote some attention to it here. Most generally, some of the points and issues about artistic representations of female suicide and death on which critics agree include: the feminization of suicide, or, the artistic predominance of female suicide (Gates, Higonnet, Bassein, Bronfen, Hults, and Loraux); the interrelational dynamics of women's death and suicide, especially following infidelity or abandonment (Gates, Bassein, Thomas, Loraux); the ambiguity, duality, and ambivalence of female death and suicide and its social meaning (Higonnet, Bronfen, Thomas, Loraux, and Hults); and the allegorical, myth-making nature of the art of female death (Gates, Bronfen, Bassein, Thomas, and Loraux).

The three primary works on death and women— including, but not limited to, suicide— are Beth Ann Bassein's *Women and Death: Linkages in Western Thought and Literature* (1984), Nicole Loraux's *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (1987), and Elisabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992). Referring primarily to nineteenth and twentieth century art, Bassein discusses the "prevailing obsession with the death of woman," the "links between women and death" in art, how these links are reinforced or dictated by life, and how "arts and language perpetuate thinking, emotional responses, and habits" (x). While Bassein devotes chapters to the relationship between women and death in and by language, Christianity, and adultery, her commentary on suicide is limited because her larger focus is death.

*Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (1987), by Nicole Loraux, also explores the suicide and non-suicide deaths of women, but she attends to women's death in classical Greek tragedies, especially wives' suicides and virgins' slaughters. Loraux says women's deaths in classical texts were usually relegated to the home and rarely mentioned— except in tragedy, which "delighted in blurring the formal frontier between masculine and feminine and freed women's deaths from the banalities to which they were restricted to private mourning" (3). However, this was done with some ambiguity: Loraux notes that women's stage deaths were "mainly a matter of
listening" because they so often occurred off stage (viii). As a result, the representation depended on language, and there was a "real benefit" to viewers, who didn't see the deaths and who, then, relied more on conjecture. Further, the representation—or non-representation—of the suicide was part of Greek tragedies' general ambiguity regarding women's deaths. Loraux says Greek tragedies used words with multiple meanings to further deflect the death and "proclaim the differences between the sexes" (xi); that female suicide was both an act in which women fulfilled and also distinguished themselves from traditional roles (28); and that, by dying violently on the Greek stage, a "woman mastered her death, a death that was not simply the end of an exemplary life as a spouse" (3). However, Loraux says female death was "a woman's solution," but not a heroic one.

While Loraux focuses on female suicide and murder in classical tragedies, Elisabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992) offers a sweeping, stunning psychoanalytic and semiotic interpretation of representations of dead women in several art forms, beginning in the mid eighteenth century, but emphasizing the nineteenth century and focusing on how representations of women's death in general "repress and articulate [culture's] unconscious knowledge of death" (ix). While Bronfen discusses the feminization of death, the duality and ambivalence of death, our anxiety about and desire for it, and while she notices the allegory of death in the beautiful feminine corpse—where, "what is plainly visible . . . also stands in for something else" (x-xi)—her primary subject is death and the unconscious; within that discussion, she comments on suicide, but she offers a much wider treatment of death and the unconscious.

Like Loraux's work with Greek tragedies, Linda C. Hults's "Dürer's Lucretia: Speaking the Silence of Women" (1991) analyzes a particular genre and period of representations of female suicide: Renaissance images of Lucretia's suicide, especially visual representations. Although Lucretia commits suicide after being raped, Hults makes some important points about female suicide, beginning with her commentary on Livy's and Ovid's narratives about Lucretia. Focusing on sixteenth and seventeenth century illustrations, Hults addresses the eroticization of
Lucretia and the feminization of suicide in painting, problematizing the ambivalent social messages these representations conveyed to men and women, especially in regard to definitions of women's honor and men's ownership of women. Hults argues that Lucretia's suicide is appropriated in Renaissance art and affirms Nicole Loraux's statement that "in a patriarchal society, 'a fine death is essentially virile'" (Hults 237).

Ruth P. Thomas also focuses on representations of female in a particular period and place in her essay, "The Death of an Ideal: Female Suicides in the Eighteenth-Century French Novel" (1984). Thomas notes the association between love and death in eighteenth century French fiction and says that, "Given the stereotype of the female as the weaker and more vulnerable of the two sexes and the conventional notion of the woman who lives and dies for love," death usually befalls the heroine, and usually these deaths "could be termed suicides" (Thomas 321). However, although Thomas discusses some female suicide, her discussion is primarily about female characters' passive suicides—that is, characters who knowingly put themselves in potentially fatal situations. Regardless of whether the suicide is active or passive, however, Thomas says, "woman's ideal is essentially the same. Virtue is purity and chastity and marital fidelity" (321)—an ideal which, as Chapter 5 explains, even the most contemporary female suicide texts continue to embrace. But this construction of the model woman as the chaste woman:

denies her sexuality [and], paradoxically reduces her to a sexual object, for the ideal of the virtuous woman springs from the traditional male conception that the female is his possession. . . . In either case--angel or sexual object--such a notion negates the real, spontaneous, emotional needs of the woman as a person and runs counter to the Enlightenment's ideal of self-fulfillment. (322)

Thomas notes, then, the inherent ambiguity of women's positions, as well as how "fiction served reality," especially the male belief that "chastity and fidelity . . . ensured the stability of the entire social structure" (330).

In "Suicide: Representations of the Feminine in the Nineteenth Century" (1985), Margaret Higonnet speaks in Freudian terms about the representations and
mythic conceptions of female suicide in Classical times and the nineteenth century. Higonnet also notices the feminization of suicide, its interrelational association with women, and the dualities of female suicide, saying, that, while female suicide is revolutionary and heroic, it is not entirely so. Perhaps most related to my project is Barbara Gates’ *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (1988), particularly her chapter, "Suicidal Women: Fact or Fiction?" which discusses how various genres' representations of suicide informed Victorian myths about suicide and women. While Gates makes some of the interrelational observations I make, she does not attend to narrative dynamics, and I have found no work that addresses the thematic and technical trends of a diachronic, cross-cultural range of female suicide narratives. Nevertheless, this earlier work suggests that the female suicide masternarrative evidenced in narratives from the last two centuries is informed by a variety of genres, periods, and locations.

As is clear above, ideologies of gender emerge in discussions about women and death—but there is more to be said about how and why they do so. Several theorists have abstractly discussed the intersection of ideology, narrative, and myth, including: Mikhail Bakhtin, Rachael Blau Du Plessis, Susan Lanser, Michel Foucault, as well as Fredric Jameson and Jean-François Lyotard. These theorists—narratologists, Marxists, feminists, and historicists—argue that ideology is revealed in narrative structure and voice, but they rarely offer larger exemplifications of this. Lanser’s readings of Ernest Hemingway’s "The Killers" and Kate Chopin’s "The Story of an Hour" illuminate the relation between narrative voice and ideology in particular texts, and Lanser convincingly challenges "the notion that literary form is autonomous" (264). Although these are important contributions to our understanding of the relationship between narrative and ideology, they do not explicitly discuss the implications of this relationship for readers and culture.

Female suicide narratives, however, offer a disturbing, but uniquely powerful opportunity to examine the nexus of ideology, narrative technique, and ethics in narrative because of their somewhat homogeneous nature; because of their relationship to what Jameson calls "the Real"; and because of the nature of suicide—
as "an event with biological (including biochemical, neuropsychological), socio-cultural, interpersonal, philosophical/existential, and psychological aspects" (Leenaars 58 in Lester 1988). Regarding formal, macrostructural analysis and homogeneous texts, Seymour Chatman says:

it is instructive to look at the successes of the Formalists and Structuralists in the macrostructural analysis of certain homogeneous texts. We can ask whether the principles informing their research are applicable to other kinds of narratives. Structuralist taxonomies rest on the *forms* rather than substances of narrative content. (89)

While Chatman is right to advocate structural concerns and to say that structuralist taxonomies rest on forms, his clean separation of narrative form and substance is somewhat myopic. If we explicate the nexus of ideology and structure in female suicide narratives, we see that, while narrative taxonomies may prioritize form over substance, in doing so they may not fully accommodate—or adequately acknowledge—the mutually informing nature of form and substance.

Part of the way female suicide narratives so powerfully illustrate the mutually-informing dynamic of form and substance is through their association with the Real. Fredric Jameson says:

The literary or aesthetic act therefore always entertains some active relationship with the Real; yet in order to do so, it cannot simply allow 'reality' to persevere inertly in its own being, outside the text and at a distance. It must rather draw the Real into its own texture. (80-81)

But, as Raymond Jack notes, "there has been scant attention paid to the possible influence of social-historical and cultural factors" regarding suicide (x). Indeed, to understand this "active relationship" of how fictional texts draw "the Real" into their textures, we must also consider, of course, the real in our interpretation of the literary act— including sociological information about suicide. As Beth Ann Bassein says, "it may be tempting to speculate on whether there have been experiences in women's lives from the beginning that have somehow tied them closely enough to death to make what seems an exaggerated association a legitimate one" (xi)—but she does not respond to the temptation.
In order to explore how and why the fictional female suicide master-narrative manipulates reality, I interpret fictional female suicide narratives in relation to what is known or understood about non-fictional suicide—that is, through the work of sociologists, suicidologists, and therapists. Indeed, part of my effort to describe the epistemological relationship between non-fictional and fictional suicide and to problematize the larger cultural context of suicide and gender requires the consideration of a historical and interdisciplinary range of "information" about suicide. Although this compass would ideally include several centuries, it has been sufficient for me to limit it to sociological and health sciences material from the last three decades. This historical range—both its breadth and its limitation—is also useful because my most compelling interest is the real and acute narrative consequences of fictional suicide on today's time and people. In their converging and diverging interests and conclusions, these materials suggest that research literature about suicide reflects not only its own, naturally undulating trends, but perhaps the influence of a larger cultural master-narrative of female suicide.

Because we cannot reconstruct the world to compare how suicide rates would change in another global context of fictional suicide narratives, some of my questions about the effects of suicide fiction on reality will remain rhetorical. But, if we can theorize that fictional narratives participate in suicide contagion and promulgate both the glamorization and popularization of suicide narratives and of suicide, then it is valuable to consider these questions in relative terms—and in ways that illuminate the chronic contexts of fictional and real suicide, a context in which, as Silvia Sara Canetto says, "Women die for love, men for glory"—regardless of the evidence presented in later chapters that men are as or perhaps even more likely to "die for love" than women are (AAS).

So, using a synthesis of feminist, structuralist, Marxist, psychoanalytic, and rhetorical strategies, I explicate the nexus of narrative technique, ideology, character, and structure in light of their differences and similarities, grounding my discussion of films, short stories, novels, and songs from several countries but primarily the United States and primarily from the past two centuries in historically recent and
contemporaneous sociological understandings of suicide. I define the components of
the female suicide masternarrative, explicate its dynamics, examine the ways in
which female suicide texts reflect and deflect the trends in real female suicide, and
discuss how these texts collectively inform real women's lives, problematizing this
influence for narrative theory and ethics and showing how ideology and technique
are mutually informing, how this interaction becomes rhetorically influential—and
sometimes fatally so.

Like earlier efforts to interpret representations of women's suicide, I focus on
similarities, with some attention to differences. I support arguments against
essentialism and the current theoretical and critical emphasis to account for
difference—and my efforts to account for similarities in these texts should not be
interpreted as an argument on behalf of the existence or condoning of essentialism.
Indeed, I do not want to "reduce them all to a kind of sexist sameness" (Hults 205).
However, it is only through attending to their similarities that I can expose, critique,
and indict those imposed similarities and their essentialist prescriptions, their sexist
samenesses. Furthermore, because one of my primary interests is in exploring the
force, impetus, and manifestations of narrative in general, I prioritize the narratives
themselves in an attempt to understand their collective culture. That is, this
dissertation is first and foremost an attempt to understand female suicide texts, not
suicide or gender or to resolve issues of essentialism. As such, the work emerges
from the texts.

This textual attention is, however, also a logistical necessity, given the range
of texts to which I refer. While I am interested in cultural and authorial differences,
my more pressing concern--inspired by the apparently universal phenomenon of
suicide contagion--is with the texts' convergence and correspondences of realities
and falsehoods, compatibilities and conflicts, and explicit and implicit messages. It
is with the larger diaspora and deployment of female suicide across cultures and
differences, with the cultural impetus behind this deployment and the narrative
consequences of it, especially with how the female suicide masternarrative
participates in the construction of a group of elusive, omnipresent, powerful cultural
ideologies which define the female condition in countless cultures and which deserve to be challenged, deconstructed, and reconstructed.

While all narrative can be socially constructed and socially constructing, female suicide narratives provide a compelling and potent opportunity to explore the relationship between life and literature, rhetoric and ideology. First, because female suicide narratives have established strong, formulaic narrative trends, they offer several opportunities to better understand suicide, culture, behavior modeling, and narrative consequences. Further, interdisciplinary attention to these texts illuminates their social implications to a greater degree than could have been possible before the sociological observations made during past twenty-five years—during which sociologists have compiled convincing evidence regarding contagion and modeling that leads us to soundly speculate that, and the least, these texts are complicit promoters of a larger cultural acceptance of female suicide, especially following interrelational distress, and, at their worst, that they are compelling forces behind particular suicides, fictional and real. Indeed, although the art critics and theorists noted above do not refer to suicide or textual contagion, the importance of their humanities work is augmented by contemporary efforts in the social and health sciences because we can fairly presume that many of the foundations of this work would have been as applicable for the art and people of earlier times as it is for those of today.

Because my interpretation of the primary texts in this dissertation's corpus is compelled and informed by how they differ from and are similar to what is "known" about suicide, and because I cite several sociological studies throughout this dissertation, let me take a moment to discuss what I mean by "knowledge" and "reality," and to try to allay possible concerns regarding my use and the nature of statistical comparisons about suicide. Although I agree with the post-structuralist notion that truth and reality are mediated by those observing, measuring, and recording that which is being interpreted, I also believe there are degrees of mediation, and that some realities are more or less elusive or immeasurable than
others, and I do not automatically discount the value or validity of all attempts to observe, define, or interpret the realities of our experiences.

However, of course, the very nature of suicidology exacerbates discrepancies between objective phenomena and their observers because attempts to monitor suicide rates have been affected by several factors that mediate statistical efforts nationally and internationally, including: those factors that affect record-keeping of any kind; insufficient or inconsistent methods of categorizing causes of death; and the social stigma and legal consequences associated with suicide during the last several centuries. While, of course, researchers are invested in believing their tools are accurate and reliable, they also are invested in maximizing their reliability, and suicidologists are aware of the positivist challenges inherent in their work and discipline. According to Akers, nearly every investigator recognizes the difficulties of using official statistics because of the variances in how they are compiled; of differing coroner criteria for, definitions of, and attributions of suicide; difficulty in distinguishing some suicides from accidental deaths; and because of under- and overreporting.®

However, while Jack D. Douglas argues that official data are unusable, Akers says:

Official compiled information is the best available in the absence of other sources of data . . . and it is the best available for studying variations in suicide rates . . . Much better data are available for modern nation-states. These show that although rates are not entirely constant and changes have taken place for some countries, differences in relative frequencies of suicide around the world have been fairly stable in the twentieth century. (278-79)

Lester calls the records reasonably accurate (3), and Peter Sainsbury says:

The evidence of these very different methods of study is that the mortality statistics are sufficiently accurate to warrant epidemiologists’ using the data to see with which national, demographic, social, or other characteristics and their trends they correlate; and thereby not only to test hypotheses about factors predisposing to suicide, but also to identify those groups in a population who are most at risk. (1986 20)7

Moreover, my concern with these texts is inspired by two kinds of studies and findings about suicide, the first being the widely-observed, regularly-
substantiated international trends related to suicide's sex discrepancies. Although some fluctuations between numerical representations of male and female suicide may occur, they are insignificant to my general concern about the gross discrepancies between occurrences of fictional and nonfictional suicide. The second kind of studies relevant to my work are the contagion studies conducted in the past thirty years using modern data collection and methodology. While some of these reports involve international suicide rates (that, presumably, would offer more challenges regarding uniformity of definition and categorizing, and so on), many of them involve temporally- and geographically-contained data obtained in the United States and Europe, which, presumably, decreases the margin of error due to variances in definitions and recordings of suicide, and so on. Finally, for this project, I am less concerned with the perfect measurements and gradations of contagion and rate changes, and more with the general, well-documented indications that it exists—and the local studies convince me that it does and support my concern about contagion's relation to fiction.

Many of the social learning issues inherent in discussions about suicide contagion have also been addressed in relation to other modeling behaviors and social-learning concerns—for instance, the debate about whether or not fictional violence reflects or produces nonfictional violence. Of course, there is a unique challenge to exploring the cultural and epistemological intersections of fictional and nonfictional suicide because those who may be most informative about the potential connections are dead. But this is both the difficulty of and the importance for giving extended consideration to the social relevance of suicide texts, especially those that are more likely to inform contemporary culture and its consumers—including classrooms and theaters. Finally, while all fiction intersects with life, the formulaic intersections of fictional suicide narratives may be particularly fatal ones. Thus, the phenomenon of suicide contagion imperatively problematizes some of our larger definitions and assumptions about ethics and aesthetics, especially the rhetorical influence of female suicide narratives and the moral implications of producing, assigning, reading, and even writing about female suicide narratives.
Because my effort is to describe some of the cross-cultural and diachronic similarities in female suicide narratives, I discuss a historically and geographically diverse range of texts in which a primary female character—usually a protagonist—commits suicide. In chronological order, the main texts I consider include: Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* (1852 U.S.); Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857 France); Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1875-77 Russia); Amalie Skram’s *Constance Ring* (1885 Norway); Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* (1895 U.S.); Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899 U.S.); Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (1905 U.S.); Yukio Mishima’s "Patriotism" (1960 Japan); Doris Lessing’s "To Room Nineteen" (1963 U.K.); "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan," written by Shell Silverstein and performed by Marianne Faithful (1979 U.S.); Robert Stone’s *Children of Light* (1985 U.S.); Michael Lehman’s film *Heathers* (1989 U.S.); Ridley Scott’s film *Thelma and Louise* (1991); and Jeffrey Eugenides’s *The Virgin Suicides* (1993 U.S.). However, I also refer to a variety of other texts that relate to general issues of suicide, including male suicide, and including but not limited to the following texts: G.E. Lessing’s play, "Emilia Galotti" (1771 Germany); Johann Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774 Germany); William Hill Brown’s *The Power of Sympathy* (1789 U.S.); John Entwistle’s song, "Thinkin’ It Over" (1972 U.S.); Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s film *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1978 Germany); Paul Schrader’s film, *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* (1985 U.S.); Ted Hawkins’ song, "The Good and the Bad" (1994 U.S.); and Pete Droge’s song, "If You Don’t Love Me (I’ll Kill Myself)" (1995 U.S.).

The primary criterion for texts’ inclusion in my main corpus is that a woman, usually a protagonist, commits active suicide—that is, she does not put herself in situations in which she knows she will be killed, as does Muriel Spark’s protagonist in *The Driver’s Seat* (1970), who arranges to have herself stabbed to death by a stranger; or the partner in Carol Reed’s British film "Odd Man Out" (1947), who walks with her rebel partner across a promised firing line; or Thomas Hardy’s Tess in *Tess of the D’Urberville’s* (1891), who commits murder, knowing she will be
executed for doing so. However, this criterion is quickly problematized because, as I mention above and discuss further in Chapter 6, some protagonists have questionable suicide motives. Further, Peg Meams, from Alice Fulton's "Queen Wintergreen" (1992), is fully alive at the end of what promises to be a truncated story of female suicide. And Heathers, a film advertised as if it narrates female suicides, includes a fleeting reference to only one "actual" female suicide—which occurs long before the time of action begins. While I regularly refer to Jeffrey Eugenides' The Virgin Suicides, especially its deflections of the masternarrative, I would argue that it is more about the effect the five Lisbon suicides have on the novel's narrator-characters—who become the novel's collectively-defined "protagonist"—than it is about the Lisbon sisters (which is, of course, part of its deflection). While these variations of the masternarrative proper further illuminate the female suicide masternarrative, let me reiterate that I am looking for narrative and social trends, not absolutes. While not all of the texts satisfy all of the masternarrative's requirements, they relate to and inform each other in several ways, even in their deflections and differences.

Although my primary criterion for texts' inclusion in this corpus is that the protagonists complete suicide, and I am aware that, since the 1950s, sociologists have devoted significant efforts to distinguishing and interpreting non-fatal and fatal suicide behavior, I will occasionally consider the implications of these texts for uncompleted suicide attempts because the subversive effect of female and male suicide narratives may manifest itself in the promotion of fatal and non-fatal behavior modeling. Indeed, seventy-five percent of those who complete suicide will have made an earlier attempt (Maltsberger 100), and "a person who has once been to the brink is perhaps three times more likely to go there again than someone who has not" (Alvarez 108).

The corpus in this dissertation is, obviously, a reflection of the texts to which I have been exposed—or, limited—and it includes almost all of the narratives I located that met my criterion, many of them from the United States. I welcome—for reasons that will become clear—the finding of texts that challenge my interpretations.
of the female suicide narratative. But the corpus already expresses some trends in relation to historical suicide—here, a reflection of it. While the major texts in this project are from several countries, none include African or African-American characters. Some suicide narratives do include Black women: "A Summer Tragedy" (1933), by Arna Bontemps, details the double-suicide of an impoverished, ailing elderly couple, and is structurally and thematically quite different from the texts informed by the narratative; and Carolivia Herron's *Thereafter Johnnie* (1993) refers, early in the novel, to the suicide of Johnnie's influential but absent mother.

These differences are important, but, because I have located them in two texts, my reference to them is limited. Although my corpus in no way is meant to represent a globally comprehensive search for female suicide texts, my efforts revealed no texts that feature Black female suicide protagonists. Indeed, I am glad to think that such texts may not be readily available and, with further investigation, might later speculate why they are not. Interestingly, however, in Western countries, Blacks consistently attempt and complete suicide less than other groups, including whites (Akers 276, Maris 90 in Jacobs). While Black suicide levels peak in adolescence, Black adolescent and adult males commit suicide almost half as often as whites (Maltsberger 51; Robins 128 in Roy 1986), and many have speculated, like Alec Roy, that this is because "Ethnic and minority groups tend to be more cohesive and have lower suicide rates" (1989 1445).

None of the female suicide protagonists in my corpus are Black, but they are all heterosexual. Two of the predominant impositions of femininity are, of course, heterosexuality and marriage. Although homosexual female protagonists may commit suicide (and gay adolescents are at much higher risk for suicide than their heterosexual peers), I know of no texts in which this occurs. Given the subversion of homosexuality in canonized literature, it makes some sense that homosexual suicide may be less prominent there than heterosexual suicide. Indeed, this might be a point of comparison for these texts: for instance, I might argue that Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) conjoins lesbian love and
suicidal behavior, although both covertly. In any case, I invite others to compare fictional treatments of suicide in relation to race and sexual orientation.

Male characters are by no means exempt from suicide, but the incidence of fictional male suicide pales in comparison to that of female suicide. Throughout this project, I have casually surveyed a variety of people about their familiarity with fictional suicide narratives. Often those I questioned named two or more fictions involving female suicide, but they rarely recalled examples of fictional male suicide. My observation is not, of course, a call for more male suicide texts; but, because fictional male suicides are rare and because my primary concern is with the feminization of suicide in fiction and its relation to suicidal behavior in reality, male suicide texts do not regularly feature in my corpus. I do, however, refer to some important male suicide texts as points of comparison with female trends, and, as with The Sorrows of Young Werther, to support my larger concern with and contextualization of the nexus of the real proliferation and the theoretical consequences of suicide narratives on behavior, beliefs, and knowledge.

I begin the comparison of fictional and real female suicide with, in Chapter 2, a presentation of sociological research that invites us to hypothesize that printed, fictional narratives may be complicit in suicide contagion and modeling. Chapter 3 explores the possibility for a kind of textual modeling by historically surveying the texts’ intertextual, extratextual, and intratextual treatments of suicide; the role of art and the media in constructing knowledge; and the historical developments of what I will more fully describe in Chapter 4 as the female suicide masternarrative. Having illustrated the relationship of individual narratives in regards to their treatments of the subjects of suicide and art, in Chapter 4 I define masternarrative, especially in relation to the female suicide masternarrative and as distinct from others’ concepts of master narratives, grand narratives, and master plots, but using some of these concepts to explore the ways in which masternarratives can function to construct allegory, myth, knowledge, and society.

In the remaining four chapters, I explore how, through its manipulations of reality in fiction, the female masternarrative produces troublesome patterns and the
implications of these patterns for narrative theory, consequences and ethics. Chapters five and six attend to the particularities of the female suicide masternarrative, especially how otherwise diverse texts share elements of theme, character, and structure that collaboratively amplify the messages they deliver to the world, messages that are already amplified by the texts' suicide content.

In Chapter 5, I comparatively apply theories of women's psychological development to the protagonists' experiences, describe the interrelational trajectory of female suicide, and interpret several texts in relation to its thematics. By contextualizing the fictions within the larger nonfictional context of gender and within the context of suicidology, I explore several sources of the masternarrative's subverted and subversive message that, if women cannot be happily married, they should not be.

Because women's suicide is so often understood in relation to interrelational distress both within and without these texts, I devote significant attention to the convergence of these issues—which, indeed, are sometimes imbued with essentialist rhetoric and informed by a research masternarrative. While my effort to contextualize understandings about and representations of female suicide refers to some social science efforts that have been criticized for being essentialist, my effort here is not to engage with essentialist debates or advocate essentialist perspectives. Indeed, I am not troubled that interrelational endeavors are a priority in most people's lives, but, as Chapter 5 shows, by the widespread interrelational prescriptions and restrictions for men and women.

Augmenting Chapter 5's emphasis on the conjunction of character and theme, Chapter 6 advances the discussion about theme and character in light of more general character attributes, situational attributes, and narrative structures, especially in relation to suicidal behaviors and influences. I discuss how the female suicide masternarrative facilitates suicide through manipulations of character, plot, and structure, both in individual texts and as a collective narrative phenomenon—the ways in which the masternarrative both promotes and curtails female death in fiction, and, finally, in culture and reality.
Having discussed several texts in relation to several issues in earlier chapters, I devote Chapter 7 to a close reading of Doris Lessing's "To Room 19." Although this story diverges from some of the trends of the masternarrative, it also models many of the trends, and thereby shows the flexibility and strength of the female suicide masternarrative. I discuss this story in relation to the concerns of earlier chapters, and, in anticipation of Chapter 8's commentary on reliability and liability, with particular attention to how its implied author is situated between positions of compassion and complicity.

In Chapter 8, the conclusion, I discuss the larger implications of the female suicide masternarrative for our interpretation of individual texts, our visions of the masternarrative, and our understanding of the cultural anxieties suggested by the masternarrative through its covert promotion of female suicide for women who deviate from prescribed, traditional female roles—especially in its relation to women's desire, will, power, and social usefulness. Bringing together my discussions about narrative technique, the intersection of reality and fiction, I discuss the texts' implications for narrative theory, practice, and ethics, especially in relation to the ideologies that emerge in the texts' structures and to the potential social consequences of masternarrative and of this masternarrative in particular. While I consider ambivalent elements of the masternarrative throughout the dissertation, this chapter is unified by a discussion about the various ambivalences promoted by these texts, about how our considerations of individual texts are informed by their association with the masternarrative's collective. In an effort to promote further discussion about narrative and masternarrative, I discuss general issues that emerge with the concept of masternarrative, such as what I define as narrative reliability and liability (that is, in contrast to narrator reliability). I discuss the ambivalences the texts promote in readers and in myself, and I explore possible narrative correctives to the forms and ideologies promoted by the female suicide masternarrative. I argue that the power, aesthetic, and rhetorical dynamics of the texts undermine women, especially as the texts become analogous to the pornographic. Finally, although my dissertation focus is the mastered telling and the mastering effects of the multiple
stories about what "surely no woman would ever dare to do," but what has also become "her story," I invite others to consider how narratives and masternarratives are and can be socially-constructed and socially constructing.
NOTES

1. Furthermore, the groups at the highest risk for suicide are aging white males and adolescent black and white males (Maltsberger 52). Also see Lester 3; McIntosh and Jewell 26; Neuringer and Lettieri vii; Akers 276, 279; Sanborn 155; Sainsbury 21; Maltsberger 51-52; Roy 1989 1415; and Robins 128.

2. Treatments of primarily male suicide in relation to literature, either characters or artists, include N. N. Schneidman’s *Dostoevsky and Suicide* (1984), which discusses Dostoevsky’s suicides, many of which are male; and Alan Wolfe’s *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan* (1990), which “investigates an apparent complicity between the sociological syndrome of suicidal alienation and the literary historical paradigm of the nonconformist autobiographical writer” by studying the relation between suicide and autobiographical fiction—or, the textuality of suicide—in the work of Dazai Osamu (viii).

3. Because of my current sensitivity to the mastering dynamics in non-fiction and fiction—including those that affect research trends—let me note that, while the critical responses in the past ten years toward dead women in art share some important observations, they do not appear to be overdetermined by a critical master-narrative of interpretation.

4. It seems, then, that this may be a turning point at which women's death moved from the private home to the "public" of the stage, as well as one of the places where female suicide was fused with narrative. As Chapter 6 shows, nineteenth and twentieth century suicide texts also share some of these classical plays’ characteristics.

5. My page references will be to the 1986 reprint of this article as "Speaking Silences: Women’s Suicide."

6. As Chapter 6 will show, some of these situations also occur in fictional suicide. For instance, Akers notes that attempts to define suicide are confounded by "ambiguous motivations, feigned suicides, unsuccessful attempted suicides, accidental self-inflicted deaths, and other events" (273) and that drowning a suicide method that is "especially difficult to distinguish from accidents" (Akers 278). Lily Bart’s overdose death in Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* ambiguity, as is Lu Anne Verger’s drowning death in Robert Stone’s *Children of Light.*

7. Also see Phillips and Ruth; O’Carroll; and Kleck regarding suicide statistics reporting.

8. While the phrase "attempted suicide" suggests any attempt to kill oneself, completed or not, it is most frequently used by sociologists to refer to *uncompleted* suicide attempts, regardless of the method employed—and this definition is also applied to the term "parasuicide." However, sometimes "attempted suicide" refers specifically to "the deliberate, non-fatal ingestion of medicinal agents in excess of the recommended dose," one of the
most dramatic and still largely unexplained phenomena in 20th century social medicine" (Jack 1). While I will most often use the phrase to refer to nonfatal attempts, regardless of method, when I discuss Jack's work, I will use the phrase as he does; this will be clear in my context.

9. An exception to the monopoly of female suicides in literature is found in Dostoevsky, whose works include the suicides of eight female and fourteen male characters. See N. N. Schneidman's *Dostoevsky and Suicide*. 
CHAPTER 2

"It's Just a Story": Fictional Representations of Suicide

She knew how small the passions were that art magnified. So, striving for detachment, Emma resolved to see in this reproduction of her sorrows a mere formal fiction for the entertainment of the eyes.

Madame Bovary

In 1897, Emile Durkheim's seminal work, Suicide, presented theories and observations about suicide modeling and contagion that were to remain essentially unchallenged for the next seventy-five years. After reviewing existing research, Durkheim reported no link between suggestion and suicide. However, with some apparent contradiction, he alleged that, while the power of suggestion may influence those within the vicinity of publicity about a suicide, national levels of suicide are not affected by suggestion. Furthermore, he believed that the suicides that seemed influenced by suggestion probably would have occurred without the influence of imitation.

Durkheim's views were so widely accepted that Norman L. Farberow's 1972 Bibliography on Suicide and Suicide Prevention, 1897-1970 did not list suggestion, imitation, or contagion in its index (Phillips 1974 340)—terms which have since become instrumental in suicidologists' understanding of suicide. But in 1972, David Lester activated an epistemological change in suicidology when he published his determination that the theretofore seven articles devoted to suicide imitation were inconclusive. Shortly thereafter, David Phillips conducted the first systematic study of the relationship between suicide and suggestion when he analyzed changes in
suicide rates in the United States and Great Britain after leading newspapers carried front-page news stories about suicides. Phillips concluded that, contrary to Durkheim's theory, there was a strong imitative effect on suicide, one manifested nationally and internationally (1974). Analyzing several years of suicide rates, Phillips found that, after the initial surge in suicide rates following media coverage of a suicide, there was no drop in rates. Phillips concluded that the increase in rates following the publicity were not a result of more quickly occurring suicides that would have occurred even in the absence of publicity, but that the publicity prompted excess, imitative suicides (341).

While the number of deaths presumed to be influenced by suicide contagion varies, it is consistently substantial. Several researchers have estimated significant numbers of excess suicides as a result of contagion, observing that, while the clustering effect appears to be strongest among teenagers and young adults, older adults also are affected by it, particularly those ages fifty-five to sixty-four (Phillips and Carstensen; Gould et al. 1989, Gould et al. 1990). Without making distinctions for age differences, Phillips concluded that from 1947 to 1968, more than 2,000 excess imitative deaths occurred in the U.S. and Britain (351). In another study, Madelyn S. Gould and David Shaffer found that teen suicides in New York City occurred in excess of six deaths in the three two-week periods following three fictional television movies featuring suicide, which, projected nationally, would amount to eighty excess deaths among ten- to nineteen-year-olds (693). David P. Phillips and Lundie L. Carstensen observed a national increase in adult suicides by an average of 2.60 deaths during the eight-day period following each story in their study. Among teenagers, the increases were higher, with 3.42 excess suicides committed following general information stories about suicide and 2.16 committed after stories reporting specific suicides, totalling 111 excess teen suicides in the United States from 1973 to 1979 as a result of feature stories on suicide (689). And Gould et al. reported that suicide rates among teens and young adults rise from one to thirteen percent as a result of the clustering effect (1990 212). While these
estimates involve relatively small percentages of deaths, they warrant attention because, as Gould says, these may be a particularly preventable class of deaths.

Not all studies corroborate Phillips' results (Motto; Kessler and Stripp), but some inconclusive findings are attributed to methodological inconsistencies (Baron and Reiss, Stack 1984, Littmann; see Gould and Shaffer 690) or to contextual limitations. In his overview of Phillips' work, Ronald W. Maris says, "Most damning . . . is the fact that the theory of imitation and suicide rates is furiously underdeveloped" (1989 95-96). Given that Phillips' primary effort appears to have been to measure and document the presence or absence of suicide contagion, it seems misguided to fault Phillips for insufficiently theorizing his influential, data-oriented work.

Moreover, Phillips' primarily empirical contributions continue to receive support and interpretive attention from several suicidologists, and an impressive and growing number of studies support findings about suicide modeling, contagion, and imitation. Suicidologists continued to discover that suicide rates rise significantly following televised and printed news stories about actual suicides (Bollen and Phillips; Stack 1988, 1993; Wasserman 1984, 1992; Biblarz et al.; also see Hawton 144-145 in Roy 1986). Steven Stack points out that, "even without the help of electronic media, well-publicized stories in the printed media were associated with increases in suicide" (1988 355). Moreover, covert suicides "disguised as motor vehicle or airplane accidents" also rise after publications of stories about suicide (Bollen and Phillips 802 1981; Phillips 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980). Even programs that did not report on actual suicides, but that provided general information or feature stories about suicide were found to be "just as dangerous" at provoking suicide contagion as were programs about particular suicides—and, among teenagers, more dangerous (Phillips and Carstensen 689).

While the 1970s occasioned much work on the phenomenon of suicide contagion, until the early 1980s, many sociologists continued to accept Durkheim's assumption that imitation does not influence suicide rates. In the past fifteen years, however, sociologists have joined disciplines such as psychiatry and economics in
their attempts to better understand the nature and role of human imitation, especially in relation to suicide. Recognizing that the decision to commit suicide is influenced by a combination of biologic, experiential, and environmental factors, sociologists have combined elements of various social and behavioral theories in an attempt to understand suicide contagion (see Stack 1992 256 for overview). Classic imitation theory argues that people imitate those they consider superior to themselves (Tarde 1903, 1912), and several researchers have confirmed that model attractiveness has a direct effect on suicide imitation (Gould 1989 26). Behavioral scientists, who believe that most human behavior is learned through observation and modeling, also agree that imitation is directly related to the desirability of the model's characteristics or the outcome of the model's behavior (Bandura). Differential identification theory proposes that our understanding of mass cultural values will help us predict which stories promote general identification with others, and, hence, suicide imitation (Matthews). These theories are correlatives of social learning theory, which argues that suicidal behavior is an acquired response learned through socialization and that "social learning may be crucially important in accounting for variation in the frequency of suicide and parasuicide," including the social learning and imitation resulting from the media's favorable representations of suicide (Diekstra 1974, 1985; Platt 1993 23; Burgess and Akers; Akers).

While the host of characteristics that may compel imitative suicide have not been studied (Gould et al. 1989), imitation theory associates imitation with model attractiveness and superiority, and some theorize that a history of similar experiences or a great degree of concordance between the model and the observer promote modeling and imitation (Sacks and Eth; Schmidtke and Hafner). In one study, Ira M. Wasserman concluded that front page celebrity suicide stories increased the national suicide rate by approximately 116 per month, which he hypothesized was related to the increased mass-media publicity surrounding the celebrities' deaths, as well as to their having qualities that invite identification (1984). Similarly, Stack found that publicized news stories about the suicides of political heroes were significantly associated with increases in suicide rates (1992) and that suicides of
prestigious people provoked an imitative effect, even if they were not celebrities (1988).

While many people succumb to the imitative effect of suicide, many more do not—which, of course, poses the question of how individual thresholds for suicide imitation are established, maintained, and crossed. Durkheim believed that people did not commit suicide unless they were already susceptible to it—which is, to some extent, self-evident—but Phillips argued that suicide contagion can affect those who are not normally predisposed to killing themselves (1974). Other sociologists remain less definitive in their conclusions about how personal and cultural dynamics desensitize people to the impact and consequences of suicide and about how individual susceptibility to suicide and suicide contagion increases (Berman, Biblarz). While mainstream culture presents clear norms against suicide, Ronald L. Akers believes these norms are neutralized by suicide victims' rationalizations of their acts, and Gould says that

In addition to imitative effects, the occurrences of suicides in the community or in the media may produce a familiarity with and acceptance of the idea of suicide. . . . Familiarity with suicide may eliminate the 'taboo' of suicide, lower the threshold at which point the behavior is manifested, and introduce suicide as an acceptable alternative response or option to life stresses. (Gould et al. 1989 26; also see Rubinstein 1983)

Louise Douce, a psychologist and the director of The Ohio State University Counseling Consultation Service, says, "I think people that are at the highest risk are people who have known somebody else who has committed suicide" (Caruso 4C).

Several of these issues emerged following the 1994 suicide of Kurt Cobain, the idolized lead singer of the enormously popular alternative rock group Nirvana. During the days following Cobain's widely-publicized death, I anticipated an increase in national--and perhaps international--suicide rates. Three days after Cobain's death, one of my students spoke with me about his high school friend's suicide earlier that day, expressing confusion because his friend had appeared to be remarkably stable, content, and successful and had had a promising academic, personal, and athletic future. As I silently reflected on the possibility that this
suicide may have been partly the result of suicide contagion, my student mumbled, "I wonder if this has anything to do with Kurt Cobain."

Given the findings of suicidologists, it seems possible—even probable—that otherwise stable people, especially young people, would commit suicide following the media blitz about Cobain's death. So, it was with surprise that I read Newsweek's story on Cobain's death, which reported that "most experts"

don't expect to see large numbers of copycat teen suicides in the wake of Cobain's. "The closer you are to the person who committed suicide, the more likely you are to emulate it," says University of Chicago psychiatrist Bennett Levental. "The vast majority of kids are not that close to Cobain." The ones most apt to copy the rock star are those who already have significant emotional problems. Says clinical psychologist Fred Yapelli: "Kids who have low self-esteem and identity tend to get hooked on these heroes," merging emotionally with them to the point of taking on their personalities. (Waters et al. 49)

Although Newsweek seems to explicitly minimize the role of suicide contagion, the article supports the contagion hypothesis for those "close" to the deceased and for those with low self-esteem. However, the article also supports the general contagion hypothesis in its commentary on the general vulnerability to and impulsiveness of suicide, even among normally healthy teenagers:

The element of timing may be decisive. While the vast majority of teenagers who kill themselves have suffered psychological disorders, some move in and out of high risk for short periods (even just 24 hours) because of emotional trauma. Los Angeles psychologist Michael Peck cites the 15-year-old who's thrown when his girlfriend ditches him and overwhelmed when his mother chastises him for a poor grade. "If there happens to be a gun there, it's over"... Indeed, the presence of firearms may be the most pivotal factor. A study comparing adolescent suicide victims who had no apparent mental disorders with kids who didn't commit suicide found only one difference: a loaded gun in the house. (emphasis added 49)

Although it makes sense that gun accessibility informs suicide rates, it seems dangerous to deny or minimize—especially amidst such obvious contradictions—the possibility of more generalized suicide contagion in the absence of guns or mental illness. And, while Cobain may have not been personally "close to" his fans, they were "close to" him, idolizing him and Nirvana long before Cobain's suicide. By
definition, and by virtue of their emotional investment in the admiree, their compatibility with and admiration for some aspect of that person, their familiarity with and knowledge about him or her, fans are, to different degrees, "close to" the objects of their interest and admiration. Imitation has been related to model "hero" status and attractiveness, and Cobain and Nirvana are touted as the inspiration for the early 1990s fashion revolution of the rebellious grunge look that began with a subculture of marginalized Pacific Northwest teenagers imitating the group's dress and was quickly mainstreamed into urban and suburban adolescent culture throughout the United States. Clearly, Cobain was an admired model for much of the young adult population in the U.S. long before he committed suicide.

It is highly likely that the news stories about Cobain's suicide produced some copycat suicides, and nonfictional suicide modeling may also illuminate the nature of fictional modeling. Indeed, some sociologists have determined that imitation occurs in response to fictional representations of suicide: Phillips found that suicide rates increased after soap opera television suicides (Maris 96); Gould and Shaffer identified one young man who committed suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning shortly after watching this method used in a fictional television movie (1989); and other researchers have repeatedly concluded that attitudes toward suicide as well as actual suicide rates are affected by filmed representations of fictional suicide (Range et al.; Biblarz et al.; Gould and Shaffer; Platt). In their study on the way viewers' attitudes toward suicide changed after they were exposed to filmed narratives about fictional suicide, Arturo Biblarz et al. hypothesized that people who readily identify with fictional suicidal characters may experience more arousal than those less able to identify with them, and that some viewers' perceptions about suicide changed "in a more positive direction" after seeing the fictional films, changes that apparently "were not random" (382). Shaffer asserted that the imitation of fictional suicide stories was implicated in two of thirty consecutive suicides (1974), and Gould and Shaffer projected that three fictional televised films featuring suicide would account for eighty excess teen suicides in the United States, concluding their paper with a
statement about the urgency of presumptive evidence which suggests "that fictional presentations of suicide may have a lethal effect" (1986 693).

Perhaps the most compelling example of the lethal intertwining of fictional suicide and real suicide is the sequence of suicides surrounding Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. In the "Werther fever" that occurred in the two decades following the publication of Johann Goethe’s emotive text, time and again the corpses of "countless" men and women who appear to have committed suicide, like Werther, in response to unrequited love, were found with copies of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* close by—under death-bed pillows, tucked in pockets soaked with river-water, opened upon nearby desks (among several, Lange xi, Rose 147, Mann 3). This reaction, along with the cult-like imitations of Werther’s suicide garb, compelled Goethe to grave, public expressions of distress and evoked an outrage that resulted in the book’s banning in several areas, including Italy, Leipzig, and Copenhagen.

While the Werther fever was relatively well-publicized, it is less commonly known that even before this mass reaction occurred, Goethe was no stranger to the sometimes deadly impetus of literature: he had modeled Werther after Carl Wilhelm Jerusalem, a friendly acquaintance who had, two decades earlier, like the fictional Werther, also committed suicide in response to unrequited love— and besides whose corpse was also found an open copy of *Emilia Galotti*, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s 1771 tragedy in which the protagonist wills her own death by her father’s knife in what has been called a "moral suicide" (Magill 641; Steinhauer 102, among others). As works of literature repeatedly served as suicide notes, this string of suicidal reader-response is a striking reminder of the power of literature to mold individual and collective attitudes and behavior, to present fictive models for historical people-- "characters" who don’t know us, but whom we know well, perhaps even more "closely" than we know our acquaintances and friends, characters we may admire and in whom, through our reading engagement and through our privileged narrative perspectives, we invest our very real time, intellect, and emotions.
Today’s sociologists better understand the large-scale imitative response to Werther’s suicide, but it is ironic that, while Phillips refers to suicide contagion as the "Werther effect" and there are anecdotal reports about suicide modeling after printed, fictional characters, contagion studies have not been conducted on the Werther medium itself: printed fiction. But, if non-fictional printed material about suicide increases suicide rates, and if fictional films and videos increase suicide rates, then it is logical to surmise that—on some level, and perhaps in some empirically elusive way—printed suicide fictions, especially those involving protagonists we know well and admire, would also increase suicide rates.

The collective effect of suicide contagion in response to filmed suicide fictions has been measured en masse, but attempts to confirm this hypothesis about printed fictional narratives on a large-scale or individual basis would be fraught with challenges. It would be difficult to confirm direct imitation of fictional suicide because medical and legal records do not show whether or not the deceased were exposed to fictional suicide. However, it might be possible to partially monitor the influence of printed suicide stories on suicide rates using psychological autopsies, which researchers have conducted since the 1950s in attempts to reconstruct the circumstances and lifestyles of people who have committed suicide, as well as the details of events and behaviors that more immediately preceded the suicide (Farberow and Neuringer). While I find no evidence that psychiatrists routinely investigate the deceased’s knowledge of fictional suicide narratives, and while survivors may be unaware of a deceased’s exposure to fictional narratives, suicidologists might consider formally investigating—routinely and in focused, long-term studies—suicide victims’ exposure to fictional suicide narratives, including printed ones.

Clearly, there are inherent hindrances in such an endeavor. Deviant behavior, including suicide, can be learned directly from those in one’s primary or secondary groups, as well as indirectly, from reference groups or from case reports in the mass media (Stack 1992 256). Similarly, suicide contagion can be a result of direct contact between decedents, or a result of decedents; indirect exposure to suicide
events, such as hearing about an event from the media or from another individual (Gould 1989, Gould and Shaffer 1986). While completed and uncompleted suicide attempts are in some ways vastly different, perhaps parasuicide—the infliction of intentional but non-fatal self-harm—can offer some insight about suicide contagion. Stephen Platt found that "eight times as many parasuicides as controls reported recent intensive contact with suicidal behavior" (30), but that, contrary to his own predictions and to other findings, knowledge of suicide or parasuicide committed by someone who was not a close friend or family member and in circumstances which did not directly involve the subject protected the subject from engaging in parasuicidal behavior. Platt concluded that indirect contact with suicidal behavior resulted in less tolerant attitudes toward it. However, Platt also noted that, regarding completed suicides, the literature supports the position that "social learning plays an important role in the etiology of suicidal behavior" (1993 30).

Platt's findings might implicate printed fiction in or acquit it of the theoretical charge of promoting suicide contagion, depending on how any particular reader experiences a suicidal character. When considering fictional modeling, where, exactly, do we demarcate the borders of "direct" or "indirect" exposure to models? We might characterize fictional narratives as sources of indirect exposure because there is no mutual "relationship" between the character and the reader, because the reader's relationship with the character is temporary, and because a character is not a reader's close friend or family member. However, fiction invites members of its narrative audience to participate in extended, intimate contact with characters, especially with the protagonists of longer, printed texts—texts that are often read over a period of time and in isolation. And when we read long narratives, we likely engage with a suicide model without much outside mediation—which is to say, we directly engage with it. Thus, our intimate associations with suicidal characters and suicide texts problematize sociologists' distinctions between indirect and direct contact with suicide models—as the Werther suicides already illustrate.
Of course, the difficulty of measuring fiction’s role in suicide contagion is compounded when we consider that suicide modeling can follow indirect exposure to suicide, can result in covert suicides, and that the length of time elapsing between exposure to a model and imitative behavior can be short or long (Platt 1993: 24). Even if sociologists measured the effects of fictional suicide stories on overt suicide rates, it would be impossible to accurately measure all imitative suicides, especially those following indirect exposure and those occurring as covert suicides. But perhaps the most obstructive difficulty in measuring the influence of printed, fictional modeling on real suicide is that, although there are several printed fictional female suicide narratives, because printed fictions are usually read in isolation, or perhaps in smaller groups, the suicide imitation they might provoke would occur sporadically and in relative obscurity, without the clear cluster effects like those observed in the studies cited above, studies that involve the simultaneous, widespread exposure of large, geographically-demarcated populations to suicide stories. Moreover, because of the difficulties inherent in determining the degree to which fictional suicide promotes historical modeling, it is also likely that the results of such a study would grossly underrepresent the impact of fictional suicide on real suicide. But these difficulties are inherent in the endeavor, not reflections of its value. Finally, even if it is impossible to accurately quantify the degree to which fictional characters become suicide models, it would be beneficial to compile a compendium of anecdotes that would expand understandings about fictional, and, especially, printed fictional suicide models.

Today’s sociologists better understand suicide imitation than they did during Werther fever—and they also now better recognize the ironies in Goethe’s prefatory poem to the second printing of Werther, wherein Werther’s ghost commands his reader to "be a man" and not follow his example: given the sex demographics of suicide, Goethe should have urged his readers to "be like a woman." Further, because we now know that even strictly informational reports are implicated in suicide contagion, it is additionally ironic that the ghost’s attempt to warn against suicide may have promoted it. Similarly, even as the Newsweek article cited above
understates the potential for contagion but also explicitly discourages suicide modeling in its title, "Teenage Suicide: One Act Not to Follow," the article may have been associated with some excess imitation suicides.

Although all engagement with art requires intimate audience participation, and any art may participate in social learning, suicide narratives demand particular attention because of their potentially fatal involvement with the phenomenon of suicide modeling and contagion. Female suicide narratives also invite a large amount of participation and identification in ways I will explore throughout this dissertation, but let me briefly note some of them here. First, the very nature of narrative—and, especially, of long narratives—promotes an extended, intimate engagement with its characters, actions, and messages. Female suicide narratives are also common and formulaic, and they focus on the experience of female heterosexual loss—that is, on concerns, experiences, and issues that affect many women at some time. As such, these texts invite women to engage with the texts and identify with the characters in particularly meaningful ways. Further, the texts' individual messages and effects are augmented by their self-contained moments of self-reflexivity, as well as by their intertextual reflexiveness—which, then, collectively compounds and reifies the readerly and cultural effects of the individual and collective texts.

There are, of course, clear taboos against suicide, and women are particularly socialized to avoid violent or transgressive behavior. According to Joyce B. Stephens:

> If suicidologists agree on one thing, it is that ultimately suicidal behaviors are not understandable as specific acts but are rather possible outcomes of more general social processes which precede the act and provide a matrix from which self-destructive attitudes and roles may arise. Viewing suicide attempting as processual in nature, it becomes necessary not only to identify those patterns of interactions which foster personal despair and self-hatred but also to trace these patterns developmentally. (emphasis added 73-74)

And Antoon A. Leenaars says that explanations for the sex ratio difference between men and women include variations in method, biological differences, psychiatric and sociological differences (59), but she does not mention the potential influence
cultural models may have on suicidal behavior, including the matrix formed by artistic representations of suicidal women. As will become clearer in later chapters, fictional female suicide narratives do, indeed, contribute to the general social processes that covertly socialize women to attempt suicide, especially following heterosexual interrelational distress, dissatisfaction, or abandonment.

While sociologists have corroborated suicide's general imitative effect and have addressed subgroup populations such as young adults, religious sects, psychiatric patients, and students, they have neglected other important subgroups—including those of sex (Wasserman 1984; Gould 1989). Over two decades ago, at the beginning of the revived interest in contagion, Phillips proposed that "well-known female suicides should affect women more than men; while the opposite should be true for well-known male suicides" (1974 352), but sociologists apparently have paid little attention to testing this hypothesis. Indeed, published essays suggest a larger obliviousness to the potentially informative role of sex on experiments about suicide. For instance, Lillian M. Range et al. describe an experiment in which observers—seventy-two percent of whom were women—viewed a video tape of a distressed female high school student and then estimated her suicide potential, but the report lacks commentary about the influence of sex on their results. In another analysis of the effects of fictional films about suicide on attitudes toward suicide, researchers said "gender was not included as a factor [in the analysis] because of the small number of males in the sample" (Biblarz et al. 1991 379)!

With some of the differences between suicidal behavior between men and women so well-documented, it is odd that sex differences—in participants, models, and researchers—have been so grossly overlooked in studies about suicide contagion, and more so given how readily the influence of sex could have been explored. For example, David P. Phillips and Lundie L. Carstensen noted that adult suicide rates increased by 2.6 in the eight-day period following the airing of suicide stories, but they didn’t report how that percentage was distributed according to sex and age. They did, however, attend to sex differences among teenagers, finding that
within the teenage population, the clustering appears more strongly among females than males. After the average story about suicide, suicide by female teenagers rose by 13.46 percent, in contrast to a much smaller increase (5.18%) for males. This evidence is consistent with the popular view that teenage girls are more influenced by fashion and imitation than are teenage boys. (emphasis added 689)

While it is baffling that these findings have failed to inspire researchers to more regularly address the role of sex differences in contagion, considering the relative historical neglect of research devoted to women’s health, this omission is somehow not entirely surprising.

Perhaps it is time to grapple with contagion's influence on that large "subgroup" that composes more than half of the world's population—on the same sex that is predominantly featured in narrative, visual, lyric, and dramatic representations of suicide. If we identify the vast body of suicides overtly represented or covertly suggested in advertisements, films, songs, and literature, as an indirect source of contact with suicidal behavior, we might find—should we find it worthy of our research funds and attention—ample reason to be concerned with the elusive, perhaps immeasurable, but ubiquitous and dangerous messages of female suicide that are cross-culturally purveyed through art, especially through narrative. Furthermore, although suicide accounts for only one half to one percent of all deaths (Sainsbury 20), approximately 1,000 people commit suicide in the world each day—seventy-five of them in the United States—and suicide ranks among the five to ten most frequent cause of death in all Western countries (Roy 1989 1414). Perhaps sociologists, cultural critics, and artists ought to consider and respond to fictional suicide narratives' potentially fatal power, especially because suicide is, for the most part, particularly wasteful, tragic, and—especially given current understandings about contagion—possibly preventable.

This call for an exploration of narrative as one of the socio-cultural promoters of suicide seems especially warranted because of recent decades' increases in suicide rates. John T. Maltsberger reports that adolescent rates in the United States tripled
In recent years, the suicide rate among adolescents in the United States has risen dramatically, though in some other countries it has not. . . . The increased suicide rates are thought to reflect changes in the social environment, changing attitudes toward suicide, and the increasing availability of the means to commit suicide. (1989 1420)

Furthermore, many of the increasing rates are attributed to increased female rates. Charles Neuringer and Dan J. Lettieri report that, although suicide rates are increasing in general, they are "rising fastest among adolescent girls" (vii)--which is consistent with Phillips' and Carstensen's findings that female teens are more susceptible to suicide modeling than male teens are. Peter Sainsbury says: "the trend during this century has been for women's rates to increase nearly everywhere relative to men's. Whereas during the first five decades suicide in men decreased in 8 of 12 European countries, that of women increased in 10 and did not change in 2" (in Roy 22). After the "rising incidence of female suicide" in Europe from 1900-1961, the rates in England and Scotland declined from 1961 to 1974--but in seventeen other countries, women's rates continued to increase "in a significant proportion" (Sainsbury in Roy 23). Lester reports that in nine western industrialized nations, while the male rate rose over two percent, the female suicide rate rose eighteen percent (1988 4). And P. Burvill found that female suicide rates rose from 1955 to 1965 in all of the nine nations included in his study. In the United States, Walter R. Gove found that from 1952 to 1963 the suicide rate rose ten percent for white males, two percent for black males--and forty-nine percent for white females, eighty percent for black females (Gove 1972 cited in Lester 1988 4). And Lester says that:

Although the male-female ratio of completed suicides in the United States remained fairly stable over the last twenty years . . . the female suicide rate has been increasing recently at a proportionately higher rate than for males, though the female suicide rate remains only about one-third of the male suicide rate. (1988 4)
Moreover, while female suicidal behavior is predominantly non-fatal, non-fatal behavior often leads to fatal behavior: consider estimates that "up to 12 percent of nonhospitalized attempters subsequently commit suicide" (Akers 277, Wilkins 290-94); that ten to twenty percent of non-fatal attempters will eventually complete suicide (Maltsberger 100); and that a person who attempts suicide is three times more likely to attempt it again than someone who has never attempted it (Alvarez 108).

Perhaps fictional representations of suicidal women are one of the several factors to which we can attribute increased suicide rates. Indeed, twentieth-century media technologies readily and massively popularize and deploy fictional suicide narratives to large (and perhaps passive) viewing and listening audiences—such as those watching the popular films *Thelma and Louise* and *The Last of the Mohicans* and listening to the songs "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan" and "If You Don’t Love Me (I’ll Kill Myself), which both listed on music popularity charts. Further, the deployment of suicide texts is assisted by the increased popularity of home video-viewing: on one day in March 1997, all thirty-seven copies of the Columbus Metropolitan Library’s copies of *Thelma and Louise* were on loan. Videos make suicide texts available indefinitely, enable repeated viewings of them (which might further densitize viewers), invite viewers to watch suicide narratives in solitude, and pose obvious challenges to studying and documenting suicide contagion.

Although my textual focus is primarily comprised of printed, Western narratives from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, representations of suicidal women have flourished through time, cultures, and media, have been regularly popularized in painting, drama, opera, folk ballads, poetry, Japanese love plays, and popular film such that one need not read canonized novels in order to be exposed to aesthetic representations of female suicide. If the televising of three two-hour movies on three evenings in one relatively small area of the world is estimated to have resulted in six excess suicides in the two weeks following their airing (Gould and Shaffer 1986 693), imagine the effect that scores of female suicide narratives, distributed worldwide and in several genres, may have on real female suicide. These
suicide narratives explicitly support the development of a Suicidal Woman, implicitly diminish the "taboo" factor of female suicide, and very likely construct and inform real women's options and behavior.

But, if suicide modeling is a real threat, why, with the aesthetization of women's self-violence so pervasive, isn't the preponderance of female suicide in art paralleled by a preponderance of female suicide in life? Sociologists propose that female suicide rates are lower than men's because women are socialized to be non-violent, because of their desire not to hurt others, because their methods are less violent than men's, they are less likely to "succeed" at whatever they attempt, and their attempts are reportedly often not attempts to embrace death, but to solicit help and interrelational connection with significant others. However, regardless of the doctrines decrying female violence, regardless of suicide's overtly transgressive status, and of women's strong socialization to be nontransgressive, women commit most suicidal behavior--that is, when we consider lethal and nonlethal behavior. It seems probable that these narratives are sources of intensive--even direct--contact with suicide models and that they increase rates of suicidal behavior in general, but that their suicidal effects are partly mitigated by other forces. As such, the texts' complicity in suicide promotion is manifested in women's fatal and nonfatal suicide behavior--and, in this way, the real narrative effects of modeling, imitation, and the lowered tolerance that Platt identifies after exposure to suicidal behavior increase women's rates of both kinds of suicidal behavior. Thus, from the more inclusive perspective of suicidal behavior, the artistic feminization of suicidal behavior more closely parallels and is complicit in the real predominance of suicidal behavior by women.

In addition to exposing and clarifying the nature of fiction's feminization of suicide, the heath sciences' evolving theories about, emphases on, and methodologies for studying real suicide can also advance our wider understanding of fictional suicide--and, then, the various relationships between fictional and real suicide. For instance, while it may be impossible to measure exactly the influence of fictional suicide narratives on real people, we can conduct psychological autopsies on
fictional characters. Indeed, in Jeffrey Eugenides *The Virgin Suicides*, Ms. Perl and the narrators perform separate, even competitive lay psychological autopsies on the Lisbons: Ms. Perl—herself a usefully problematized characters—listens to Lux's favorite albums and the song, "Virgin Suicide" (176); and the narrators conduct their own, decades-long psychological autopsy on the five Lisbon sisters—an effort that produces more insight about and for the narrators than the Lisbons. Although printed narratives may not answer many of the questions a psychiatrist might ask during a psychological autopsy, they—especially the longer novels—give us insights into characters' lives and psyches that may be more frank and definitive than the information retrieved during the psychological autopsies of real people.

Furthermore, through their unifying similarities, these texts also enable us to conduct a living, collective cultural autopsy of female suicide both within and without the narratives, to compare the trends of real and fictional suicide, to better understand the larger cultural dynamics of and assumptions about female suicide, and to understand how these cultural dynamics and "knowledge" inform and are informed by fictional narratives. Whether or not we can fully quantify the texts' influence on women's suicidal behavior, as instruments of social learning and meaning, they can help us interpret cultural attitudes toward, "knowledge" of, and reactions to suicidal women. By examining their shared characterizations, actions, and structures, and by considering their shared reflections and deflections of reality, we can better understand the larger context around and attitudes toward female suicide—that is, we can better understand how art engages with women's passions, how its "reproduction of [women's] sorrows" can be much more than, as Emma Bovary believes and shows it is, "a mere formal fiction for the entertainment of the eyes" (163).
NOTES

1. Clusters are identified by increased concentrations of suicide in geographic areas within definite time frames.

2. For instance, Steven Stack's 1992 study on suicide during the Depression offered limited findings because during the years included in his study only two celebrities committed suicide, and television did not play a role in the mass media.

3. See Akers 303 for another overview of Phillips' work and a discussion about why Phillips' work is convincing.

4. Although Thelma and Louise is a film, given its geographically widespread and temporally contained popularity, it would be fruitful to study the rates following its release.

5. Burvil concluded "that modern society is leading to more suicidogenic stress for females while having no ameliorative effect for males" (in Lester 1988 4). However, researchers also note that rates increase during social change and often lower after periods of social adjustment. Among others who discuss this in relation to employment and divorce practices, see Kerkhof and Clark, who postulate that as divorce becomes more common, it may cause less social disintegration, which will result in lower suicide rates among the divorced (50).
CHAPTER 3

Lethal Coherence:
The Inter-, Intra- and Extratextual in Female Suicide Narratives

It was seriously meant, of course, but still it was a novel. That is every woman's naive idea of literature. It reflects the relatively larger part which the social life plays in the existence of women. If a man tells you he wants to write a book, nine times out of ten he means a treatise or argument on some subject that interests him. . . . But when a woman tells you she wants to write a book, nine times out of ten times she means to write a novel.

*The Woman Who Did*

Introduction

While sociologists and suicidologists recognize the role imitation and modeling play in human development and behavior, female suicide texts are also informed by powerful kinds of textual modeling. Indeed, long before suicidologists devoted sustained attention to suicide clustering, suicide texts themselves have participated in a tri-leveled textual dynamic of suicide influence and contagion. While suicide narratives are clearly not the only texts that are cohesively, collectively or dynamically informed, the nature of suicide contagion and the theoretical threat of suicide modeling presented by them makes this body of texts and the lethal coherence established by them particularly compelling. And because the relationship between fiction and reality is already imbued with potentially serious repercussions in suicide narratives, it is especially interesting to explore the ways fictional suicide texts explicitly and implicitly use, illuminate, and problematize the
relationship between the real and the fictional, the ways in which they depend upon and illuminate the nexus of art and "life" in narrative. Indeed, within and around these texts and their treatments of suicide, art often becomes something for characters and for real people to produce, consume, be informed by, and sometimes to become.

This mutually-informing dynamic is evident in several of the texts' narrative realms, whereby textual forces promote a unifying but also dynamic and flexible coherence in the female suicide collective: in the texts' macro elements of narrative, such as structure, theme, and character; in their micro elements, such as imagery and kernels of action and focalization; in their use of various textualities; and in the ways in which the texts contend with the issues of art, suicide, and the media. While this dissertation addresses several aspects of female suicide texts that illustrate their coherence and that problematize their relationship to real suicide, this chapter focuses specifically on the last issue I named above: the relation between suicide, art, and the media. Furthermore, while I will address the texts' macrosimilarities in later chapters (for instance, the protagonists' tendencies to die at the end of the narrative), this chapter focuses on the texts' more localized similarities of particular acts, focalizations, imagery, language, memories, and descriptions—on narrative microsimilarities that help reveal and support the texts' larger coherences and patterns. Indeed, in the same way that individual female suicide texts gain force when considered within the cumulative context of female suicide narratives, their microsimilarities gain force when considered within the context of the texts' macrosimilarities that are discussed in later chapters.

And, because the texts' microsimilarities also highlight the texts' treatments of art, suicide, and media, as well as their various textual trends, I attend to all three subjects in this chapter. The texts address issues of art, suicide, and media in three different, but sometimes interactive, textual locations: the extratextual, the intertextual, and the intratextual. Because these textualities are defined by their associations with fiction and reality, their terms are particularly useful tools with which to discuss the dynamic between the real and the fictional in suicide narratives.
So, while these narratives, like others, often blur the boundaries between the three kinds of textualities, let me begin with some definitional distinctions for them.

I will use the term *extratextual* in reference to the use of historical events in the fictional world: for instance, Gustave Flaubert’s alleged use of the historical Delphine Couturier’s suicide in his construction of the “fictional” Emma Bovary. By *intertextual*, I will mean a text’s or character’s reference to other "fictional" texts that have been produced in our historical world: for instance, Constance Ring’s reference to the “fictional” *Madame Bovary*. (Already, I hope to suggest in these examples some complication of the terms and our concept of fiction and reality in these texts, which I will expound on later.) And I will reserve the *intratextual* label for self-contained references or occurrences within individual texts, references that do not refer to other historical situations or texts: for instance, *The Woman Who Dicts*’s reference to its protagonist’s novel, *A Woman’s World* or *The Power of Sympathy*’s story of Fidelia.

These definitions are not meant to draw static demarcations between the kinds of textualities, but to provide a starting point from which to explore their fluid interconnections, especially texts’ comments on "real" issues about suicide, art, and media. Indeed, as is perhaps already clear, the distinctions in these terms are inherently fluid. For instance, all of the intertextual references are also extratextual: that is, Constance Ring’s reference to *Madame Bovary* is both extratextual and intertextual. Nevertheless, the term "intertextual" will specify a reference to another fictional, produced text, rather than to an extratextual historical event. It is important to make this distinction because the texts’ commentary on other texts is significant to their commentary on suicide contagion and, then, to the larger self-reflexiveness and strength of their masternarrative, which I will define in Chapter 4. Moreover, many of the intratextual references are only liminally intratextual: that is, while, within the boundaries of the text proper of *The Power of Sympathy*, Ophelia’s story appears to be an intratextual one, biographical information reveals it to be the extratextual story of the historical Frances Apthorp. Indeed, intratextual events and
references are in the perpetually liminal position of becoming extratextual or intertextual ones: that is, at any moment, newfound historical material might reveal that intratextual references are actually inter- or extratextual ones. Because the three textualities inform each other in a variety of often covert ways that are best understood within the larger progression of the texts, this survey is arranged according to "clusters" of texts that, through their negotiations of the inter-, intra-, and extratextual, illustrate the undulations, progressions, and, most importantly, some of the coherences of the collective body of female suicide narratives.

While this dissertation is inspired and compelled by concerns with the similarities among these texts—similarities that remain strong into the 1990s—the texts also change; and therein lies the oxymoron of speaking about the progression of the female suicide "tradition." But in the same way that contagious conditions manifest themselves in similar, but also changing or mutating ways, female suicide texts also undergo changes—often linear, temporally-located changes that clearly occur within and emerge from the larger tradition of female suicide narratives. And, while most of the female suicide texts in this corpus maintain a general allegiance to the female suicide tradition, the texts' undulations and recursivity finally lead to the emergence of some explosive renegade texts, texts that critique the very tradition from which they have emerged. However, even as—concurrent with suicidologists' sustained attention to the role of art and media in promoting suicide contagion—some texts more explicitly explore the interrelationship of art and reality in regards to suicide, as they level increasingly pointed critiques at the role of art and media in promoting suicide, and as they begin to deconstruct the more established traditions in female suicide narratives, other "new" texts continue to conform to many of the tradition's oldest trends. So, while in some ways the tradition appears to be on the cusp of substantial changes, it is too early to tell if the newer texts that challenge much of the tradition's past will make lasting changes on the future of female suicide narratives. Indeed, even though the texts produced in the past decade introduce sweeping reconfigurations to the fictional female suicide narrative tradition, as this and later chapters show, many of the changing elements of the
female suicide tradition are characterized by a recursivity that maintains their presence in the tradition and that maintains, of course, the tradition itself.

Although this chapter delineates some undulations of the last two hundred years through readings of several texts, lest the general configuration of the progression be obscured by particular readings, let me broadly describe the configuration here. The earliest texts of this corpus—including The Sorrows of Young Werther (1774; hereafter, Werther), The Power of Sympathy (1789), The Blithedale Romance (1852), Madame Bovary (1856), and Anna Karenina (1876)—regularly make covert and overt intertextual references to suicide texts and, aside from these, rarely make intratextual references to suicide—that is, until the protagonists' suicides are actually narrated. However, these texts are distinguished from later texts primarily by their covert, but strong, reliance on the extratextual.

While the emphasis on the extratextual ends with Anna Karenina's covert use of extratextuality in 1876, the extratextual emerges briefly in some later texts. For instance, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1978 German film, The Marriage of Maria Braun, makes covert, implied extratextual references to Eva Braun's 1945 suicide: like Eva, Maria's affair was kept relatively secret, both women were Germans involved with German soldiers, and both women burned—Eva with Hitler, and Maria near to her husband and her lover, but not with them. But the extratextual usually returns only through its association with the explicitly intertextual references to historical texts— as it does with Paul Schrader's 1985 film, Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters, which uses the extratextual and the intertextual to foreground its main theme, the interrelationship of Yukio Mishima's life and fiction; with Michael Lehman's 1989 film, Heathers, which makes references to the historical musical group Big Fun; and with Ridley Scott's 1991 film, Thelma and Louise, which uses the historical song, "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan," written by Shel Silverstein and performed by Marianne Faithful in 1979.

The nineteenth-century texts also, however, frequently explore the role of art in constructing character—albeit with much less overtness than contemporary texts--
and, in this more muted exploration, the nineteenth-century texts also make regular, explicit intertextual references to each other. However, through the nineteenth century and the first three quarters of the twentieth century, female suicide texts gradually moved away from their implicit extratextual and their explicit inter- and intratextual references to suicide and art and became increasingly marked and unified by strong, but covert intertextual similarities to other suicide texts. While early texts such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856), Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1876), and Amalie Skram's *Constance Ring* (1885) are unified by some covert similarities, implied intertextuality continues to gain prominence until it becomes the primary but covert textual dynamic in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), Doris Lessing's "To Room 19" (1963), and Silverstein's "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan" (1979).

*Thelma and Louise* continues to make substantial implicit connections to earlier texts, but this 1991 film follows the 1985 lead of Robert Stone's *Children of Light* and Schrader's *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* and helps re-root the explicitly intertextual tradition through its use of "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan." As such, *Thelma and Louise* is a transitional text between the heyday of implied intertextuality and the re-emergence of the explicit intertextuality that texts, beginning in 1985, made essential to their increasingly extended and blatant problemization of suicide and art. Indeed, until 1985, even though some texts make intertextual references to other suicide texts, suicide narratives rarely make the issue of suicide an explicit intratextual concern, one that is threaded into the main diegesis. While earlier texts work toward and end in suicide, which is, of course, intratextual, only more recent texts make suicide an explicitly informing issue throughout the text.

Furthermore, this more explicit intratextual attention to the issue of suicide is accompanied by more extended, explicit intertextual references to suicide texts. In 1985, with Schrader's *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* (hereafter, *Mishima*) and Stone's *Children of Light*, suicide texts continue to make some implied intertextual
references. But they re-focus on the explicitly intertextual—and, with this refocusing, they advance, albeit with far more adamancy and judgment, the exploration of the interrelationship of art and life that begun in earlier texts. But, rather than more marginally addressing factors that promote suicide, loss of virtue, and so on, more recent texts confront with full force art's and the media's implication in these issues.

Further, as contemporary texts make explicit intertextuality their primary concern and devote unprecedented, rigorous attention to the role of media and art in constructing character and promoting suicide, they abandon the finesse of implied intertextual references—references which, if present, might have covertly linked them with the very texts they aim to critique and from which they finally diverge. Contemporary texts continue the various textual trends: they eliminate implied intertextual references, and they minimize extratextual ones (using only extratextual references that are explicitly intertextual), but they make intratextual concerns with suicide primary ones. Finally, *Heathers* in 1989 and *The Virgin Suicides* in 1993 abandon many of the macro- and micro- elements of the female suicide tradition such that they begin to deconstruct the tradition: while *Heathers* is advertised as if it is a female suicide narrative, there are no actual female suicides in it, and yet there are multiple female suicides in *The Virgin Suicides*. Concurrent with suicidologists' epistemological advances regarding art, media, and suicide contagion, these fictional narratives explicitly address these same issues and scathingly critique the role of art in suicide. That is, newer texts continue the critique that begins indirectly two centuries earlier—in texts that implicitly and explicitly attend to role of art and narrative in constructing character, but that, unlike resistant, contemporary texts, nevertheless blindly honor, succumb to, and fuel the many narrative impetuses that unproblematically support female suicide.

In important ways, the developments of these tri-textual relations reflect concurrent considerations in art and sociology. It appears that the general shift in female suicide narratives from the extra-, to the inter-, the intra-, and then, most recently, back to the explicitly intertextual is also paralleled by historical shifts involving debates about fiction's potential danger and usefulness, as well as by the
developing sociological interest in contagion. The earlier novels—such as *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), *Madame Bovary* (1856), and *Anna Karenina* (1876)—are characterized by their extratextual references, and they regularly comment on. question, or reply to more historically recent concerns, lasting through the 1840s. about fiction's potentially dangerous didactic power to affect reality, especially the realities of informative and vulnerable female novel readers. However, as texts became less apologetic for themselves, whether or not they contended with social issues, they also became less or not at all extra- and intertextual, but primarily intratextual, such as we see in *The Awakening* (1899), Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905), Yukio Mishima's "Patriotism" (1960), Doris Lessing's "To Room 19" (1963), and Silverstein's "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan" (1979). Perhaps this trend is at least partly reminiscent of Realism's effort to facilitate a sense of immediacy in artistic representations and of the "art for art's sake movement." One wonders if, given the possibility of contagion, suicide texts that lack self-referentiality in relation to suicide and culture become, ironically, more "dangerous" in regard to contagion. In any case, with the emergence of modernism and post modernism—especially post modernism's attention to structuralism and parody—and with the developing sociological concerns with contagion, suicide texts became less extratextual and returned, first, in the 1980s, to blatantly explicit intertextual concerns with *Children of Light* and *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters*, and then to more parodie, reflexive efforts directed toward larger social commentary in *Heathers* and *The Virgin Suicides*.

In these ways, then, the tri-textual trends in female suicide narratives at least partly reflect their societies' contemporaneous concerns. By explicating female suicide narratives in relation to their changing attentions to the inter-, intra-, and extratextual, we can see how they, as fictions, explicitly and implicitly relate to and comment upon the real contexts in which they occur—which, as will become clear in later chapters, also informs how we talk about their reliability and liability as texts, especially in regard to the messages they purvey through their thematic
interpretations of art, suicide, female suicide, and the media. Perhaps most importantly, the changes in the female suicide narrative tradition also illuminate the stamina, influence, and importance of the tradition's consistencies and of several mutually-informing elements of narrative that depend upon the texts' collective presence and powers—that is, of what I will define more fully in Chapter 4 as the female suicide master-narrative. Indeed, the master-narrative's foundation is visibly set in its texts' dynamic, but mutually-informing tri-textual changes.

The Extratextual Century: 1774-1877

Margaret Higonnet says: "In order to limit the intrinsic ambiguity of the act [of women's suicide], many suicides are doubled by explanatory texts," and cites as an example Cato reading Plato's *Phaedrus* (69 1986). However, while female suicide narratives of the late eighteenth century and most of the nineteenth century make a variety of explicit and implicit intertextual references, one of their most distinguishing characteristics is their incorporation of extratextual events into the intratextual. Beginning with *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774, 1787) and including William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), *Madame Bovary* (1856), and *Anna Karenina* (1875-76), the texts of this cluster merge the extratextual into fictional narrative, and, in the process, often explicitly contend with questions about the relationship between art, especially novels, and reality.

Although my focus is female suicide narratives, male suicide narratives sometimes illuminate—even if by setting in relief, as we will see in Chapter 5—the implications and dynamics of female suicide. Indeed, two of the most compelling examples of the merging of the inter-, intra-, and the extratextual in relation to suicide occur in male suicide texts: *Mishima* and *Werther*. In *Werther*, Goethe briefly foregrounds the role of the intertextual because Werther dies with a copy of *Emilia Galotti* open on the desk beside him, which mirrors the intertextual pre-history of the novel—that is, Carl Wilhelm Jerusalem's historical suicide near a copy
of *Emilia Galotti*. Similarly, only the comparatively few people who knew the circumstances of Jerusalem's suicide would recognize Goethe's covert incorporation of the extratextual into the novel's plot. Furthermore, while Jerusalem's suicide is one weave of the diachronic, cross-generational threads of *Werther*, the novel's most dramatic and notorious extratextual events occurred after its publication—in the "countless others" who committed suicide with the *Werther* text at their sides (Lange xi; also see Rose 147, Mann 3.)

**The Power of Sympathy**


The last of the novel's suicides is the only one that occurs in the diegetic—or primary—narrative and the only one that refers to the intertextual. After Harriot and Harrington, engaged to be married, discover that they are—as a result of their father's adultery—half-siblings, Harriot dies of grief, and Harrington kills himself with a pistol to be with her. In the last pages of the novel and in his penultimate letter, Harrington writes:

Tomorrow I go—There is nothing here that can calm the tumult of my soul. . . I fly from the face of day—I fly from books—Books that could always cheer me in a melancholy moment, are now terrifying—They recall scenes to my recollection that are past—pleasant scenes that I am never more to enjoy. They present pictures of futurity—of gloomy futurity—I just opened a book, and these are the words that I read:—"The time of my fading is near, and the blast that shall scatter my leaves. Tomorrow shall the traveller come, he that saw me in my beauty shall come; his eyes will search the field, but they will not find me." These words pierce me to the quick—they are a dismal prospect of my approaching fate. . . . Farwel! [sic] (111)

The book—found beside Harrington's corpse—is *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Thus, in addition to compelling real-life copycat suicides, sixteen years after
Werther's publication. Brown produces his own Werther imitator in Harrington—who, of course, is unknowingly imitating Jerusalem, who inspired Goethe to write Werther. Thus, Werther illustrates the extensive, dynamic inter- and extratextual imitative force possible through suicide narratives: intertextually in Harrington's fictional imitation of Werther's fictional actions, and extratextually in Harrington's fictional imitation of Jerusalem and of people who, after reading Werther, committed suicide with the text by their corpses. Long before sociologists devoted substantial attention to it, Harrington's imitation of another fictional character and of the acts of several real people who also imitated Werther suggests the fictional world's awareness of its own potential for suicide modeling, both within that fictional world and without it.

The other two suicides in The Power of Sympathy occur on the hypodiegetic level: they are not woven into its plot proper, but are embedded, as hypodiegetic narratives, within the primary or diegetic narrative and serve as examples and thematic aids to its lessons, especially those about women's virtue. One of the hypodiegetic suicides spans six pages, wherein a "ruffian" "betrays [Fidelia] to a carriage" and carries her off days before her intended marriage, after which her fiancé drowns himself, leaving Fidelia to walk perpetually the fields, a "poor maniak [sic]" mumbling to herself (48-53). The other hypodiegetic suicide is the story of Ophelia: in three pages, we are told of Ophelia's seduction, impregnation, and abandonment by her sister's new husband. The sisters' father insists on confronting the anonymous culprit, but on the day of the intended meeting, their mother finds Ophelia dying of self-poisoning.

Brown's onomastics indicate that this is, of course, an intertextual reference to the pre-text of Hamlet's Ophelia, who drowns herself and who is prominently figured in nineteenth-century art (and, I shall discuss, Ophelia also emerges as a pre-textual model for Zenobia in The Blithedale Romance). In any case, both of these hypodiegetic suicides reiterate the novel's diegetic warnings to women about the importance and unreliability of virtue, and they reflect on the primary characters'
beliefs, behaviors, and fates regarding virtue. That is, Ophelia’s fate shows the importance of virtue: Ophelia has unrealistic expectations that enable her brother-in-law to "[triumph] over her innocence and virtue" (30), and she is punished for her own lack of virtue. And William’s fate shows—perhaps with Fidelia’s, since it is unclear whether or not she willingly goes with the "ruffian"—that virtue is not necessarily rewarded.

To magnify his text’s persuasive powers, Brown enlists the extratextual throughout his novel to support the beliefs promulgated by his novel. The title—The Power of Sympathy: Or, The Triumph of Nature, Founded in Truth—immediately suggests that Brown will use the extratextual in this "fiction," and the novel’s epistolary form suggests a rhetorical effort to support the title’s promise. And, indeed, Brown founds his truth in the extratextual—that is, in the real—with an explicitness that is unprecedented and unparalleled in my texts, by incorporating two shame-ridden, local historical events into the novel. His less explicit use of the extratextual is the historical basis for Ophelia, whose story "paralleled with embarrassing closeness" the lives of Frances Apthorp and her brother-in-law, Perez Morton. Fewer than five months before the novel was published, Apthorp—like Ophelia—committed suicide by poisoning. Brown, a neighbor of the Apthorps and Mortons, was "thoroughly familiar with the distressing details of their tragedy" (H. Brown xii-xiii) and modeled Ophelia after Frances Apthorp. And Brown didn’t stop at the linguistic appropriation of Apthorp’s death. When Ophelia was found by her mother, she reportedly "clasped her mother’s hand, and raising her eyes to heaven, was only heard to articulate 'Let My Crime Be Forgotten With My Name.--O Fatal! Fatal Poison!'" (36-39). Furthermore, the novel’s first volume featured a frontispiece woodcut of a woman sprawled on the floor, her face and body twisted in pain, entitled "The Story of Ophelia" and encaptioned "O fatal! Fatal Poison!" (H. Brown xii).

Although the first death in the novel—Elizabeth Whitman’s—is not a suicide, it is another fitting example of Brown’s interpolation of the extratextual into the intratextual, a rhetorical strategy that characterizes many of the century’s female
suicide narratives. It is a second-level hypodiegetic narrative, the intrusive, explicitly intratextual five-page long footnote of the true story of Elizabeth Whitman. "a cause célèbre which had been wept over and discussed up and down the Connecticut Valley in 1788" (H. Brown xii-xiii). Whitman's lover impregnated and abandoned her, and a second man, after promising to marry her, didn't--but did abscond with her entire fortune, after which Whitman, alone, went to Salem, delivered her baby in a hotel room, and two weeks later died of puerperal fever.

The footnote begins:

This young lady was of a reputable family in Connecticut. In her youth she was admired for beauty and good sense. She was a great reader of novels and romances, and having imbibed her ideas of the character of men, from those fallacious sources, became vain and coquettish, and rejected several offers of marriage, in expectation of receiving one more agreeable to her fanciful idea. Disappointed in her Fairy hope, and finding her train of admirers less solicitous for the honour of her hand, in proportion as the roses of youth decayed, she was the more easily persuaded to relinquish that stability which is the honour and the happiness of the sex. (17)

As Herbert Brown notes, "Both affairs contained many of the precious ingredients of... heroines of excessive sensibility, captivating libertines, tearful penitence, and lingering deaths," and, "since they were 'Founded in Truth,' both could disarm the prejudices against novel reading" and "expose the fatal consequences of seduction" (xii-xiii). That is, Brown had to contend with the anti-fiction biases of conduct books and the clergy, which may have compelled his striking effort to present the novel as "real." In regards to suicide contagion, this may have two competing implications. First, through its association with "fact," Brown's text might have invited modeling. However, later, when anti-fiction prejudices had abided and authors of female suicide narratives no longer attempted to present them as "fact," these texts also neglected to address the "factual" threat of contagion--and thereby might have become more dangerous than the earlier texts that, being written in an atmosphere that assumed they were dangerous fictions, addressed those assumptions.

In any case, Brown's effort to embed the extratextual into the text is so complete that the footnote includes excerpts from Whitman's actual death-bed letter
to her baby’s father—which, of course, simultaneously invokes the intertextual with
the extratextual. The sub-hypodiegetic footnote—inserted during an extensive group
discussion in the diegetic narrative about the value of fiction and the virtue of
women—clearly augments the diegetic story of Harrington and Harriot, the
hypodiegetic stories of Ophelia and Fidelia, and all of the novel’s discourses on
female virtue and art. *The Power of Sympathy*’s characters argue that if books are
read selectively and with a keen eye for dangerous advice, they also can be useful in
enhancing women’s socialization, education, and character.

However, in the diegetic narrative, the characters also agree that books often
misrepresent the world by misleading women into thinking that the world is fair,
people more virtuous than they really are, and that their own virtue will be
rewarded. The characters also believe books promote in women an elevated,
unrealistic sense of themselves and their possibilities, which leads to
disappointments. Certainly, the views espoused in *The Power of Sympathy*
are supported by the failed romantic, fictionalized fancies of Lily Bart, Emma Bovary,
and Constance Ring, among others. But, although Whitman’s death is not a suicide,
it clearly reiterates the book’s warnings about the dangers of injudicious reading and
of women’s developing fictionalized, romantic notions of people’s virtue. These
suicides reiterate the novel’s diegetic warnings against injudicious reading by
providing Whitman as, according to Mr. Holmes, an example of a young woman
who "has imbibed her ideas of the world from desultory reading," whose trust and
whose belief in man’s virtue leads her to "disappointment and repentance" (17).

Brown’s novel also seems to be acutely aware of the extratextual presence of
its readers. That is, the extended primary narrative discussion in *The Power of
Sympathy* seems to serve as Brown’s anticipatory meta-defense of his novel: the
novel’s characters would argue that the novel in which they appear exemplifies a
doubly-useful text because Harrington’s father’s lack of virtue is punished and
because Harrington’s and Harriot’s virtue, which others assume will be rewarded, is
not. Furthermore, Brown’s unabashed use of Whitman’s story perhaps illustrates
authors’ unabashed willingness to use the extratextual in their creations.

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However, Brown’s use of the Apthorp and Whitman stories also suggests his own obliviousness to another extratextual presence, one that also impacted his novel: the historical women’s families. While the footnote clearly served Brown and his texts, it offended the Apthorps and the Mortons, both prominent Boston families. Apparently Brown "cooperated with his publishers in withdrawing The Power of Sympathy from the market as soon as he learned of the suffering his volume was causing his neighbors" (H. Brown xii-xiii)—which, of course, utterly defeated his novel’s main efforts to teach anything about virtue. Brown clearly did not want to let Apthorp’s "crime be forgotten with [her] name" (39): his intratextual appropriation of Apthorp and Whitman immortalized their names and their crimes, even though The Power of Sympathy was withdrawn from the market. Indeed, Whitman’s life, or, as H. Brown says,"career," became the basis of Hannah Webster Foster’s novel The Coquette: Or, the History of Eliza Wharton (1828), which H. Brown calls "easily the most memorable of the fiction written by American women in the eighteenth century" (xiii n. 3).

While Goethe’s use of Jerusalem’s life in Werther set a covert precedent for the incorporation of extratextual suicides into fictional texts, Brown’s novel overtly establishes precedence and momentum for a rhetorical trend that is repeated throughout the century in female suicide narratives--the appropriation of extratextual stories of women’s lives and deaths and their interpolation into "fictional" narratives. Again, long before sociologists had attached numbers and theories to the real phenomenon of suicide modeling, it emerged as a rhetorical force in fictional and real lives: in characters’ imitations of real people and in their imitations of other fictional characters, and in the texts’ influence on real people. The larger rhetorical irony of these narratives is that, even though these "fictional" narratives prolifically "cite" instances of real female lives and suicides, they do so from the minority of real suicide that is committed by women; thus, the narratives collectively construct skewed visions of female suicide and help purvey the myth that women die for love (which I will discuss at length in Chapter 5).
The Blithedale Romance

The next novels in this cluster—Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856), and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1876)—also employ the three textualities to explore the role of art in constructing "reality" within the diegetic world, but they appropriate the extratextual more discreetly than *The Power of Sympathy* does. *The Blithedale Romance* does not refer to specific works of art, but Hawthorne complicates the relationship between art and "reality" at the diegetic level both intra- and extratextually. Of course, he does so intratextually, through Westervelt's capitalist stage-use of Priscilla as the "Veiled Lady" and by continually portraying Zenobia as something to be gazed at in awe, even as a piece of art. Coverdale notes that, in contrast to the simple attire and the "one superb flower" Zenobia wears at Blithedale farm, in town, Zenobia's hair-piece undergoes "a cold and bright transformation; it was a flower exquisitely imitated in jeweller's work, and imparting the last touch that transformed Zenobia into a work of art" (163-64). And Zenobia sees her life as art: just abandoned by Hollingsworth and Priscilla, she says to Coverdale, "You are turning this whole affair into a ballad. Pray let me hear as many stanzas as you happen to have already! . . . It is genuine tragedy, is it not?" (223). Even after Zenobia kills herself, Coverdale associates Zenobia's actions with works of art:

Zenobia, I have often thought, was not quite simple in her death. She had seen pictures, I suppose, of drowned persons, in lithe and graceful attitudes. And she deemed it well and decorous to die as so many village-maidens have, wronged in their first-love, and seeking peace in the bosom of the old, familiar stream--so familiar that they could not dread it--where, in childhood, they used to bathe their little feet. (236)

Coverdale's comments also obliquely refer to Shakespeare's Ophelia, who drowns herself in *Hamlet*, as well as to the nineteenth-century fascination with imbuing Ophelia images in its art. In *The Female Malady* (1985), Elaine Showalter reveals that Victorian England's asylum inmates were dressed by supervisors to look like Ophelia, photographed, and studied by actresses, concluding that "the figure of Ophelia eventually set the style for female insanity" (92). Barbara Gates (1988)
notes that in this situation, "art, trying to imitate life... was really imitating art" (136) and discusses the nineteenth century's embrace of artistic representations of drowned, women, often dressed like Ophelia, and Elisabeth Bronfen (1992) psychoanalytically interprets additional nineteenth-century paintings of drowned women (as well as Roy Lichenstein's 1963 Drowning Girl).

Although many things about the appearance of Zenobia's corpse and its retrieval, as discussed in Chapter 6, contrast with the nineteenth century's peaceful representations of flower-decked, drowned Ophelia-women in flowing gowns and hair, Zenobia's drowning and her representation as art clearly are intertextual references to the nineteenth century artistic compulsion for drowned women. However, while the visual and lyric representations of Ophelia-like women are not explicitly self-critical, Coverdale's speculation that Zenobia's--and other women's--behavior may have been inspired by her exposure to the nineteenth century's several representations of the drowned Ophelia betrays an inherent awareness for the possibility of fictionally-inspired contagion, and an inherent critique of it, perhaps even of the texts involved in it. Thus, Coverdale's comments, although directed at visual art, help indirectly indict fictional narrative in the promotion of suicide.

And, of course, long before Coverdale speculates that Zenobia models her suicide after artistic representations, Hawthorne provokes larger questions about extratextual modeling as readers found parallels between the Blithedale characters and the people at Brook Farm. In his preface, Hawthorne discourages such associations and calls his personages "imaginary" and "entirely fictitious" (1-2). In doing so, Hawthorne, with his romance novel, stands in some middle location between fiction and reality, as well as between representations of them that range from Brown's "tale of truth" in The Power of Sympathy to twentieth-century texts that are presented as and appear to be strictly fictitious. However, whether or not Hawthorne models Zenobia after Margaret Fuller, he, indeed, models Zenobia's death scene on an extratextual one: in July 1845 Hawthorne steered the boat that recovered the corpse of a nineteen-year-old teacher from Concord who had drowned herself. He writes "in horror" about the discoloration and rigidity of the corpse in
his journal and includes parts of his journal entry almost verbatim in the scene narrating the recovery of Zenobia's body (Kolodny xviii).

**Madame Bovary**

Like *The Power of Sympathy*, *Madame Bovary* discourses on the dangers and benefits of books, novels, and art, and Emma Bovary certainly sustains the morals taught by *The Power of Sympathy*. More than any of the characters we meet until Lu Anne, in Robert Stone's *Children of Light* (1985), Emma Bovary is constructed by books, identifying with and even living through and as characters. Emma's ego-affinity for books begins in her adolescence, when she "on the sly lent the big girls some of the novels, that she always carried in [her] pockets. . . . all about love, lovers, sweethearts . . . heart-aches, vows, sobs, tears and kisses . . . gentlemen . . . virtuous as no one ever was" (26). Early in her marriage, Emma tries to understand what the words "bliss, passion, ecstasy, that had seemed to her so beautiful in books," meant in life (24). Dissatisfied with Charles, Emma continues to embrace "literature for the passions it excites" (28) and tries to "experience love with him," reciting "passionate rhymes" to him in the moonlit garden, singing "melancholy adagios," but finding herself "as calm after this as before" and Charles "neither more amorous, nor more moved" (31). So Emma plunges further into books, reading them during dinner, devouring them and "seeking in them imaginary satisfaction for her own desires" (41).

But Emma's "one distraction" from her dissatisfied world, of course, exacerbates her dissatisfaction with it (45). When, having "read everything," Emma finds her world "flat" (45), she begins her affair with Rodolphe. Charmed by heroines and "the lyric legion of . . . adulterous women," she becomes "an actual part of these lyrical imaginings" and fulfills with Rodolphe "the love-dream of her youth," tasting "the love . . . without remorse, without anxiety, without concern" (117). *The Power of Sympathy* warns about women's susceptibility to books' misleading messages about virtue and their ability to inspire women to have false
hopes, and Emma, as *The Power of Sympathy* warns, succumbs to fantasies inspired by her novels with "gentlemen . . . virtuous as no one ever was" (26) and imparts Rodolphe with virtues he, of course, doesn't have.

Certainly Emma's fictionalizing promotes her false hopes for Rodolphe--who then dashes her hopes on the night before their scheduled elopement. Before her affair, Charles and his mother, concerned about Emma's "Reading novels, bad books, [and] works against religion" that will lead her "far astray," try to keep her from the "poisonous trade" of books (90), but when Emma falls ill after Rodolphe's abandonment, Homais argues that books will help cure her by stimulating her imagination, tempering her devotions, and essentially coaxing her distracted mind back to reality. Likewise, the priest proposes reading to cure Emma's "excessive fervor [that] might lead to heresy, to extravagance." But, the bishop's bookseller sends a random selection, which Emma reads--as *The Power of Sympathy* also warns against--voraciously and injudiciously, causing Emma to be "seized with the finest Catholic melancholy ever conceived by an ethereal soul" (154-55).

And, like some of the characters from *The Power of Sympathy*, Homais says, "Of course . . . there is bad literature. . . but to condemn in a lump the most important of the fine arts seems to me a stupidity" (157), and he convinces Charles to try the virtue-teaching theater. But the theater also transports Emma to "the reading of her youth" (161), and she recognizes in it "all the intoxication and the anguish that had brought her close to death," hears in the prima donna's voice echoes of "her own conscience" and sees in "the whole fictional story . . . something of her own life" (162). Emma's reverie is interrupted by her temporary recognition of fiction's limited ability to represent life:

But no one on earth had loved her with such love . . . She knew now how small the passions were that art magnified. So, striving for detachment, Emma resolved to see in this reproduction of her sorrows a mere formal fiction for the entertainment of the eye. (162-63)

But "All her attempts at critical detachment were swept away," and Emma, "drawn to the man . . . tried to imagine his life. . . . If only they had met! . . . A mad idea took possession of her: he was looking at her right now!" (163). At the moment she
recognizes in the characters what she believes "brought her close to death" after Rodolphe. she--in a foreshadowing of her death-by-poison--falls "back in her armchair" with cardiac dysrhythmias that choke her (163).

But Emma still wants romance, and she and Léon bond through their "constant exchange of books and of romances" (70-71), both of them having discovered in books vague ideas and dim images that are "the fullest expression" of their own sentiments (59). When they become lovers, she becomes "the mistress of all the novels, the heroine of all the dramas, the vague 'she' of all the volumes of verse" (192). But occasionally Emma still recognizes the gap between her life and the lives of the characters she reads: "How she envied her first undefinable sentiments of love which she had tried to construct from the books she read" (206). And yet books increasingly grip Emma's reality: she begins sleeping apart from Charles so she can read all night "lurid novels where there would be scenes of orgies, violence, and bloodshed" (210); and when she writes to Léon, she imagines "a phantom fashioned out of... her favorite books" until "he became so real, so tangible that her heart beat wildly in awe and admiration, though unable to see him distinctly, for, like a god, he was hidden beneath the abundance of his attributes" (211-12).

While Brown's text tries to allay fears about fiction and to promote its didactic usefulness if it is used cautiously, Madame Bovary shows the dangers of fiction, especially when particularly indiscriminate readers blur the distinctions between reality and fiction (which is not to suggest that only indiscriminate readers are subject to modeling). Emma does everything that The Power of Sympathy warns against: she reads without discretion, and she believes what she reads. While at first Emma simply recognizes some of her own dreams and hopes and passion in books, she begins to look for self-definition, and, in the process, she begins to live as if there are no repercussions to her emotional and financial abandon. While Emma does not identify with any one particular character in her books and operas, she responds to the collective, composite female lover--who "faints in lonely pavilions" (26), and who often commits suicide, and, finally, her "enthusiastic veneration for

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illustrious or unhappy" fictional women makes her both illustrious and unhappy (26). And she, indeed, becomes "the mistress of all the novels, the heroine of all the dramas, the vague 'she' of all the volumes of verse" (192).

Furthermore, Emma not only lives as a composite fictional character herself and as a character who lives through other fictional characters, she is also inspired by and inspires fictional, intertextual modelling: after reading Madame Bovary, Dostoevsky's Nastasia Filippovna in The Idiot commits what N. N. Schneidman calls "an essentially suicidal act" (1984 50-51). And Emma may have been modeled after a real women. René Dumesnil says that, when asked for the identity of the "real" Madame Bovary," Flaubert said "I am Madame Bovary!" This "mistress of all the novels" is at least intertextual within Flaubert's own work: in Flaubert's 1837 manuscript "Philosophical Tale: Passion and Virtue," Mazza, after giving herself "body and soul" to and then being dismissed by Ernest, commits suicide by poisoning (298-99).

While Dumesnil considers Flaubert the "only authentic 'source'" of the novel, de Man reported in 1965 that it is well known that Flaubert used "life-models" in Madame Bovary and that after considerable attention, French scholars clearly established that Flaubert used as a model a certain Deslauriers, a doctor whose wife Delphine Couturier committed suicide by poison and who lived in a Norman town called Ry that has much in common with Yonville l'Abbaye. But many other sources have been proposed, and the entire question is far from being clearly settled. (de Man x-xi)

Dumesnil dismisses the biographical reports that Emma is Delphine Couturiers as dubious and disputed and adds that such reports offer only "anecdotal interest" (299). De Man--who wavers in his view of Delphine as Emma's model--finally also questions "the exegetic value of such investigations" (de Man x-xi).

By now, of course, feminist theorists have explored the implications of appropriating women's voices and lives, of textual appropriation, commodification, and ownership of others' stories--the political and psycho-social issues of writing lives and, in this case, deaths. Such investigations help unravel the relationship between fiction and reality--and the power-plays that therein occur--which seems
particularly interesting and important when dealing with the potential for suicide contagion. (Indeed, I wonder which books Delphine Couturier might have read.) Finally, it is ironic that Dumesnil describes *Madame Bovary* as a novel compiled by and representative of "reality" and that de Man characterizes Emma as so credible that "One has to remind oneself that [she] is fiction and not an actual historical person" (vii)—that Dumesnil and de Mann be so fascinated by the construct of Emma, and yet so dismissive of the potential biographical source of her construct. Their priorities seem to me indicative of two conflicting, but perhaps self-serving views: of both the dismissal and glamorization of female suicide. That is, Dumesnil's and de Man's comments seem to embrace fictional suicide, but discard real female suicide and the innuendoes of the reciprocal relationship between literature and life.

*Anna Karenina*

In contrast to Emma, who is both a fictional character arguably modeled after a particular woman and a character constructed by her own composite conception of fictional women, Anna Karenina is indisputably based on a particular woman. Anna Stepanovna was the common-law-wife of one of Tolstoy's neighbors, A. N. Bibikov, who was, like Vronsky, a landed proprietor (Gibian 745 n. 8). On January 4, 1872, the well-dressed Anna Stepanovna arrived at the railway in Krapivenski Uyezd, "went up the to the rails, and, when freight train no. 7 was passing, she made the sign of the cross and threw herself on the rails under the train, which cut her in two" (Gibian 745; News item in Tulskie Gubernskii Vedomosti, qtd. from the Tula Province News). Tolstoy observed Anna's autopsy, and his wife said "the suicide gave Tolstoy the idea for the ending of the novel, as well as for the name of the heroine, Anna" (Gibian 745 n. 8 cites Gusev). Like Anna Stepanovna, the well-dressed Anna Karenina also had been intimate with, but not officially married to, a landed proprietor and had also "crossed herself" just before throwing her self in front of a train and being nearly severed in two (695).
And yet, while the novel's end is admittedly modeled after a real woman's suicide, when someone "ventured the opinion that Tolstoy had been too hard on [Anna]" by letting her be run over by a train, Tolstoy allegedly said, "my heroes and heroines are apt to behave quite differently from what I could wish them to do!" (xiii). In yet another example of a heroine's suicide being narrated against the suicide of a real woman, how interesting that Anna Karenina "wanted" to do almost exactly what Anna Stepanovna Pirogovna did the year before Tolstoy began *Anna Karenina*. As another "fictional" woman imitates the death of a real one—or, as authors continue to co-opt the deaths of real women—these female suicide narratives establish a reverse imitative dynamic that lends credence to the notion and acceptability of recurring "accounts" or stories of women's suicide in fiction: that is, while parts of the individual fictions are based on real events, while vignettes of the narratives may be true, the individual narratives and their collective are not true—as will become clearer throughout this dissertation. Furthermore, as individual fictional narratives gain credence by appropriating the deaths of real women, the collective disproportion of fictional female suicide narratives also acquires a kind of mass credence that actually conflates reality by presenting distorted proportions of female suicide in the collective of suicide narratives.

Moreover, by modeling Karenina after Stepanovna, Tolstoy diminishes even the illusion of Anna Karenina's "self-will" and individuality. Although, having been based on the suicide of Anna Stepanovna, Anna Karenina's suicide may seem more plausible, its modeled nature diminishes its sense of individuality and self-determination; and, as this project will continue to show, the female suicide protagonists' self-determination is inherently diminished by the female suicide tradition. Furthermore, Tolstoy appropriates, publicizes, and commercializes perhaps the most personal and controversial acts of Stepanovna's life—her common-law relationship and her suicide, both acts that are almost internationally granted distinctions of shame, loss, regret, and privacy—and that are usually granted some distance of respectable, sanctified privacy. Unlike Brown, Tolstoy not only commercializes Stepanovna's tragedy, he successfully, internationally publicizes and
immortalizes it, records forever the act that, because of its spiritual and social weight, several communities—familial, social, medical, religious, and legal—record conservatively. And Tolstoy—like Hawthorne, Brown, possibly Flaubert, and others—does so, of course, when Stepanovna can not respond to or retaliate against the commercialization of her death. These authors cash in on something their models can not: their own deaths.

Let us not assume these women sought notoriety, let alone fictionalized notoriety. Further, the authors selectively memorialize these real women: that is, because the texts are clearly not entirely biographical, authors must selectively mis/represent or dis/honor or mis/inform readers about the historical women’s lives. Short of providing fiction readers with full biographical accounts of these women (which might further honor or violate the sanctity of their lives), when readers read Anna Karenina’s story, where do their assumptions about Anna Stepanovna stop? In this way, the authors also write and re-write or revise the deceased models’ lives and deaths—lives and deaths that, most likely, are presented more fully in these fictions than anywhere else, and, of course, when the women cannot "correct" their own lives—which have become "fictions." Of course, fiction writers regularly co-opt historical events, but the appropriation of a suicide death seems to deliver an especially grave disservice to the historical women on whom the fictional characters’ deaths are based because the historical deaths and situations are fraught with psychosocial complications and are likely far more unique than they can ever be within the molding context of the tradition of female suicide narratives, the strength of which will emerge throughout this dissertation. Further, of course, the deceased cannot respond to or correct the authors’ appropriation and capitalization of their lives, cannot challenge the sources behind their fictionalization and behind the continued, posthumous distress placed on their reputations and "character."

Moreover, selectively representing parts of real women’s suicide stories to imbue fictional narratives with visions of reality disserves women who have or will consume these narratives, especially women who have or will imbue these "historical" but collectively-skewed representations of female suicide with the image
of truth and the power of character and social learning models. Further, while I will discuss in Chapter 5 implications about the sex-related distinctions between real and fictional suicide, let me note here that, because fictional suicide rarely involves men, it less frequently submits real men—who commit approximately seventy-five percent of all suicide—to the re-writing, re-configuring, and re-judging entailed in writing and reading these women's "fictions."

This is not to assume that Tolstoy was not troubled by Stepanovna's death. In contrast to most suicide texts, Tolstoy addresses the issue of suicide in *Anna Karenina* more than any of the non-contemporary texts in my corpus. Characters in both of *Anna Karenina*’s parallel plots consider suicide, and Tolstoy is clearly aware of the potential for fictionally-inspired suicide contagion: Vronsky’s mother is displeased about Anna’s and Vronsky’s affair because she hears it is "a desperate Werther-like passion which might lead [Vronsky] into doing something foolish" (159). Countess Vronsky’s thoughts are given no explanation or contextualization in the narrative, suggesting that Mrs. Vronsky, her interlocutors, and Tolstoy’s audience are familiar with Werther’s suicide, the imitative history surrounding it, and the general phenomenon of suicide imitation.

But Tolstoy uses this reference to prime us not for a male suicide, but for Anna’s—for a suicide that must surprise us, but also be credible and consistent within Anna’s character and experience. And, indeed, Tolstoy includes in Anna’s experience that which, compounded by Countess Vronsky’s comment, suggests that Anna may participate in suicide modeling. When Anna and Vronsky are at the train station early in the novel, a man is run over by a train. Anna hears someone in the crowd say the man threw "himself under" the train (59), another that it would be a "very easy death, instantaneous," and she says, "It is a bad omen" (60). And, indeed, her memory of this event seems to spur her toward her own ambivalent suicide. Just before she commits suicide, she thinks "she need only drink the whole phial [of opium] in order to die, it seemed to her so easy and simple," but then she thinks, "No--anything, only to live!" (680). Shortly thereafter this, she "remembers the man who had been run over the day she first met Vronsky, she realized what she
had to do," and, within seconds, she throws herself in front of a train, and immediately regrets doing so (694).

Although Tolstoy does not cite titles in Anna's reading list and we do not know if she reads Werther, Anna eventually becomes an avid reader who is deeply affected by literature. But, at first, Anna finds reading an unpleasant occupational distraction from her own life, one to which she resorts only when she perceives no other options:

it was unpleasant to read, that is to say, to follow the reflection of other people's lives. She was too eager to live herself. When she read how the heroine of the novel nursed a sick man, she wanted to move about the sickroom with noiseless footsteps. . . . But there was nothing to be done, so she forced herself to read. (92)

Anna's relationship to reading is not addressed for the next several hundred pages of the novel--when she remains occupied by society, family, and Vronsky. But when Anna is increasingly isolated in Europe and dissatisfied with her life--like Emma--she turns to books of all kinds, reading "a great deal--both novels and such serious books as were in fashion" (582), "all the books that were praised in the foreign newspapers and magazines" with serious attention. Anna studies technical books about Vronsky's interests and becomes so knowledgeable that he consults with her, at first doubting, but then "astounded at her knowledge and memory" (582).

While Anna reads selectively and to bide her time during her hiatus from her preferred society, she also reads voraciously, reassuring Vronsky that she will not be bored because she has just received "a box of books from Gautier's" (584). As Vronsky spends increasing amounts of time away from Anna, she "filled her time" and distracts herself from her fear of losing Vronsky by walking, talking, "and above all reading, reading one book after another" (603). While Emma finds an invigorating life substitute in reading, Anna classifies reading as an analgesic:

I do not live, but only wait for a solution which is deferred and still deferred. Again no answer [to my request for a divorce]! . . . I can't do anything, begin anything, change anything! I restrain myself, wait, invent occupations for myself--the English family, writing, reading, but all that is only deception, it is all a kind of morphia. (637)
In contrast to Emma, who is unaware of the negative implications of her relationship to reading, Anna—at least at this point—is fully aware that novels are a secondary, dissatisfying substitute filler for the life she fully intends to lead, rather than a reflection of the kind of life she wishes she could. And while, unlike Emma, Anna never reads herself into the novels, like Emma, the "mistress of all the novels," Anna is also described as a novel's composite heroine: Betsy says, "You must love [Lisa Merkalova]: . . . . She said that you are a real heroine for a novel, and that were she a man she would have committed a thousand follies for your sake" (271).

While we know very little about the particular texts Anna reads and nothing about the heroine to which Lisa refers—indeed, she seems to refer to a composite heroine—it is very possible that Anna reads novels and watches operas that include female suicide, especially since operas regularly feature female suicide. Her society is familiar with Werther, and, given that she reads English novels, and French novels, poetry and history, and that she purchases books from a French bookstore, it is also possible that Anna could have read *Madame Bovary*.

Further, Tolstoy draws implicit parallels between the *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary* that suggest a covert intertextuality between the texts and their heroines. Anna and Emma both are haunted by peasants in their waking lives, sleeping nightmares, and deaths. When Emma rides home after visiting Léon, she sees from her carriage a

wretched creature on the hillside, who would wander about with his stick right in the midst of the carriages. A mass of rags covered his shoulders, and an old staved-in beaver hat . . . hid his face; but when he took it off he revealed two gaping bloody orbits in the place of eyelids. (193)

His "flesh hung in strips," and when he speaks, he throws "back his head with an idiotic laugh." The peasant, whom Emma saw regularly, would walk behind the carriage singing, "Often the warmth of a summer day/Makes a young girl dream her life away," sometimes hanging onto the back of the moving coach, pressing his face into the window. His voice "would grow sharp" and linger "into the night like an inarticulate lament of some vague despair. . . . [filling] Emma with dread. It went to the very depths of her soul" until Hivert would "lash out savagely at the blind man
with his whip" and wounding him, cause him to "fall back into the mud with a shriek" (193). After the passengers would fall asleep, Emma would sit "with death in her soul" (194). The regular nightly haunting of Emma by this blind peasant carrying a stick and speaking inarticulate laments in French becomes for Emma a kind of nightmare, one that fills her soul "with death." And, immediately before Emma dies, she cries, "The blind man!" and begins "to laugh, an atrocious, frantic, desperate laugh, thinking she saw the hideous face of the poor wretch loom out of the eternal darkness like a menace. The wind blew very hard that day/It blew her petticoat away" (238). Emma's deathbed memory of the rhyme is certainly meant to invoke the "wretched creature" who one day, when following Emma's carriage, sang "Often the warmth of a summer day/Makes a young girl dream her heart away" (193).

And Tolstoy seems to incorporate the same kind of figure into Anna Karenina as a way of covertly suggesting that Anna's life, nightmares, and death are informed by Emma's. Anna has regular visitations by a peasant which take the form of actual nightmares and about which we first learn on the night before her death, when she awakens from a "terrible nightmare," one that "had come to her several times even before her union with Vronsky." Of course, by withholding this information from readers until just before Anna's death, Tolstoy delays our seeing Anna's association with Emma—which helps maintain the surprise effect of Anna's suicide. However, the figure in Anna's nightmares remarkably resembles the peasant that haunts Emma. Anna dreams of an old man with a tangled beard [who is] leaning over some iron and doing something, while muttering senseless words in French; and as always in that nightmare (this is what made it terrible) she felt this peasant was paying no attention to her but was doing something dreadful to her with the iron. And she awoke in a cold perspiration. (emphasis added 680)

On the way to see Dolly, Anna's thoughts further associate her with Emma's experience with and focalizations about the blind peasant: "These horses, this carriage, how horrid it is of me to be in this carriage" (685). The text even more closely conjoins Anna and Emma when Anna, sitting on the train sees outside her
window, like Emma sees outside her carriage window, a "grimy, misshaped peasant in a cap from under which his touzled hair struck out, [pass] that window, stooping over the carriage wheels" (685). Anna thinks, with horror revealing itself on her face, "There is something familiar about that misshaped peasant," and, "remembering her dream she went to the opposite door, trembling with fright" (692).

It seems quite likely that Anna is thinking of two peasants, the one she sees in her life, who then reminds her of the one in Madame Bovary. And, indeed, in the same way that Emma thinks of the peasant just before she dies, seconds before Anna’s death, the intertextual peasant and the metaphor of reading are invoked simultaneously, potentiating the covert intertextual association between these texts:

A little peasant muttering something was working at the rails. The candle by the light of which she had been reading that book filled with anxieties, deceptions, grief, and evil, flared up with a brighter light than before, lit up for her all that had before been dark, flickered, began to grow dim, and went out for ever. (695)

Tolstoy metaphorically describes Anna’s last moment in relation to reading, and, by invoking images and experiences shared by Emma, including just before the deaths of both characters, Anna Karenina implicitly indicts reading’s influence on Anna’s life and death—and covertly, but strongly suggests that Anna saw in her life—and death—similarities to Emma’s "fictional" life and death, that Anna’s character, life, and death may have been influenced in several ways by Madame Bovary.

At the same time, the passage suggests that Anna thinks her interpretation of her life is wrong, her fear about Vronsky exaggerated, perhaps even wrong, and that her perceptions of reality have been skewed by misperceptions founded in fictions. While Anna’s stressors are indeed real, she is gripped by her sense of uselessness, interrelational distress, and her fear of abandonment. And while Tolstoy makes Vronsky suspect enough for us to understand Anna’s fear (which I discuss in Chapter 5), the passage suggests that Anna’s jealousy and fear may also be exaggerated, constructed by fictional characters whose anxieties she transposes onto her own "real" life. Tolstoy, indeed, seems to suggest—intentionally or not—Anna’s association with Emma, and, in the same way that one wonders if the allegedly true
figure upon which Emma was based. Delphine Couturier, read female suicide texts or even romances, one wonders if Anna Stepanovna read *Madame Bovary*.

**Hermeneutic Hodgepodge: or, the Tri-Textual Dispersion: 1885-1905**

While several nineteenth-century female suicide texts individually imitate life, "life" in these texts is conflated and distorted in two ways. First, even though this century offers some examples of male suicide for love (for instance, Werther's, Harrington's, and William's), the canonical texts continue to present a preponderance of female suicides. And the rhetorical weight of that preponderance is further increased through the texts' reliance on extratextual examples taken, of course, from the minority of real suicides that are committed by women. In this way, the texts invite a tautologically specious reasoning about female suicide: because the texts are based on real suicides, they invite the presumption that they truthfully reflect not only the context of individual suicides, but, especially with the regular incorporation of extratextual suicide into several famous texts, the more global context of suicide and of female suicide. Thus, in their wide deployment of historical events and in addition to their deployment of other kinds of thematic and character similarities that I discuss in following chapters, the texts both represent and misrepresent "real" suicide in the partly-fictional narratives. However, given the theoretically strong possibility of suicide contagion, it is also possible that these texts may, finally, come full-circle in suicide contagion as they become role models not simply for other fictional characters whose influence is suggested by the narrations of their lives, but for real women.

While the extratextual reappears in some important ways in later suicide narratives, in the latter half of the twentieth century, female suicide texts almost eliminate extratextual references to historical suicides. Although these texts follow the textual trends of modernism, perhaps this shift in suicide narratives was aided by the increased narration and publication of real suicide stories through the proliferating news media, stories that may have both sensitized and desensitized people to the issue and impact of suicide and to the fictional appropriation of one of
the most tabooed, tragic, and even criminal events of life. Perhaps authors and readers became less amenable to the appropriation of one of the most conflicted and distressing events of others' personal lives in fiction. Or, perhaps the media deployment of real suicide stories muted the sensationalism quotient of "real" suicide events and simply diminished the novelty or rhetorical impact of making extratextual allusions in novels. But, whether extratextual allusions to real suicide became passe, taboo, or some combination of both, they ceased.

Female suicide texts continue, however, to explore art's role in the heroines' lives throughout the twentieth century. The texts in the second cluster—Constance Ring (1885), The Woman Who Did (1885), The Awakening (1899), and The House of Mirth (1905)—continue to honor many of the character and structural trends of the female suicide tradition, but, as they diverge from the extratextual tradition, they also illustrate a wide range of textual uses in female suicide narratives. Like their predecessors, Constance Ring and The House of Mirth continue to make explicit intertextual references, although the latter less so. And, like their successors, The Awakening minimizes explicit intertextual references, and The Woman Who Did eliminates them. At the same time, Constance Ring and The Awakening illustrate the increasing rhetorical force of the texts' implied intertextual similarities that will emerge from and then define female suicide texts through Thelma and Louise in 1991. However, while this cluster offers a wide range of the textual hermeneutics of female suicide narratives, like all of the clusters, it also explores and illuminates how art constructs lives.

The Woman Who Did

Grant Allen's The Woman Who Did (1895) is a transitional site in the female suicide narrative tradition away from the use of the extratextual. While I found no evidence that the text is based on extratextual events, the extratextual tradition clearly informs the novel—both before and after its publication. And, in the midst of this tradition, the novel negotiates its narrator's dismissal of the potential influence
of novels and its implied author's defense of them, a defense grounded, however, in their "factuality." The negotiation of the use of the extratextual—that is, of "truth"—in fiction is apparent in Allen's dedication of the book to his wife as a "brief memorial of a less fortunate love" (v) and in his preface: "But surely no woman would ever dare to do so," said my friend. 'I knew a woman who did,' said I; 'and this is her story'" (5). *The Woman Who Did* does not appear to have been based on the life of a historical woman, but its dedication and preface suggest Allen's familiarity with the use of the extratextual earlier in the century and his apparent desire to have readers transfer some of the strength and "truthfulness" of that tradition onto his novel. Allen's rhetoric suggests that he wants to trick readers into thinking the novel is based on "truth," and that, though it is not, it warrants the merit of "truth." Allen wants readers to transfer historical "validity" from the text onto itself, although that validity appears to be lacking in the larger context of the novel.

Thus, before the novel proper begins, Allen blurs the distinctions between fiction and biography in female suicide texts by infusing his story with a fictionalized sense of the "real"—and of the sensational. Ironically, of course, the likes of Allen's misleading metacomment are absent in earlier texts that actually do rely on historical events. Nevertheless, Allen's fictional evocation of the extratextual in a novel that seems to lack actual extratextual material suggests that "real" stories, especially those about taboo subjects, are considered more didactically valid, more convincing, and perhaps less dangerous than fictional ones: that is, they are safe to tell because they are true. This reasoning may further explain the preponderance of the extratextual in the nineteenth-century, but at least in those texts, some of the reasoning's fallaciousness is palliated because the earlier texts are at least partly based in historical events. Allen's novel is not, but through his "realization of fiction," he partly continues and partly diverges from the tradition of imbuing texts with convincing, validating bits of reality.

Perhaps one reason why Allen's text is the last in this corpus to offer the real as fictional is that his rhetorical effort backfired: by blurring the distinctions between the real and the fictional, the novel was apparently convincing enough to be labelled
a "sinister threat to the American Home and American Womanhood" (Boyd vii). Author and text were lambasted across the United States, called vicious, suspicious, and disreputable by reviewers, and the novel was censored from a variety of libraries.

Presumably, Allen's biographical rhetoric exacerbated the sense of threat posed by the novel. However, the novel was considered dangerous not, apparently, because Herminia—a remarkably strong, successful, independent woman—provides an insidiously attractive model for suicide, but because she chooses—and is generally happy that she chooses—to be an unwed mother, because she, as she is introduced in a 1895 article in the New York World, "Rejects Marriage and Claims Absolute Freedom for her Sex in Everything" (Boyd vii). And, indeed the fictional Herminia is alleged to have been a model for her real-life successors:

[T]he headlines blazoned forth the adventures of no less than two English women who "went the way of 'The Woman Who Did.'" One was a clergyman's daughter and the other was locked up in an asylum, only to be released when the authorities discovered that revolt against marriage is not a proof of insanity. The connection between these cases and Grant Allen's teaching was apparent to all. . . . "Vice is presented to the unthinking reader in the garb of virtue." (emphasis added Boyd xi)

In an interesting diversion from the trend to model fictional suicide protagonists after real women, historical women—"unthinking readers"—are alleged to have modeled themselves after a protagonist. Furthermore, while the female suicide protagonists' relationship to art is less standardized than other shared characteristics in these narratives, Herminia differs from many of the protagonists because she is "intellectual" and "somewhat inartistic" (115), because she, a journalist who prefers to produce rather than consume art, writes a novel, A Woman's World.

And Allen continues to blur the boundary between the real and the fictional through his novel's treatment of Herminia's novel. In its commentary on A Woman's World, The Woman Who Did offers an apparently anticipatory meta-defense of itself in its discussions about the nature and role of art in women's
socialization—much like comments made in *The Power of Sympathy*. The narrator of *The Woman Who Did* says of Herminia’s novel:

It was seriously meant, of course, but still it was a novel. That is every woman’s naive idea of literature. It reflects the relatively larger part which the social life plays in the existence of women. If a man tells you he wants to write a book, nine times out of ten he means a treatise or argument on some subject that interest him. . . . But when a woman tells you she wants to write a book, nine times out of ten times she means to write a novel. (140)

Thus, the narrator seems to account for but also dismiss the significance of women’s "novels of education," to suggest that, while novels may reflect the importance of women’s social lives, they cannot be taken seriously. As I have noted earlier, it is ironic that this general dismissal of the epistemological potential of novels in an effort to validate them for their ability to provide nonthreatening entertainment may have granted them, given the dynamics of suicide contagion, more insidious authority as dangerous constructors of knowledge.

Perhaps this narrator’s dismissal is even more ironic because, while he dismisses the presence and usefulness of novels, the narratives themselves explicitly and implicitly problematize the easy dismissal of suicide texts—including *The Woman Who Did*. Indeed, Herminia Barton leaves the exclusive Girton school because she fear the dogma with which she is inculcated there, in the name of knowledge, because, if she "stopped there [she] could never achieve and guard [her] freedom" (26). Of course, Allen problematizes the narrator’s dismissal of novels as socialization tools when Herminia, the author of the book about which the narrator comments, commits suicide. This problematization of the novel may be more consistent with Allen’s desire to represent his own novel as "founded in truth." In either case, Allen’s negotiation of how we ought to best perceive novels—as "founded in truth" or as silly women’s forums—certainly reflects the competing concerns of the time during which he wrote *The Woman Who Did*.

Perhaps this negotiation of the novel’s position as a medium of social threat or personal leisure is also evident in Grant Allen’s and Herminia Barton’s parallel relationships as authors: Allen writes his novel "for the first time in my life wholly
and solely to satisfy my own taste and my own conscience" (1), and Herminia also lives and writes to satisfy her own conscience. Like Allen, she writes a romance of the "despairing heartcry of a soul in revolt" that "enclosed a lofty ethical purpose" (141-42). Although Herminia's novel and intentions resemble Allen's, the reviews of her novel, *A Woman's World*, are more mixed and favorable than were the reviews of *The Woman Who Did*. Herminia's novel is heralded as "A Very Advanced Woman's Novel" out of which "pure genius shines forth undeniable on every page," even though the reviewer "dislikes" "its whole tone, and still more its conclusions." However, because the novel "breathed a moral air," it is "voted dull" and shunned because "People said to themselves, 'This book seems to be a book with a teaching not thoroughly banal, like the novels-with-a-purpose after which we flock; so we'll give it a wide berth'" (144). Allen seems to invite and flatter the liberal thinking that would, if embraced, encourage the critical reception of Herminia's novel and his own. However, the review of Herminia's novel becomes an intratextual harbinger to the critical reception of Allen's novel: "The book is mistaken; the book is poisonous; the book is morbid; the book is calculated to do irremediable mischief" (143). Finally, both books are given wide berths.

**Constance Ring**

*Constance Ring*, written by Amalie Skram and published in 1885, serves the progression of the female suicide tradition in a variety of ways: it apparently eliminates extratextual references; it continues the tradition of explicit intertextual references; it reiterates several of the concerns introduced by earlier texts; and it seems to have been implicitly informed by them, especially by *Madame Bovary*, giving momentum to what will become an increasingly evident tendency in the texts to make and rely on implicit intertextual connections to each other. Anne-Lisa Amadou notes similarities in *Constance Ring* and *Madame Bovary*, whereby both heroines are in "three disastrous relationships" and both "depict a movement from marriage to adultery to death" (cited in Messick 299). While later chapters in this
dissertation focus on particular similarities in the texts’ interrelational trajectories, structures, and so forth, let me glean a variety of similarities that betray the implicit intertextuality among Anna, Emma, and Constance.

While Anna, Emma, and Constance read to occupy time, their lovers and husbands develop a variety of other interests, including professional ones. Charles and Lorck (and Lu Anne Verger’s husband, Lionel) are doctors. And Anna Karenina, Madame Bovary, and Constance Ring all feature extended narrations of community events that publicly bring the heroines, their husbands, and their lovers together in awkward, revealing situations that affect their marital relationships: Anna Karenina’s "election" gatherings and horse races, Madame Bovary’s agricultural fair, and Constance Ring’s carnival. Constance and Lorck discuss the carnival much like Anna and Karenin discuss the races, with the husbands primarily expressing concern about maintaining the appearance of propriety. Anna and Constance dismiss the concerns, and Ring and Karenin suggest more proprietous behavior for their wives. Shortly thereafter, Anna and Constance tell their husbands they no longer love them, after which Lorck says, "If you can’t control your spiteful nature, you might as well kill yourself" (261)—and Karenin also later wishes for Anna’s death. Lorck and Constance, and Emma and Léon bond while discussing literature (as do Edna and Robert, and Lu Anne and Gordon). And Meier, while ardently courting Constance, is lovers with her seamstress—Emma.

By naming Meier’s seamstress "Emma," Skram reiterates her invitation for us to recognize the intertextuality between Madame Bovary and Constance Ring, but Skram also contends with intertextuality on the character level. Constance, familiar with a variety of texts that seem to construct her vision of interrelational options, and Lorck discuss the beauty of dying for love the year before Lorck says to her, "If you can’t control your spiteful nature, you might as well kill yourself" (261). And, although she will eventually fulfill the female suicide compulsion—aptly suggested by her husband—Constance at first flouts Lorck and the female suicide narrative
tradition when she threatens, "Of course I could always run off with a lover instead of killing myself—there's that way out, too" (261).

Indeed, as Anna, Emma, and Constance show, adultery is one way out for our protagonists—one that often leads to the other way out, suicide. And Constance is both aware of and part of that tradition in several ways: like Emma and Anna, Constance reads frequently, to herself and with others, and *Constance Ring* expresses some of the same criticisms about reading expressed in *The Power of Sympathy*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Madame Bovary*. For instance, Ring complains that Constance's reading has affected their marriage, saying that Constance's lack of desire for him is "just some whim, of course. Some damned nonsense from those novels of hers. . . . It's the only possible explanation" (17); Charles Bovary and his mother believe reading has "polluted" Emma--and Emma's reading does cause her to reject Charles's conversation, his sleeping companionship, even his concern for her when he runs to her room, having heard her cry out during her reading. Like Emma and Anna, Constance is unhappily married, reads in solitude and in company, for leisure and to occupy herself.

And Constance reads three novels dealing with infidelity, two that end in suicide. While I found no information indicating that Constance is based on a historical woman, one of the novels Constance reads relies on the extratextual in its detailed representation of a historical woman's life—which does not end in suicide. Jens Peter Jacobsen's *Fru Marie Grubbe* (1876), referred to in *Constance Ring* as "the Woman from Tjele," chronicles Marie's fall from aristocracy to poverty during the course of her own several marriages and infidelities until her natural death at age seventy-five. Jacobsen studied the historical Grubbe's life (1643-1718) in great detail archivally and, drawing heavily from legal documents and proceedings, closely based his "novel" on her life, including "verbatim quotations from documents and dialogues" in the text (Jensen 46-47). While Jacobson's text is not a suicide text, it complements the extratextual propensity in the period's female suicide texts.
Furthermore, Constance is susceptible to fictional stories about dying for love. She reads Alphonse Daudet's *Fromont jeune et Risler aîné* (*Fromont the Younger and Risler the Elder*, 1874), in which Risler commits suicide after discovering that his younger brother and wife are having an affair. "Poor Risler's dreadful death"—one of the rare examples in literature of a man committing suicide "for love"—"moved [Constance] greatly. Throwing down the book, she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes and wept for a moment" (169-70). Constance, like Risler, commits suicide after discovering her spouse is having an affair and, like Risler, in the last chapter of the novel.

Constance also responds strongly to *Madame Bovary*, loaned to her by Lorck. Before completing the novel, she says, "I'm so sick of all these immoral women... They really ought to find a new subject... Promiscuous--unprincipled." Lorck and Constance argue over what it means to be an "unprincipled woman," Lorck arguing, like Herminia Barton, that women who submit to "loveless relationships" are so. Constance tells Lorck "it's as if duty and respectability don't exist in your scheme of things," and Lorck calls Constance "completely blinded by the old ideas about virtue and the like" (40). Constance does embrace "old ideas about virtue," especially fidelity. And, only after learning about Lorck's affair does she finally submit to Meier's solicitations—and then, having been betrayed, like Risler, and having betrayed, like Emma, Constance commits suicide. Thus, both suicide texts—one male, one female—compound Constance's identification with the texts' suicide characters: Constance identifies against herself when she becomes like the "immoral," unfaithful women she harshly judges, and she identifies with the betrayed Risler, then commits suicide like Risler and Emma—without doubt.

The Awakening

Both the text of *Constance Ring* and Constance's fate are intertextually-determined, thus suggesting—within fiction—the power of suicide modeling on fictional characters and the texts' contagious effects on each other. However, while
several of the protagonists consume and are influenced by art. *The Awakening*’s Edna Pontellier, who in many ways exemplifies the standard female suicide protagonist, is only intermittently engaged with literature, music, and painting. Edna reads one book in secret solitude" and with profound astonishment" (515), but, after Robert’s departure, her reading interest wanes. Furthermore, *The Awakening* lacks all extratextual references, makes only minimal and general explicit intertextual references, and overtly contends with the formative role of literary art less than most of the texts in this corpus. But, ironically, even though Edna doesn’t feel consistently moved by literature, her character is informed by it—especially, like Constance Ring’s, by *Madame Bovary*. Indeed, *The Awakening* is an important text in the female suicide narrative tradition because it is implicitly informed by preceding texts and because it is a bedrock of several of the implicit intertextual connections that unite later texts.

While I will discuss *The Awakening*’s implicit intertextuality with later texts in the next cluster, let me note some of the ways in which *The Awakening*, which makes no reference to particular suicide texts, is implicitly informed by earlier female suicide narratives at the micronarrative level. Edna’s appearance at times resembles Zenobia’s and Herminia’s. After her bath, "Her head, set off by the dainty white gown, suggest[s] a rich, rare blossom" and recalls Herminia’s white dresses and flowers and Zenobia’s floral hairpieces. Like Emma and Constance, Edna is visited by her father and is overcome when music awakens her passions and provokes strong emotional and physical reactions in her. Like Emma and Constance, the men who try to win her affection are, at the least, flirts, at the worst, duplicitous, manipulative womanizers—Emma’s Rodolphe, Constance’s Lorck and Meier, and Edna’s Robert and Alcée. Edna’s relationship with Robert resembles Emma’s with Léon and Constance’s with Lorck: all three couples share intimacy through reading, and Robert’s and Léon’s early relationships with the protagonists are accepted, even encouraged, before they become destructive.
In the same way that Anna's death resembles Emma's, the narration of Edna's death resembles the narration of Anna's, especially in images, tone, and rhythm. Shortly before Anna dies, a "feeling seized her like that she had experienced when preparing to enter the water in bathing" (695)—and, of course, Edna drowns. Before dying, Anna remembers "a whole series of girlish and childish memories," and Edna recalls her own series of girlhood sounds and smells: the barking dog, the calvary officer's spurs, bees, and musky flowers (598-99). Both narratives allude to the protagonists' past feelings that are fanciful or imaginary: Edna's fantasies about the calvary officer and Anna's imaginings about Vronsky. And both narratives use the light and flame metaphor for death: when Anna dies, "The candle by the light of which she had been reading that book filled with anxieties, deceptions, grief, and evil, flared up with a brighter light than before, lit up for her all that had before been dark, flickered, began to grow dim, and went out for ever" (695); and just before Edna dies, she "looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again" (598). Finally, both women consider curtailing their suicide attempts, but not until it is too late to save themselves: Anna wishes "to rise, to throw herself back, but something huge and relentless struck her on the head and dragged her down," then feels "the impossibility of struggling" (695); and Edna thinks, "Perhaps Doctor Mandelet would have understood if she had seen him--but it was too late; the shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone" (599)—and, of course, Edna will, like Anna, be "dragged down."

The House of Mirth

Like Edna and Herminia, Lily Bart, in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) has a limited interest in fiction. However, Lily prides "herself on her broad-minded recognition of literature" (65), and, like other protagonists--especially Anna and Emma--fiction and art inform Lily's sense of self and her expectations for life: she learns "those affecting words" that are appropriate to social situations through her "extensive perusal of fiction," and she is "fond... of sentimental fiction" and
feels "such tastes ennobled her desire for worldly advantage" (33). Lily prefers not to marry a man who is "merely rich," but an "English nobleman" or "Italian prince." In the same way that Emma fantasizes about exotic cities with "domes, and bridges, and ships, forests of citron trees, and cathedrals of white marble" (141), Lily is charmed by "Lost causes" and likes "to picture herself as standing aloof from the vulgar press" of the hills of ancient Rome (35). But when Lily imagines marrying Percy Gryce—whose hobby is Americana, including books—she imagines living "with the Gryce library in a fire-proof annex that looked like a mausoleum" (22). Yet Selden, Lily’s best emotional match, cannot fulfill Lily’s romanticized, fiction-founded dreams for money and class. Lily’s desire to live like the very people for whom she doesn’t care reflects her competing, incompatible desires for both the Gryce and the Selden worlds, a tension that contributes to her purgatorial status as a single woman, her financial insecurity, and that makes her, finally, her own "lost cause" (35).

In the midst of trying to negotiate her affection for Selden and her desire to marry someone of higher social standing, Lily "becomes" art in the Trenors’ tableaux party. The female suicide progression away from explicit intertextual references pauses briefly on her, as Lily considers posing for a tableau of a painting of Cleopatra—who kills herself, of course, and who also figures in Children of Light. Lily decides to figure in a painting that features its female model more than the Cleopatra painting does, and Lily selects a type so like her own that she could embody the person represented without ceasing to be herself. It was as though she had stepped, not out of, but into, Reynolds’s canvas, banishing the phantom of his dead beauty by the beams of her living grace. (134)

As Lily poses for the tableau of the painting of this woman who is dead and unnamed in the novel, her beauty is for Selden "so vivid that for the first time he seemed to see before him the real Lily Bart" (134), and Gerty says to Selden that Lily’s simple dress "makes her look like the real Lily" (135). But even this "real" Lily is modeled after the historical painting of a historical woman: Sir Joshua Reynolds’s painting, "Portrait of Mrs. Lloyd," commemorates the marriage of Joanna
Leigh to Richard Lloyd (Waid). Although Lily never marries—which is largely why she eventually kills herself—long before Lily’s death, Gerty and Selden see the true Lily through her representation of a dead woman. Finally, Lily’s romanticization and internalization of "sentimental fiction" and her identification with dead women facilitate and presage her own death.

**Covert Contagiousness: Or, the Heyday of the Implied Intertextual**

As the preceding discussion shows, earlier texts make covert intertextual allusions to other female suicide texts. However, through the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, the female suicide texts in this selection gradually move away from the explicit intertextual, intratextual, and extratextual references that mark the nineteenth century—including those about suicide, virtue, art, and art’s role in constructing women—and become increasingly marked by strong, but covert similarities. The departure from the explicit intertextual and the embrace of the implied intertextual begins in 1895 with *The Woman Who Did*, which makes no explicit intertextual references. While *The Awakening* in 1899 and *The House of Mirth* in 1905 make some explicit intertextual allusions and thereby manifest the waning influence of the earlier trend, their references are minimal. As the texts abandon extratextuality and explicit intertextuality, their implied intertextuality becomes the most informing textuality for the narratives of this temporally wide-ranging cluster: *The Awakening* (1899), "To Room 19" (1961), "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan" (1979), and *Thelma and Louise* (1991). These texts are unified, as later chapters will show, by macro-elements of narrative, but their lethal coherence is also pronouncedly augmented by their shared microsimilarities of language, imagery, and action, similarities that unify them almost entirely through covert connections, such that by 1963, Lessing’s "To Room 19" eliminates all extratextual and explicit intertextual references, as does Silverstein’s "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan" in 1980.

Perhaps these writers embrace covert intertextuality because they have before them the nineteenth century’s wealth of popular suicide texts—a wealth that
increased as printed texts were made into twentieth-century films, including Anna Karenina (1935, 1948) and Madame Bovary (1949, 1991). That is, the female suicide narrative is well-grounded in Western culture when these texts are produced. And, while their lack of explicit intertextual and extratextual references might suggest a weakening of the collective trend of female suicide narratives, it is more likely indicative of the stability and security of those trends—trends that are so pervasive that implied intertextual references are sufficient enough to soundly unify these texts with the larger female suicide narrative tradition. That is, through individual texts' tri-textual coherences and links, the texts begin to form and signify a naturalization and reification of their larger collective. Indeed, while this cluster abandons explicit reference to the larger contexts of suicide contagion, suicide, art, and female suicide, its texts convey many of the same messages delivered by The Power of Sympathy and The Woman Who Did—but they do so less self-consciously, less dogmatically, such that one wonders if, with its more discrete and covert coherence, this cluster is cumulatively more "dangerous" than earlier clusters.

In any case, this cluster's texts manifestly inform each other and create riveting intertextual links among themselves, links that clearly illustrate their indebtedness to earlier female suicide narratives and their mutually-informing influence on each other. As I will discuss in later chapters, the reification of the narratives' traditions emerges in relation to character, theme, and form, as well as in relation to the texts' treatment of "facts." And, as Chapter 5 will show, as earlier texts' reliance on "real" or "true-life" extratextual facts fades, more recent texts foreground the "facts" and assumptions about women that are reified by literary, sociological, and ideological constructs.

"To Room 19," with Anna Karenina and The Awakening

Doris Lessing's "To Room 19" (1963) is the first text in this corpus to eliminate all extratextual and explicit intertextual references to other female suicide texts. But, although it makes no intratextual references to suicide, it betrays its
predecessors' influence on it, even those from a century before. For instance, Anna and Susan both repeatedly note, sometimes with self-chastisement, their falseness with their husbands, whom they find repulsive—and this deception is aptly evident often during bedtime scenes. Part of the women's bedtime occupations, attending to their hair, is also significant in both texts, especially in the heroines' realizations that they are mad. During one of Anna's last upsets over Vronsky's absence, she can't remember if she has brushed her hair:

She did not even trust her hand, and went up to the mirror to see whether her hair really was done or not. It was, but she could not remember doing it. 'Who is that?' she thought, gazing in the mirror at the feverish, frightened face with the strangely brilliant eyes looking at her. 'Yes, that is I!' she suddenly realized, and looking at her whole figure she suddenly felt his kisses, shuddered, and moved her shoulders. Then she raised her hand to her lips and kissed it. 'What is it? Am I going mad?' and she went to her bedroom. (683)

Susan's hair-brushing is also featured in "To Room 19," especially during moments both of insight about and detachment from herself and the demon. While talking to Matthew and brushing her hair, she looks in the mirror and

she examined a round, candid, pleasant face with clear dark brows and clear grey eyes. A sensible face. She brushed thick healthy black hair and thought: Yet that's the reflection of a madwoman. How very strange! Much more to the point if what looked back at me was the gingery green-eyed demon with his dry meagre smile. (1897)

Like Anna, who imagines feeling her lover behind her as she brushes her hair, Susan sees the demon-snake-man lover who seduces her away from her family and to the green hotel room:

She was peering in and smiling as if she were amused at the clinging hissing hair that followed the brush. 'Yes, I think it would be a good idea on the whole,' she said, with the cunning of a madwoman evading the real point. (1898)

While brushing their hair, both women see glimpses of their own madness and glimpses of the male figures who coax their transformations from complacent women to distressed, miserable, and then dead ones.
"To Room 19" also recalls *The Awakening* in several subtly shared uses of images, tone, and movement: green colors, serpents, water, seductiveness, solitude and death. Susan's family thwarts her attempt to find solitude in Mother's Room and in Room 19, and Edna's begins to thwart her attempt to find it in the pigeon house. At first, Susan and Edna both feel uncomfortable in their solitary places--Room 19 and the sea--but eventually both women make daily visits to their places of attempted solitude. During Susan's daily visits to her hotel room, she hears the hiss of the gas and feels the fluidity of emptiness, she "brooded, wandered, simply went dark, feeling emptiness run deliciously through her veins like the movement of her blood" (1901). And, after Edna learns to swim, "the waves daily beat upon her splendid body," and she notes their "little foamy crests that coiled back like slow, white serpents" (528).

Susan and Edna both fear, then tolerate, desire, seek, find, and die in similar, solitary places, in environments that have seduced them, that are occupied by green serpents, that share a sense of fluidity and greenness, and that erase signs of their existence: Edna, the sea, occupied by its real and its wave-serpents; and Susan, the hotel room, occupied by its seductive green serpent-man. During their daily visits to these places, Edna's sea and Susan's hotel room leave no traces of their presence: the waves immediately erase Edna's marks, and Susan leaves the green bedspread without wrinkles, the room so undisturbed that Fred thinks, "She might never have been in the room at all" (1900).

After interrelational rupture, Edna and Susan go to their solitary places intending to die. Edna, suddenly left by Robert, feels "There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone" (598). So Edna embraces this aloneness in the sea:

The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. . . . The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. . . . The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft,
close embrace. . . . She did not look back now. but went on and on. thinking of the blue-grass meadow. (598)

Susan also, after learning of Matthew’s affair, goes to her place of death "without looking back at [the restaurant], just as she had left her house. . . without another look" (1907). And the narration of her death echoes Edna’s: in Room 19,

She spent [four hours] delightfully, darkly, sweetly, letting herself slide gently, gently, to the edge of the river. . . . She lay on her back on the green satin cover, but her legs were chilly. She got up, found a blanket. . . and carefully covered her legs with it. She was quite content lying there, listening to the faint soft hiss of the gas that poured into the room, into her lungs, into her brain, as she drifted off into the dark river. (1908)

Finally, both places comfort Edna and Susan in death, Edna "enfolded" by the sea "in its soft, close embrace" (598), and Susan "carefully covered" by the blanket, while both women’s lungs fill with fluid greenness that kills them.

The Awakening, "To Room 19," "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan," and Thelma and Louise

While "To Room 19" is clearly informed by earlier texts, it also implicitly informs several later texts, and these linkages help promote a sense of unity in the female suicide collective and illustrate the interconnectedness of the texts in ways that become important for understanding their collective themes and consequences—and for later chapters. For instance, neither Edna nor Susan "look back" on their ways to death, nor do Lucy, Thelma, or Louise. In addition to sharing the character and structural elements discussed in later chapters, this cluster immerses itself in covert intertextual references, especially in the texts’ remarkably detailed attention to white houses, gardens, serpents, water, telephones, traveling, and vertical movement before death.

Given The Awakening’s position at the cusp of the change from the extratextual and the explicitly intertextual to the implied intertextual, it is perhaps not surprising that white houses and gardens begin appearing with Edna’s "charming," "dazzling white," "large, double cottage" and her "scrupulously neat" yard with "flowers and plants of every description" (546). "To Room 19" refers five
times to Susan's "big white house" and three times to her garden" (1886, 1891, 1900, 1903, 1907). And Lucy Jordan has "a white suburban bedroom in a white suburban town" where she can "rearrange the flowers."

Telephones and travel are also featured in this cluster, as well as in other female suicide texts. Because Lucy realizes she will "ride through Paris in a sportscar," "she let the phone keep ringing and she sat there softly singing all the nursery rhymes she'd memorized in Daddy's easy chair." Susan, however, wants to ignore the phone, but doesn't. She resents being tethered to her house, husband, and children by obligations that are met through phone calls. She never feels free (1892), but she does feel imprisoned (1890) and encaged (1892). Even when Susan goes on vacation, she is tethered to her family via the telephone line: she "prowled over wild country with the telephone wire holding her to her duty like a leash. The next time she must telephone, or wait to be telephoned, nailed to her cross" (1896). And, of course, Thelma and Louise, in the midst of traveling and "enjoying" their newly-found freedom, are tracked down by phone tracing.

The protagonists' restrictions and the men's freedom are represented throughout these texts by the women's desire to travel, particularly to Paris. Of course, Paris is one of the most mythically "sexualized" and romanticized cities in the world, and the male characters--many of whom, as Chapter 5 notes, find sexual gratification, often adulterously--also travel to Paris: by freely going to Paris, Oblonsky "recovers" from his family (660), Léon escapes from his depression and the boredom of Tostes, and Rodolphe enlivens his life.

But travel--and sexual gratification--are freedoms denied the protagonists. Conjoining travel and sexual imagery, Emma wishes for a son because:

A man, at least, is free; he can explore all the passions and all the countries, overcome obstacles, taste of the most distant pleasures. But a woman is always hampered. Being inert as well as pliable, she has against her the weakness of the flesh and the inequity of the law... her will flutters in every breeze. (63)

But the protagonists fantasize about traveling, often to Paris, and when they do travel, instead of being, like the men, rejuvenated or improved, they die. Edna
fantasizes about going to Paris to study art (589), and, bored in Tostes, imagines Paris, "walked about" it with her fingertip on a map (41). When Emma grows increasingly bored and unhappy, she "wanted to die, but she also wanted to live in Paris" (43). Of course, Emma is the only protagonist to actually go to Paris—and it facilitates her undoing. And Lucy goes to Paris, but only through fantasy and death, as she is driven to "forever, as she [rides] through Paris with the warm wind in her hair." As Chapter 5 also discusses, in addition to desiring Paris, the protagonists even more consistently share a desire for gratifying heterosexual connection. Of course, none of them find lasting sexual or romantic gratification, and those who try to, usually adulterously, die.

Travel is also significant—and deadly—for Thelma and Louise. At first the act of taking even a vacation is an act of subversive fleeing: when the server asks Thelma "when you gonna run away with me?" Louise says, "She's running away with me." However, Thelma's travel is also transgressive, especially in its subversion of Daryl's control over Thelma: Daryl never lets her do anything without him, but this time she leaves without informing him, let alone asking his permission to travel with Louise. As Jimmy asks Louise if he can come to where she is, a song plays quietly in the background: "Can we try to bear this cross forever? You're a part of me, I'm a part of you, wherever we may travel, whatever we go through." The "overvoicing" of this song with Jimmy's pleas suggests that he and Louise might "bear the cross" together, but Louise promptly and adamantly refuses to let Jimmy join her and Thelma. After leaving Jimmy, as she walks to Thelma, the song plays louder, clearly indicating that Louise and Thelma have rejected their men and will stand with each other "at the crossroads."

The song continues, "I can feel it when I hear that lonesome highway. So many miles to go before I die. We can never know about tomorrow. Still we have to choose which way to go. You and I are standing at the crossroads." Of course, the song is a harbinger of Thelma's and Louise's deaths, and even though they travel in flight, Thelma appreciatively says, "I always wanted to travel. I just never got the opportunity," and Louise says, "You got it now." In the cluster's only
episode of explicit intertextuality to suicide texts, as the women drive through the
Badlands in their convertible, their hair blowing in the wind—of course, like Lucy
Jordan’s—"The Ballad of Lucy Jordan" starts playing. The song ends with the lyrics.
"At the age of thirty-seven, she knew she’d found forever as she rode along through
Paris with the warm wind in her hair," and its music trails off into several seconds
of repetitive lyric-less chords—meant, I imagine, to represent "forever" for Lucy and
for Thelma and Louise as they drive with an almost transcendent sense of peace and
unity while their worlds fall apart.

Although Lucy, Thelma, and Louise feel peace when they travel, travel is a
desired, dangerous source of escape for these protagonists that is often associated
with their desire for heterosexual gratification, sometimes through adultery, and
often with madness and death. Edna commits suicide before going to Paris, but
Emma’s trips to Paris and her extravagant spending become key facilitators of her
suicide. Daryl accuses Thelma of being "mad" when she calls him from her trip,
and Lucy’s trip, also fatal, is inspired by her hallucination of a lover who invites her
off the rooftop. And on Susan’s trip, from a hilltop she sees the demon and
becomes aware of her madness.

These characters long to travel, to go to Paris, but to fulfill these longings is
to die. Furthermore, they all travel to increasing heights before their downward
movement of death. Thelma and Louise drive up to the edge of the canyon before
crashing down into it. Lucy climbs up the stairs before jumping off the roof and
dying on the street, accompanied by her hallucinated lover. And Susan, also
accompanied by her hallucinated snake/man/demon, also walks up the stairs to her
bedroom, walks up to the mountaintop on her trip, and up to Room 19, and then
figuratively moves back down when she "drifted off into the dark river" to which the
snake leads her after death (1908).

**Eruptive Returns to the Explicitly Intertextual: 1985**

The lack of explicit intertextuality that characterizes "To Room 19" and "The
Ballad of Lucy Jordan" lasts only a short while: with the 1985 appearance of Paul
Schrader's film *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* and Robert Stone's novel *Children of Light*, the explicitly intertextual returns to the fore. While *Thelma and Louise* also participates in this intertextual return, it is more aligned with the preceding cluster because of its stronger, implicit intertextual links to earlier texts and because it does not explicitly problematize the notion of intertextual promotions of suicide (that is, Thelma and Louise don't hear "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan" and give no indication they are familiar with suicide texts). Indeed, like the early narratives that make explicit intertextual references and devote explicit attention to the formative role of art, the 1985 texts return, albeit to a much greater degree, to explicit intertextuality and make it, unlike earlier narratives, one of their primary concerns through which they also devote unprecedented, extended, critical attention to the role of art in constructing character and promoting suicide.

*Children of Light* and *Mishima* both entirely depend upon other suicide texts—*The Awakening* and Mishima's stories, including "Patriotism," respectively—for their structure, characterization, and action. Immersed in explicit intertextuality, these works continue earlier texts' exploration about literature's relationship to and effect on "life," but the newer texts blatantly problematize the role of art in constructing character and promoting suicide. Furthermore, their work prefaces—perhaps even enables—the even more adamant attention to intertextuality and to the nexus of media, art, and suicide that is delivered by *Heathers* and *The Virgin Suicides*, texts that make scathing commentary on issues and conventions that have been addressed far less scathingly by many of the narratives in this corpus and that have affected all of them.

*Children of Light*

Robert Stone's *Children of Light* (1985) is immersed in explicit and implicit intertextual references to *The Awakening*, whereby it foregrounds the role—in fiction—of art in suicide identification and modeling. Years before the time of action begins in *Children of Light*, Lu Anne Verger, an actress, gives Gordon Walker, a
screenwriter and her lover, a copy of The Awakening, one of Lu Anne's favorite books. Every day during Walker's writing the novella's film script, he is either with or thinking about Lu Anne, "so that when the principal character of Edna Pontellier was defined in scene and dialogue, Lu Anne inhabited it utterly" (11).

Lu Anne not only inhabits art; through her acting she produces, consumes, and again becomes a part of it, identifying with characters while and after she plays their roles on stage. While filming The Awakening, Lu Anne sees "Edna in the glass now, not Rosalind. Lu Anne studied herself. Gone, that young Queen of the New Haven night" (81). Later, she says to Walker, "I can be a light Cordelia. And I can be a shy Cordelia. . . . And I can be a dead Cordelia," and shortly, thereafter, he finds "himself beside dead Cordelia" and says to Lu Anne, "Hey. . . . Come back" (178). Of course, Cordelia's murder is successfully disguised as a suicide—and Cordelia is called "the eternal feminine" in the musical fantasia Levin watches in Anna Karenina (editor's n. 6 and 6 619). Edna also identifies with Cleopatra—whom, recall, Lily Bart considers modeling in The House of Mirth: "I want to be Cleo too, Gordon. I'm tired of Edna. I'm glad she's dead. . . . I mean, I just can't die too many times" (174). As Lu Anne continues to identify with characters and to play their roles, even in her daily life, she extends their lives. In the process, her own ego-boundaries weaken, and she imbues not simply her characters, but herself, with the immortality of art, "death" with a reversibility from which she can repeatedly "come back."

In this way, art makes Lu Anne real, and Lu Anne makes art "real." While making art is, according to Lu Anne, essential for her own well-being, it is also part of her undoing, and this is especially evident, explicitly and implicitly, in her relationship to Edna. The novel makes predominantly explicit references to The Awakening, but it also makes several covert ones, such that, even though Lu Anne differs from the typical female suicide protagonist because of her long history of drug-abuse and schizophrenia, Lu Anne and Edna are conjoined more than any other protagonists in my corpus.
For instance, Lu Anne is married to Lionel, Edna to Léonce. Edna’s last name is "Pontellier"—and, as a child "old black Pelletier" yells at Lu Anne (218). Lu Anne grows up in New Orleans—where the Edna lives, and both characters know doctors who care about them--Lionel and Dr. Mandelet. Edna’s romantic interest, Robert, first gets to know Edna and her children on the beach; and when Gordon, Lu Anne’s romantic interest, first calls Lu Anne in the time of action, she, her husband, and children are at the beach. Both women are strong swimmers whose strength is measured in their shoulders, and both invoke a sense of the regal. Also recalling several of Hawthorne’s descriptions of Zenobia’s appearance, behavior, and character, Edna wears "a magnificent cluster of diamonds that sparkled, that almost sputtered, in [her] hair, just over the center of her forehead," a golden, shimmering "satin gown spread in rich folds in either side of her," "soft . . . lace encircling her shoulders." Further, "There was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and spread her arms, which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone" (576-77). Although Lu Anne, with her abject psychotic episodes, is inconsistently regal, she also plays the role of Queen Cleopatra. As an actress—who has played Queen Cleopatra—she is admired and protected by the crew, which serves as her court, honoring her wishes and protecting her follies. Lu Anne also "[wants] to be Queen" (98), and she shortly before she dies, says to Gordon "Give me my robe. . . . Put on my crown" (251).

Edna and Lu Anne also share contexts, personal situations, memories, and visions. For instance, Edna describes for Madame Ratignolle a girlhood memory of walking in a meadow in the summer, and Lu Anne remembers her own "inward vision of a hot September day that sometimes came to her in dreams. She was small, always a child in her dreams, and walking a sandy road down home" (122). Edna has romantic feelings for a tragedian—speculated to be Edwin Booth (1833-93), the Shakespearean actor acclaimed for his portrayal of Hamlet (521 n. 9), which, of course, recalls Ophelia, who, like Edna, drowns herself. And Lu Anne, who also drowns herself, has romantic feelings for Gordon—who is also a Shakespearean actor.
whom she loves, admires, and is haunted by. Lu Anne’s and Edna’s passions are stirred for their Shakespearean’s, even though they both feel fond of their husbands, Lionel and Léonce. And, of course, *Children of Light* makes several intertextual references to Shakespeare, including references to Cleopatra, Cordelia, and Rosalind.

Edna and Lu Anne also both respond strongly to music. Lu Anne:

began to sing. . . . The song located her to that September day when walking beside the burial ovens she had breathed in some evil fateful thing. . . . The song summoned up such a wave of sadness, of recollected hopes, old loves and losses that she thought she would die. . . . She let her song rise again and spread out her arms. (123)

And, of course, Lu Anne’s arm movements and her memories of "old loves" describe Edna’s recollections of herself as a girl throwing her arms out "as if swimming when she walked" through the tall grass, remembering the men of her young infatuations (520-22). And Madame Ratignolle’s performance provokes in Edna’s imagination "the figure of a man standing beside a desolate rock on the seashore. . . . naked," with an "attitude . . . of hopeless resignation as he looked toward a distant bird winging its flight away from him" (727)—which foreshadows Edna’s swim away from the shore, but which also describes Gordon’s appearance and aspect as Lu Anne swims away from him. Lu Anne’s thoughts, however, also align the adult Lu Anne with the adult Edna, both unhappy and listless.

These similarities suggest an ongoing shared perspectival and visual focalization between Edna and Lu Anne that begins long before the narrative’s time of action, in the protagonists’ childhoods. However, the implications of this underlying identification become clearer and more consequential in relation to Lu Anne’s ego boundaries during the time of action and through the characterization and plot of *Children of Light*. While Stone implicitly links Lu Anne to Edna in several ways, at first Lu Anne establishes Edna clearly as the other: "'Edna--I love her. . . . Well, of course she isn’t me. I mean,' she said with a laugh, 'things are tough enough as they are'" (26). Although Lu Anne still insists on her separation from Edna, when she thinks of her herself as mother, she temporarily "is Edna." She remembers:
a judge who was one of her ex-husband's relatives had called her 'a lousy mother,' right out in court, in front of her daughter and in front of her own mother and daddy. Now she was Edna Pontellier. Of Edna, Kate Chopin had written: She was fond of her children in an uneven impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them.

You lost it all anyway, Lu Anne thought. You lost the child inside yourself, then the person that grew there, then the children you never bore and the children you did. (81)

While "now" might mean "momentarily," it could mean "from now on," and Lu Anne's thinking "now she was Edna Pontellier" anticipates the possibility of Lu Anne's increasing identification with Edna. Furthermore, Lu Anne's third person self-reference suggests some fleeting ego detachment on her part. But Lu Anne regains her ego separation and imagines what Edna would think when the sky "looked to her like late-summer weather at home. Edna, she thought, would know the oppression of that yellow-gray dog end of summer light" (89).

While Lu Anne empathizes with Edna, she views Edna, at least at this point, as a persona she inhabits: "She saw the inhabited mask of Edna Pontellier before her" (95). But gradually Lu Anne begins to question the boundaries between Edna and herself:

Lu Anne was a lousy mother, certified and certifiable. Who the hell did she think she was, Edna? Too good for her own kids? But then she thought: It comes to the same thing, her way and mine. You want more, you want to be Queen, you want to be Rosalind. (98)

Lu Anne does not merely "recite" the judge's judgment of her as a "lousy" mother, she internalizes it, and she conflates the judge's critique of her with her own critique of Edna, and then her self-critique. Through Edna, Lu Anne recognizes her own conflicted feelings about her children—whom, like Edna, she loves deeply at times, but whom she also leaves, readily and completely. As Lu Anne starts to recognize and empathize with Edna's maternal situation, including her conflicts about motherhood, she also sees similarities between her desires and Edna's, and she judges herself as she judges Edna.

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Shortly, thereafter. Lu Anne begins to merge with Edna: she tries to reassert her own "realness" and to distinguish herself from Edna, but Drogue’s comment sabotages Lu Anne’s effort:

I’m real, she thought. "Let’s go with it" [film the scene]. . . . In that moment she found Edna. Edna knew what living was worth to her and the terms on which she would accept it. She knew the difference between living and not living and what happiness was. It occurred to Lu Anne that she knew none of these things. Too bad, she thought, because I’m the one that’s real, not her. It’s me out here. . . . She began to cry again. "How about it, Edna?" Walter Drogue asked. He spoke without taking his eye from the viewfinder. "What’s it gonna be?" He was just chattering to keep their spirits up. "Nothingness or grief?" "Beats me," Lu Anne said. (99-100)

This passage reflects Lu Anne’s liminal position between regaining her self-identity and being submerged in Edna’s. First, Lu Anne asserts her own reality, which seems to embolden her to perform the scene as Edna. In the next moment, Lu Anne, who has judged Edna’s mothering skills and distinguished herself from Edna, admires Edna’s knowing "the difference between living and not living and what happiness was" (99). Lu Anne realizes that she does not know what Edna knew and wishes she did, again, asserting "I’m the one that’s real, not her. It’s me out here" (100). But then Lu Anne notices the director and crew members watching her, one through a viewfinder, and thinks, "Who does he think he’s looking at? . . . Or is he just seeing movies?" (100). She begins to cry, suggesting a variety of possible confusions and conflicts—about herself, about her role, about acting and being directed. But Lu Anne, an actress readily directed by others, is receptive to suggestion: her psyche is easily invaded and occupied by others—fictional characters, Walker, the Long Shore Friends. So when the director collapses the distinctions between her role and her reality by saying, "How about it, Edna?" Lu Anne’s own distinctions begin to collapse. While just three pages earlier, Lu Anne dismisses "grief" and "nothingness" as "only sounds," when the director says to "Edna," "Nothingness or grief?" Lu Anne answers an irresolute, "Beats me."

But even as Lu Anne increasingly identifies with Edna, she does not endorse suicide yet. Gordon’s script says that during Edna’s walk into the sea, "She senses a
freedom the scope of which she has never known. She had come beyond despair to a kind of exaltation" (120), and Lu Anne says incredulously, "Really, now. Gordon." and thinks, "exaltation beyond despair? She had never found anything beyond despair except more despair" (120). Lu Anne wonders if she can play "exaltation beyond despair," even if she might not believe in it and decides, "absolutely, you betcha. We play them whether they’re there or not" (120). However, she goes on to say, "And once we’ve played them they’re there and there they stay" (120). Then, as if she has made the commitment to be Edna, she wonders:

What if walking by the water one day you broke through it? You’re walking into the water like our Edna and bam! Life more abundant. That’s a trick, she thought suddenly. That’s a mean trick, because Walker was right about the lure of life more abundant. To go for it was dying. That kind of abundance, going for that was dying. (120-21)

Lu Anne seems to doubt the ability to find "life more abundant" through death, and then she recalls that Walker had rewritten the emotional tone of the end of the script in the past year, and "It occurred to her that he might think he was about to die. Or be wishing himself dead, or her" (121). As Lu Anne continues to resist but increasingly internalizes Edna’s character, her sense of Edna as other continues to deteriorate, and, unnerved by her own thoughts, she thinks:

What’s happening here? Who are we and what are we playing at? Where does one thing leave off and the other stuff commence? "I’m real," she said aloud. Having so declared, she had to have a drink and think about it. I know that I am. I know what’s me and what’s not me. That’s all I know. (121)

Then she runs into her Long Friends. And, when thinking about Edna, Lu Anne thinks, "She finds out who she is and it’s too much and she dies. Yes, Lu Anne thought, I know about that. I can do that, me" (132).

But Lu Anne still doesn’t seem to want to die. She thinks, "But the drowned people she had seen in the church hall after the hurricane down home had not looked particularly fulfilled" (133). But, then, in the process of becoming Edna, Lu Anne progresses from putting herself in Edna’s position, to imbuing Edna with her own characteristics:
"I'm a biological function of their lives. That's it. Three lives, one death. That's all, man. Would I let [my children] destroy me? No, I would not, Lionel. Gordon, rather. You wrote the book, Gordon. She doesn't let them dominate her life! She will die for them, sure, but she won't live for them. Isn't that the way it goes? They need not have thought that they could possess her. Isn't that what you wrote, Lionel?" "Lionel didn't write it and neither did I. Madame Chopin wrote it." "A red-necked Irishwoman who would trade her kids for a pint of Jim Beam. That's the big secret, you know. She didn't care about her kids. What she really wanted to be was an actress. Isn't that right, Gordon?" (196)

As Lu Anne conflates Lionel's and Gordon's names and thereby gives them both the authority to have "written" Edna's story—which has become, of course, Lu Anne's story—Lu Anne begins to fit herself into Edna's character, even when the fitting is forced. On the night before her suicide, Edna holds her "farewell" dinner to and in the large, white house on her twenty-ninth birthday (576), and after filming Edna's suicide scene, Lu Anne tells Charlie, "it's my birthday." When Charlie says, "But I thought your birthday was last month," Lu Anne gives him "a conspiratorial wink" (207). On the night before Lu Anne commits suicide, she says to Walker, "It's my birthday" (205). Walker answers, "No it's not," but Lu Anne continues the charade—all the way to the end. Indeed, shortly after Lu Anne plays Edna undressing at the ocean-side before drowning, Lu Anne, like Edna, strips on the beach and drowns while her husband and children are away visiting her parents-in-law.

Furthermore, both women's suicidal commitment seems to subside just before death. Just before she dies, Edna thinks, "Perhaps Doctor Mandelet would have understood if she had seen him—but it was too late; the shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone" (598). While Lu Anne is the most "suicidal" of all of the protagonists, she weighs down her skirt on the beach with a stone, and just before her death, she calls out to Walker, "Come, or else save me" (252).

Walker believes that, because Lu Anne anchored her skirt, she planned to return, but Lu Anne may have disguised her final act of desperate self-determination by constructing and directing her own "final performance." That is, by anchoring her skirt, she enables her death to be interpreted as accidental—which would suggest to her survivors that Lu Anne's life-force prevailed, when Edna's did not. But, even
as Lu Anne may intentionally sabotage the appearance of the imitative element in her imitative act, even as she alters the role enough to "write" and "direct" her final performance, she, of course imitates Edna and ultimately and completely plays her "role." While at first Lu Anne distinguishes herself from Edna and appears to play with and control the degree to which she identifies with her, Edna's role clearly writes Lu Anne.

Stones uses intertextual references to problematize not simply the relationship between these particular texts, but the relationship between "life" and art, especially in relation to suicide modeling. Since *The Awakening* is Lu Anne's favorite book, since she is an unmitigated consumer of art, a "great reader" (150), and an actress who believes "The world is possible with art" (160), at the beginning of the novel, this screenwriter-actress coupling seems to promise a mutually beneficial outcome. This possibility is undermined when, early in the novel, the cast expresses concern for Walker's effect on Lu Anne—with whom he had had a notoriously turbulent affair years before the filming. And Stone uses the screenwriter/actress relationship between Walker and Lu Anne to make another commentary on writing women's death: Walker says he is "death . . . destroyer of worlds" who has "come to write people out of the script" (168), suggesting Walker's power to write roles—and acting jobs—out of the script. Indeed, Walker's words eventually assume a literal meaning for Lu Anne, who, instead of being professionally and financially rejuvenated by Walker's writing her into the film's leading part, is destroyed by the part and, as I discuss in Chapter 5, by her personal association with Walker, who finally does "write her death," both on screen and off.

If *Children of Light* seems extreme, it is. On one hand, it relies so heavily on *The Awakening* that, having read the novella, it is impossible to consider *Children of Light* as a completely separate text. On the other hand, whether or not one has read *The Awakening*, even with its extensive conjoining of character and plot, *Children of Light* maintains its own independent dignity as it exposes some of the implications of the very subgenre to which it belongs. Given recent theories and
research about suicide imitation, the novel and its extreme use of the intertextual are exponentially fruitful hermeneutic enterprises; that is, the novel is a fictionalized commentary on what may be very real but unexplored, even impossible to explore, dynamics between fiction and reality, especially in regard to suicide. While making no explicit reference to the issue of contagion and suicide modeling, the fictional world of *Children of Light* convincingly illustrates one—albeit extreme, with Lu Anne’s drug abuse and schizophrenia—example of a protagonist’s struggle with printed, fictional models of female suicide and with the larger phenomenon of suicide contagion.

*Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters*

While Paul Schrader’s 1985 film, *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* (hereafter, *Mishima*), is primarily about male suicide, like some other male suicide texts, it illuminates and contributes to many of the issues affecting female suicide texts. Because Mishima espoused a philosophy that intertwined art and life, his art and life are particularly cogent to the issues at hand. *Mishima* combines the intertextual—several of Mishima’s fictions—and the extratextual—Mishima’s own life—to explore the intersection of art and reality. While most of the female texts that rely on extratextual narratives do not make explicit the extratextual sources of the “fiction,” Schrader’s goal appears to be to formally illustrate Mishima’s fascination with the intersections of art and life, and his film foregrounds and melts the boundaries between the extratextual, intertextual, and the implied intertextual.

In 1960, Yukio Mishima wrote "Yuukoku" (hereafter, "Patriotism"), a story in which Shinji, a Japanese Imperial soldier commits *seppuku* (self-disembowelment), after which his wife, Reiko, participates in Shinji’s throat-cutting and then commits *hari kari* herself. While Shinji feels no doubt about committing suicide, Reiko’s desire for life is so strong that her suicide seems more aptly described as institutionally-supported self-murder. This is an extremely compelling and disturbing text because its implied author, while clearly illustrating, even
admiring. Reiko’s strong life force, also strongly condones both suicides. The implied author’s position directs, perhaps inadvertently, many readers—at least the readers in my class—to feel unnerved by Reiko’s “decision,” the implied author’s position, and the various power-dynamics dramatized by the story. And yet, at the same time that Mishima’s own story provides the source of our critical discomfort, the implied author does not seem to share that discomfort. And this disjunction between reader and implied author, especially in a story so imbued with an extremely intimate view of sex and death, exacerbates the discombobulating effect of the story, and, especially, of Reiko’s death.

Mishima interweaves fiction and reality through “Patriotism”’s structural and rhetorical manipulation of fiction, history, and journalistic style. While the story is presented as fiction, its foreword places it in a historical context:

On the twenty-eighth of February, 1936 (on the third day, that is, of the February 26 Incident), Lieutenant Shinji Takeyama of the Konoe Transport Battalion—profoundly disturbed by the knowledge that his closest colleagues had been with the mutineers from the beginning, and indignant at the imminent prospect of Imperial troops attacking Imperial troops—took his officers’ sword and ceremonially disemboweled himself in the eight-mat room of his private residence in the sixth block of Aoba-cho, in Yotsuya Ward. His wife, Reiko, followed him, stabbing herself to death. The lieutenant’s farewell note consisted of one sentence: ‘Long live the Imperial Forces.’ His wife’s, after apologies for her unfilial conduct in thus preceding her parents to the grave, concluded: ‘The day which, for a soldier’s wife, had to come, has come. . . .’ The last moments of this heroic and dedicated couple were such as to make the gods themselves weep. (1110)

This foreword at once favors the suicides, sounds like a newspaper report, and suggests that the story that follows is the more detailed, intimate narrative of a historical event. Whether or not the reader is familiar with Japanese history, the foreword suggests that the story that follows is part of that history. Further, this fictionalized extratextual effect—similar to that suggested in Allan’s preface to *The Woman Who Did*—is enhanced when the reader learns from the editor’s footnote that in February 1936, young right-wing military officers led a coup against the Japanese government which resulted in the murder of several officials, which ended after the
rebels surrendered, and which was followed by a "purge of the military" (editor's n. I, p. 1110; Pickering).

In "Patriotism," Mishima clearly is interested in collapsing distinctions between the real and the fictional, and in creating a convincing and affirming relationship between the historical coup and his fictional story about Shinji and Reiko. But, perhaps far more than the average author, Mishima's own life—not simply his imagination—and his fiction sustain a mutually informing relationship. Mishima established the Shield Society, with the goal of reinstating the Imperial Emperor to what the Society considered its proper place in Japanese society. And in 1970, ten years after writing "Patriotism," Mishima and four other members of the Society, disheartened over the increasingly capitalistic conditions of Japan and the diminished power of and respect for the Japanese Imperial Army, took General Mashita hostage in exchange for the opportunity to address the 1,200-member garrison of the Self-Defense Forces. During the address, Mishima "attributed the moral weakness of modern Japan to the loss of the 'sword' aspect of her tradition" and "called for an uprising to produce a constitutional change that would revive the Imperial Army" (Iga 93). After the address, Mishima returned to where the four soldiers were holding the general hostage, said, "Long live the Emperor!" three times, and committed seppuku, after which his lieutenant in the Shield Society beheaded Mishima and then committed hari kari himself.

While earlier examples of the extratextual involve the insertion of elements of historical suicides into later narratives, Mishima's texts prefigure a suicide that occurs after they have been written—Mishima's own. Mishima's life confirms that "Patriotism"'s implied author is indeed aligned with Mishima. Furthermore, Mishima's life enables us to recognize Mishima's close alignment with Shinji, the soldier in "Patriotism." Indeed, the story prefigures Mishima's own sexualized death: in "Patriotism" Reiko figuratively beheads her lover after his seppuku (which Shinji actually assists by thrusting his head against the knife with which Reiko is preparing to slit his throat) before committing hari kari herself; and the lieutenant
who witnesses Mishima’s seppuku beheads Mishima and then commits hari kari is called the lover Mishima had “been waiting for all his life” (Iga 97). In these ways, then, Mishima’s fiction becomes a pre-text for his life.

Mishima’s life and death also explain some of the readerly tension associated with "Patriotism." It confirms that the writer and narrator of "Patriotism" are closely aligned, both focally and experientially, with Shinji. Thus, while readers may expect the narrative perspective to more closely approximate the pseudo-journalistic tone of the forward and the footnotes, the narrator’s perspective is imbued with Shinji’s desire--his sexual desire for Reiko and his desire for the double-suicide. Perhaps this explains why the narrator’s perspective, as well as Shinji’s, dominate the story, Reiko’s perspective, and Reiko’s life--and why the narrator, with Shinji, seems to misinterpret, overlook, or understate Reiko’s signs of distress, even as readers (who are probably more objective about the story and the issue of double-suicide than Mishima was) are painfully aware that Reiko’s death is essentially imposed on her, even though Shinji prepares her for it from the first night of their marriage (1114)--and Mishima prepares readers for it from the first paragraph of the story.

As the appendages to the story proper suggest, Mishima was fascinated with the relationship between art and life, and Schrader’s film illustrates and explores Mishima’s life, art, and philosophy by merging, as Mishima did, elements of the inter-, extra-, and intratextual into the form of one text (that is, of course, actually, many narratives). The movie alternates between black and white dramatizations of "excerpts" from Mishima’s life that are filmed in pseudo-documentary style and color dramatizations of excerpts from several of his stories. This interweaving is accompanied by voiceovers of "Mishima’s" voice, in which he discusses his philosophy of art as life and life as art. Gradually, the excerpts of Mishima’s life merge--thematically, and in character, action, and plot--with Mishima’s fiction, so that, by the end of the movie, the end of the fourth story converges with the end of Mishima’s life and with the end of the film: with both the fictional character created by Mishima and Mishima himself committing seppuku on behalf of the Japanese Imperial Emperor.
Schrader's film interprets various stories' interactions with Mishima's life. In part two, "Art," during the dramatization of the excerpt from "Kyoko's House" (1959), the wife cuts and bruises the husband and says, "Perhaps you should die with me. I could watch your face in a pool of blood until it stopped moving. Then I would take poison." And in "Patriotism," Shinji also insists that Reiko look at his face as he dies, that she witness his death to ensure that it honors the traditions without "irregularity" (1114). As Shinji begins thrusting the sword into his abdomen, Reiko thinks, "Whatever happened, she must watch. She must be a witness. That was the duty her husband had laid upon her" (1123)—and that is the duty of Mishima's lieutenant and lover.

Schrader also illustrates Mishima's philosophy of living art through the film's casting. At one point the movie fleetingly shows a dramatization of "Patriotism"—the quick image of a couple facing each other on a matt, as Reiko and Shinji do before killing themselves—and Ken Ogata, who plays Mishima in the film, also directs the dramatization of "Patriotism" and, within this embedded narrative, plays the dramatized role of Shinji. By casting Ogata as Mishima in the film, Shinji in the embedded dramatization of "Patriotism," and as the director of the embedded "Patriotism," Schrader suggests that his own study of Mishima's life has identified Mishima, to no surprise, with "Patriotism"'s Shinji.

However, while Mishima's texts and acts are clearly self-consciously constructed political statements, the texts also repeatedly suggest the fruitlessness, limitations, or even the farce of statements that are predominantly supported by Mishima himself. In the dramatized excerpt from "Runaway Horses," the leader of the groups asks the younger soldiers if they are willing to pay the price even if it might not help restore his Imperial Majesty, and then the film switches back to a dramatization of Mishima vowing with young members of the Shield Society to restore the Imperial Majesty by signing in blood. Nothing in "Patriotism" suggests that Shinji's death will mean anything to anyone except Reiko and perhaps her family; indeed, Shinji's death seems a cowardly way for Shinji to avoid having to punish his friends and actually honor his professional duty. And one of
"Patriotism"'s subtle indications of Reiko's difficulty with the suicides is her apparent breach of her promise to witness—and thereby validate and ensure the honor of—Shinji's suicide, which is also a breach of tradition. While she begins watching his face, Reiko seems to look away from the suicide: after Shinji starts the seppuku, the narrator says, "Reiko had been sitting until now with her face lowered, gazing in fascination at the tide of blood advancing toward her knees, but the sound took her by surprise and she looked up. . . . Reiko could bear the sight no longer" (1124).

While so much of Mishima's life and writing suggests that he finds validation in seppuku, his stories also suggest that, albeit noble in his eyes, suicide does little more than make a statement—and sometimes one daunted by retorts. Schrader seems to underscore the futility of Mishima's suicide: in the film's dramatization of "Mishima's life, one of Mishima's conditions for releasing his hostage is that Army garrison will listen to Mishima’s speech in silence—but his voice is drowned out by the garrison’s taunts. Mishima probably would not have predicted the garrison’s taunts, but, even as the author of "Patriotism"—and as the implied author who embraces the nobility of Shinji’s suicide and seems not fully aware of his narrator’s focalization’s effects on Reiko’s perspective—in "Runaway Horses" Mishima suggests his own awareness of the possible futility of his suicide. This makes one wonder if Mishima knowingly committed a more artistic, rather than political, suicide, a timely, final statement enabling Mishima to live and die for, direct and enact his very real belief that life and art are one, a final effort to meld his life and texts. Perhaps one of Schrader’s most useful contributions in Mishima is his underscoring of not only the relationship between art and reality in Mishima’s life, but, finally, the craftedness, uselessness, and egocentricity of some of Mishima’s suicides, including his own.
Explosive Divergence and Scathing Parody: 1991-93

Robert Stone’s return to the explicitly intertextual in *Children of Light* and Paul Schrader’s reliance on the extratextual in his fictional and biographical *Mishima* anticipate the progression toward Michael Lehman’s 1989 film, *Heathers*, and Jeffrey Eugenides’ 1993 novel, *The Virgin Suicides*—texts that foreground issues of suicide clustering, contagion, and modeling. In contrast to the texts that jettison extratextual and explicit intertextuality in their embrace of implied intertextuality. *Heathers* and *The Virgin Suicides* abandon most extratextual references, many of the macrosimilarities to the female suicide tradition, and all of the finesse and discretion enabled by implied intertextual connections—connections that would have covertly linked them with the very texts and tradition they critique. Indeed, *Heathers* and *The Virgin Suicides* devote unprecedented, scathing critical attention to suicide contagion, media, and art. Their explicit intertextual references and their direct contention with the general role of media-promulgated suicide contagion are so extreme that the texts parody themselves and the larger body of female suicide narratives, and, in the process, they explode many of the macrotrends in character and structure that are staples of female suicide narratives. Indeed, even as these texts present themselves as and then conflate our understanding of and familiarity with suicide narratives, they explicitly and self-consciously manipulate the intertextual and suicide contagion; they deprive themselves and the tradition from which they emerge of several of the tradition’s conventions; and they undermine the tradition’s hegemonic "dignity."

*Heathers*

In the same way that *Mishima* illuminates issues in female suicide narratives even though it is primarily about male suicide, *Heathers* illuminates several of the issues affecting female suicide narratives even though not one female commits suicide in the movie. Indeed, contrary to the teasing previews and advertisements for the movie that suggested it involves the suicide of several adolescent females, it
is a narrative of four murders that are disguised as suicides, one "faked" suicide, two uncompleted female suicide attempts, one completed female suicide that occurs before the time of action, and of only one enacted and completed suicide during the time of action—a male's.

Although *Heathers'* audience learns that the deaths are murders as the murders occur, the film was promoted as a movie in which suicides occur. Indeed, New World Pictures took advantage of the same suicide sensationalism that the film rigorously critiques: had the promoters said "this is a film that indicts suicide, suicide sensationalism, suicide contagion, and the media," the audience would have been quite different. Instead, perhaps the promotion drew the crowd that most needed to see this film. And, rather than glamorizing suicide, *Heathers* excoriates the very cultural embrace that draws viewers to the film, that supports the body of "true" female suicide narratives, and the process by which suicide becomes an epistemologically viable option—an option so strongly expected, anticipated, and reified that it can be readily used to disguise murders as suicides.

Jason Dean, *Heathers'* adolescent serial killer and the only character to actually commit suicide in the movie, employs the phenomenon of suicide modeling and contagion to disguise repeated murders and to plan the mass "suicide" of Westerberg High. Indeed, he is inspired to disguise his first murder as suicide when, moments after poisoning Heather Chandler, he sees in her room a copy of *The Bell Jar* Cliffs Notes and an issue of *Info* magazine with a cover story entitled "The Fall of the American Teen." After spotting these texts—which the camera very quickly pans over, both upside down—Dean says, "We did a murder and that's a crime, but [if] this were like a suicide thing, y'know?" Veronica, whom Dean makes unknowingly complicit in the murders until they actually occur (and who then becomes knowingly complicit by not reporting them), says "Like a suicide thing?" and the two collaboratively forge Heather Chandler's suicide note.

Suicidologists know that suicide rates increase even after informational releases about suicide—such as the *Info* magazine cover story shown in *Heathers*—
and, while suicidologists have not yet studied the effects of printed, fictional narratives on suicide modeling, Jason and Veronica assume the credibility of such modeling. Jason’s successful use of *The Bell Jar* and its Cliffs Notes indicts and mocks the problem: that is, even the superficial Cliff Notes of *The Bell Jar*—a novel with a reputation as a suicide text because its author committed suicide, but with a protagonist who does not commit suicide—is assumed to be sufficient support for a theory of imitation.

Furthermore, the community is so receptive to the sensationalization of suicide that it exaggerates, embraces, and inadvertently mocks the possibility of intertextual contagion: when Heather Duke, the fourth murder victim, is killed while reading Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick, Or The Whale* (1851), the priest’s eulogy interprets Heather’s underlining of the word "eskimo" (which may have been one of the words J.D. underlined) as "the key to understanding Heather’s pain." The absurdity of the priest’s allusion to the *Moby Dick* text as a text associated with suicide may be meant to discount the possibility of suicide contagion, but it more likely suggests the town’s willingness to glamorize and romanticize suicide and contagion—perhaps as an alternative to accepting that its teenagers are being murdered. Ironically, although real suicides are often disguised or identified as other kinds of death, the *Heathers* community seems more willing to embrace the deaths as suicides than to consider the possibility that their community includes a murderer.

Nevertheless, as the film indicts and mocks the possibility of suicide contagion, it also accepts that the phenomenon exists—even if only "out there," amidst what it may posit are its uninformed viewers. While there may be some slight ambivalence about the writers’ and director’s views on the validity of suicide contagion, *Heathers* continues its scathing critique of contemporary culture through its representation of popular culture as a purveyor of suicide. After using fiction, the media, and suicide modeling to successfully convince the community and school that Heather Chandler’s murder is a suicide, Jason successfully disguises three more murders as suicides. And throughout the narration of these murders, *Heathers*
makes explicit, repeated commentary on the role of popular culture and the media in promoting suicide.

Popular culture is epitomized in the movie’s repeated inter- and extratextual references to the group Big Fun and its song, "Teenage Suicide: Don’t Do It," touted in the film as the "number one song in America." However, although the song, which was written by Don Dixon and performed in the Heathers by the historical British vocal group Big Fun, was recorded on an album, it was not indexed in several national and international music charts for the period—which, incidentally, disputes the student’s claim that it is the "number one song in America." Indeed, the song has acquired the status of specter in my own research: while I found information about its recording, I was unable to actually locate one.

However, the film plays some of the song’s lyrics, perhaps its most ironic ones, given the film’s context: "Teenage suicide, don’t do it. Teenage suicide, she blew it. Teenage suicide, don’t do it." When Heather MacNamara calls the radio deejay and complains that her "whole life is a mess," the camera pans over part of a Big Fun poster in her bedroom—clearly meant to suggest the group’s growing icon status. Jason convinces Heather Duke that a "teenage rag" reports that Big Fun wants to play at a school prom, and she agrees to solicit signatures to petition for permission for the group to play at Westerberg (which she fraudulently obtains). As Veronica increasingly challenges and resists Jason, he surreptitiously leaves a doll wearing a miniature Big Fun tee shirt hanging by the neck in Veronica’s room—a sign, of course, that he is willing to murder her if she continues to resist him or to threaten to expose him. Further, when Veronica is in the basement frantically trying to prevent Jason Dean from blowing up the school in a mass murder-disguised-as-mass-suicide, the camera quickly pans a pep rally occurring on the floor above them—a rally to which some students have worn Big Fun tee shirts. Of course, had Jason been successful with his murder scheme, these shirts would have helped convince the town that the mass murder was a mass suicide.

Heathers continues to mock and indict the cultural production and glamorization of suicide. After Martha Dunstock unsuccessfully attempts suicide by
walking into traffic. Heather Duke says, "She's alive and in stable condition. Just another example of a geek trying to imitate the popular people at school, failing miserably." And the students who have completed "suicides" are posthumously re-characterized to be sensitive and deep: after the first murder, one of the characters says to Heather MacNamara and Veronica, "Sorry to hear about your friend. Thought she was your usual airhead bitch. Guess I was wrong. We all were."

Heather MacNamara and Heather Duke, both vying to be the leader of the Heathers clique, undercut the "loss" with their ironic responses--"What a waste," and "Oh, the humanity." However, the film offers a critical response to the Heathers' superficial ones when, the moment after hearing their comments, Veronica steps into the gym shower, fully dressed.

Adults also embrace and glamorize the culture of suicide. Miss Flemming—not surprisingly, the English teacher—offers a particularly cutting glamorization of the suicides: she tells her colleagues, "We must revel in this revealing moment." In class, Miss Flemming says, with several pauses:

I'm just so thrilled to finally have an example of the profound sensitivity of which a human animal is capable. That example is Heather Chandler. I have her note. Now, I'm going to pass this note around the class, so you can all feel its pathetic beauty for yourself. And while we do this, I think it's a good opportunity to share the feelings that this suicide has spurred in all of us.

But the students' responses reiterate another kind of response to the suicide, one that diminishes the same loss that they also glamorize. Tracy says, "I heard it was really gnarly. She sucked down a bowl of multi-purpose deodorizing disinfectant, and then smash!" and Miss Flemming replies, "Uh, now, Tracey, let's not rehash the coroner's report. Let's talk emotions." Another student says, "Heather and I used to go out, and she said I was boring, but now I realize I really wasn't boring, it's just that she was dissatisfied with her life"--to which Miss Flemming replies, "That's very good, Peter," and another student asks, "Are we going to be tested on this?"

But these mean-spirited, superficial responses are not limited to the film's youths:
after learning that Heather Chandler was not a cheerleader, the principal says: 
"Damn. I’d be willing to [cancel school] half a day for a cheerleader."

Even the students’ parents are seduced by the media thrill of the suicide news. After the two football players are killed, the principal cancels an entire day of school and agrees to let Miss Flemming hold her cafeteria "love-in," during which she asks the students to hold hands. When the media cameras arrive, she says, 
"We’ll be on t.v. Let’s show them how you feel." But the students feel no true loss, and the event becomes a fiasco. That night, Veronica and her parents watch Miss Flemming on the news:

The Westerberg suicides were tough on all of us. But we shared the pain of losing three very popular students. I came into the cafeteria and asked them to hold hands. . . . In a burst of cleansing synchronicity, TV cameras happened upon the scene.

With disgust, Veronica says to her parents, "Cleansing synchronicity? Outpouring of emotions?" but her parents are too intently trying to identify the students on the television to respond to Veronica: "'There’s Heather.' 'And there’s Heather! Where are you, Veronica?"

Later, Veronica’s parents watch Miss Flemming lecture the television viewing audience: "Before a teenager decides to kill himself, there are a few things he needs to know. After all, this is a decision that affects all of us. And there’s only one chance to get it right." The grammatic ambiguity of Miss Flemming’s sentence is consistent with the community’s ambiguous response to the deaths, one that protests and promotes suicide. Is "one chance to get it right" the "chance" to live, or to complete suicide on one’s first attempt? Because suicide death has immortalized—and posthumously improved—the deceased students’ lives and reputations, we might interpret this ambiguity to suggest that suicide is a chance for students to posthumously "get life right"—or correct their lives’ errors, even though the correction is really just a change perceptions about the dead. But every moment of living life offers another chance to make life right. And if the "chance" is to die, then getting "it right" presumably refers to completing suicide on the first try (since a first-time "failure" deprives the survivor of ever "succeeding" on the first try again:
that is, while one can make additional attempts, one can never repeat a first attempt). Indeed, the community’s interpretation of "getting it right" is clarified by the response to Martha Dunstock’s uncompleted attempt: because Martha survives her attempt, she is said to have "failed miserably." That is, she doesn’t "get it right"--she doesn’t complete suicide on her first attempt, and she doesn’t "correct" her reputation by committing suicide.

These responses minimize and glamorize suicide through their very real posthumous character elevations of the deceased and through the false and superficial grief spewing with more telling, acerbic indicators of the characters’ feelings about each other. However, the media response is also implicated in the glamorization of the suicides. In the editing room for the school paper, one of the students says, "The number one song in America today is 'Teenage Suicide: Don’t Do It' by Big Fun. Jesus man, Westerberg finally got one of these things, and I’m not gonna blow it!" Then Heather’s suicide is featured on the front page of the school paper, while the article about the "foodless fund" is relegated to a small area by the Taco Bell coupons. The yearbook staff also plans a "Heather Chandler Yearbook Spread," a "two-page layout, with her suicide note right up here in the corner." When Veronica is disgusted by this, a student member of the yearbook staff says, "It’s more tasteful than it sounds," and asks Veronica for any notes or other kinds of writing Heather might have given her.

Thus, these adolescents--members of the age group that is most affected by suicide contagion in reality--also unknowingly participates in a media-blitz exploitation of suicide. Surprisingly, an employee of the media makes an incisive meta comment about the media’s role in suicide contagion: when the phone rings at the radio station, the deejay says, "If I’m getting one more request for that Big Fun song, I am gonna commit suicide! [sic]." As the deejay begins to play "Teenage Suicide: Don’t Do It"--to which Jason has begun referring as "our song"--Jason, listening to the radio with Veronica, shoots the radio, silencing one of the instruments that enables him to disguise his murders as suicides.
Ironically, Jason and Veronica—the murderer and his accomplice—are the film's only characters to disdain, let alone question, the community and media response to the deaths. When Heather Duke appears on several news stations to discuss Heather Chandler's death, Jason says, "Heather Chandler's more popular than ever, now," and Veronica says, "Scary stuff." When Veronica turns off the television while her parents watch the coverage, her mother protests, and Veronica says, "Can't you see these programs are eating suicide with a spoon? They make it sound like it's the cool thing to do!" And, Veronica writes in her diary the night after the football players' double-funeral, "My teen angst bullshit has a body count. The most popular people in school are dead. Everybody is sad, but it's a weird kind of sad. Suicide gave Heather depth, Kurt a soul, Ram a brain." Finally, when Veronica intervenes just as Heather MacNamara is about to lunch on sleeping pills and Heather, annoyed, says, "Suicide is a private thing," Veronica, in one of her most scathing and useful lines, says, "Heather, you're throwing your life away to become a statistic in the US fucking A Today. That's about the least private thing I can think of."

Unlike any of the earlier texts, *Heathers*—a narrative not of suicide but about it—repeatedly and sardonically complicates and implicates the role and the assumed roles of literature and media in suicide and contagion. Just after Jason shoots the radio when it begins to play "Teenage Suicide: Don't Do It," he tells Veronica that he witnessed his mother's suicide: Mrs. Dean knowingly entered a building that Mr. Dean was about to demolish, and, just before the explosion, she waved outside to J.D., who watched his mother explode with the building. It is no accident that Mrs. Dean commits suicide in a library—or that "Jason Dean" recalls James Dean. Indeed, *Heathers*—which makes several illusions to *The Wizard of Oz*—is a very metareferential movie, bursting with implicit intertextual references. But even as it critiques the cultural embrace of suicide and mocks the notion of fictionally-inspired suicide contagion, the film repeatedly implicates literature and the literary sensibility in the occasion or promotion of suicide: for instance, in the characterization of the romanticizing, mocked English teacher. Miss Flemming—which, of course, is an
onomastic play with "phlegm"; in the community’s similar interpretations and assumptions about two vastly different literary texts, Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* and *Moby-Dick*; in the students’ use of the school paper and yearbook, both English-related clubs; and in Mrs. Dean’s decision to commit suicide in a library.

**The Virgin Suicides**

Like *Heathers*, Jeffrey Eugenides’ *The Virgin Suicides* (1993) flouts the conventions of typical female suicide narratives: narrators and readers know from its first lines that the five Lisbon sisters will commit suicide; it has "a" first person-plural narrator, the conjoined, changing voice/s of approximately fourteen boys and men; some of the sisters make uncompleted attempts; and suicides occur throughout the novel. However, while the narrators know all about the suicides from page one, they lapse into a discovery mode of narration, and they even ponder questions to which they have found answers years before the time of narration begins. They do this so regularly the novel at first seems to be primarily about the boys’ mission to voyeuristically and gratuitously bare meaningless details about the Lisbons and their suicides--details that expose the boys’ and men’s sexual preoccupations. But, as they narrate their teenage discovery of the details, the novel becomes the narrators’ vehicle for self-discovery about themselves as adolescents and as adults.

Although the narrative-as-discovery mode is not necessary on the plot level--since the narrators have already done their "research" about the suicides--the narrators’ process of self-discovery-through-narration is so compelling that it informs their narration of the more "objective" details of the suicides. The narrators’ effort to catalogue and then to regularly reference their "exhibits"--interviews, "sightings," household objects, and numbered photographs--betray their continued attempt to impose order on what remains for them a disorderly and disordering time, their effort to understand the inexplicable. At the same time, at the beginning of the novel, the narrators still do not understand or accept their boyhood rejection and impotence--nor their adult obsession with the girls--and the psychological negotiations they undergo during this discovery are manifest in their narrative, even
on the plot level. For instance, instead of simply narrating the events about which they already know, the narrators narrate their research about the events, such that at times the narrative—through voice and structure—approximates their boyhood search, with all its chaos, confusion, and perplexity. The resulting lack of formal control parallels the narrators' youthful turbulence as they desperately, but unsuccessfully, try to inspire the girls to reciprocate their sexual desire—and their desire to live—and as the narrators try to understand, as boys and adults, the Lisbons' behavior.

Furthermore, during the process of discovery-through-narration, the narrators taint their evidentiary, positivist rhetoric with moments of doubt, reflection, and questions about reliability as the narrative focalization and voice undulate between those of young boys and those of middle-aged men. As the narrators' changing perspective more consistently approximates adulthood, they abandon their evidentiary presentation and honestly, piercingly, and movingly confront the suicides' psychological impact on themselves.

In the midst of this diegetic jostling and as the narrators resign their effort to understand many of the logistical details of the suicides, the smokescreen of those details fades and the adult narrators poignantly discover, with difficulty, what they are discovering, what they have been trying to understand since childhood, but what they could not understand as boys: their desire for and rejection by the Lisbon sisters; their impotence in provoking the Lisbons' desire for them and for life itself; and, finally, the fruitlessness of their continued obsession with girls whom they come to see have not only rejected them, but puppeteered them in their elaborate, dramatic, effective suicide scheme. In this way, *The Virgin Suicides* also digresses from typical female suicide narratives because it extensively illustrates the suicides' effects on family and friends. Through its form, voice, and plot, *The Virgin Suicides* illustrates the devastation suicide wrecks on the Lisbon parents and especially on the neighborhood boys.

Unlike *Heathers*, *The Virgin Suicides* illustrates—with cumulative clarity and impact—some of the devastation caused by suicide, but, like *Heathers*, this novel
also problematizes public responses to suicide. Some characters in The Virgin Suicides resist the media-blitz associated with the first suicide. Mr. Larkin, the "publisher of the city's largest newspaper," is uninterested in reporting Cecilia's suicide, and the local newspaper neglected to run an article on the suicide attempt, because the editor, Mr. Baubee, felt such depressing information wouldn't fit between the front-page article on the Junior League Flower Show and the back-page photographs of grinning brides. (14-15)

Mr. Baubee's reasoning is hardly deep, but even though the "growing shabbiness" of the Lisbon house after the first suicide attracts "the first reporters, Mr. Baubee . . . continued to defend his decision against reporting on a personal tragedy such as suicide" (93).

But the narrators explain the initial lack of interest in the first suicide differently:

Back in summer, the city newspapers had neglected to report on Cecilia's suicide because of its sheer prosaicness. Owing to extensive layoffs at the automotive plants, hardly a day passed without some despairing soul sinking beneath the tide of the recession, men found in garages with cars running, or twisted in the shower, still wearing work clothes. Only murder-suicides made the papers, and then only on page 3 or 4, stories of fathers shotgunning families before turning the guns on themselves, descriptions of men setting fire to their own houses after securing the doors. (93-94)

The rationale for not covering the Lisbon suicide impugns the media critique, but three months after Cecilia's death—and as the surviving Lisbons' behavior becomes increasingly odd—the paper publishes a letter to the editor that describes "in the sketchiest manner possible the particulars of Cecilia's suicide, and [calls] on the schools to address 'today's teenagers' overwhelming anxiety'" (94).

Enter Ms. Perl—The Virgin Suicides' equivalent of Heathers' Miss Flemming, and possibly the anonymous author of the editorial. A journalist, Ms. Perl epitomizes the individual and community responses that both texts criticize. The day after the editorial appears, Linda Perl appears at the Lisbons' and speaks with Bonnie and Mary "before Mrs. Lisbon threw her out" (95). The day after her visit, Perl's story appears in the city's largest paper, and Mr. Larkin—who initially refused
to cover the story—"would never discuss his reasons for running it" (95). Even though the narrators' efforts to investigate the suicides are similar to Ms. Perl's, they criticize her work, almost betraying their similar, competing effort, and the media-blitz that follows her article:

Ostensibly, the piece avoids sensationalism by informing the readership of a common social danger. The following day a general article on teenage suicide appeared, also by Ms. Perl, complete with charts and graphs, and mentioning Cecilia only in its first sentence. . . . From then on it was a free-for-all. Articles came out listing teenage suicides statewide for the past year. Photographs ran, usually school portraits showing troubled youngsters in dress-up clothes, boys with wispy mustaches and necktie knots like goiters. (96)

While Perl's article produces its own media onslaught--almost as if the media's attention to suicide produces its own mass effect within media--some people continue to object to the coverage: "Many people objected to the articles and television shows, coming as they did so long after the fact. Mrs. Eugene said, 'Why can't they let her rest in peace'" (98).

However, the boys, although irritated by the coverage, admit that it alerted them "to danger signals [they] couldn't help but look for" (98). The Chamber of Commerce also joins the information campaign about suicide, through which the boys learn:

that there were 80 suicides per day in America, 30,000 per year, that an attempt or completion happened every minute, a completion every 18 minutes, that 3 to 4 times as many males completed suicide but 3 times as many females attempted it, that more whites than non-whites completed suicide, that the rate of suicide among the young (15-24) had tripled in the last four decades . . . but, contrary to [their] expectations, the highest rate of suicide was found among white males over 50. (98-99)

While the Chamber of Commerce's motive for distributing information about suicide at first seems honorable and genuine, the book scorchingly discloses the Chamber's true concerns:

Many men said afterward that the board members of the local Chamber of Commerce . . . had shown great prescience in predicting the negative publicity the suicide scare would bring to our town, as well as the subsequent fall in commercial activity. While the suicides lasted, and for some time
after, the Chamber of Commerce worried less about the influx of black shoppers and more about the outflux of whites. (99)

In the same way that *Heathers*’ Jason and Veronica explicitly criticize their town’s response to the suicides and thereby reiterate the commentary made by the movie’s implied author, *The Virgin Suicides*’ narrators explicitly object to their town’s responses to the suicides, reiterating the criticism made by its implied author. Finally, as in *Heathers*, there is widespread community acceptance of the media’s participation in the suicides, and as the narrators become more insightful during the course of their narration, they, in their recursive interpretations, offer increasingly direct commentary about Ms. Perl and the media’s intrusiveness, ruthlessness, motives, and unreliability:

She made much of the record-burning incident, and often quoted rock lyrics that alluded to death or suicide. Ms. Perl befriended a local deejay and spent an entire night listening to the records that Lux’s schoolmates listed among her favorites. From this ‘research,’ she came up with the find she was most proud of: a song by the band Cruel Crux, entitled ‘Virgin Suicide.’ The chorus follows, though neither Ms. Perl nor we have been able to determine if the album was among those Mrs. Lisbon forced Lux to burn: ‘Virgin suicide/What was that she cried? ’ No use in stayin’/On this holocaust ride/She gave me her cherry/She’s my virgin suicide.’ The song certainly ties in nicely with the notion that a dark force beset the girls, some monolithic evil we weren’t responsible for. (176)

In much the same way that *Heathers* exposes the irony behind community’s embrace of the song “Teenage Suicide: Don’t Do It,” on one level, this passage suggests a criticism of popular culture for its promotion of suicide.

However, while the novel does not undermine the potential usefulness for sound psychological autopsies, its certainly casts doubt on Ms. Perl’s pseudo-psychological autopsy of Lux, on its forced, farcical nature, and on Perl’s oversignification of the song. As the narrators say:

The newspapers, later writing about what they termed a ‘suicide pact,’ treated the girls as automatons, creatures so barely alive that their deaths came as little change. In the sweep of Ms. Perl’s accounts, which boiled two or three months and the suffering of four individuals into a paragraph with a heading ‘When Youth Sees No Future,’ the girls appear as indistinguishable characters marking black x’s on a calendar or holding hands in self-styled Black
Masses. Suggestions of satanism, or some mild form of black magic, haunt Ms. Perl’s calculations. (176)

The narrators continue to complain about Ms. Perl’s prolific unreliability: she writes an article every two or three days for two weeks, and she shifts her tone from the sympathetic register of a fellow mourner to the steely precision of what she never succeeded in being: an investigative reporter. . . . she cobbled together reminiscences into an airtight conclusion, far less truthful than our own, which is full of holes. (222)

The dangling modifier here brilliantly reveals the narrators’ complicity in actions which they criticize: Ms. Perl’s and the media’s. That is, while the narrators offer valid complaints about the media’s distortion and intrusiveness, they, too intrude on and distort the girls’ lives—but they only begin to see this toward the end of their narrative. While they confront this complicity shortly, at this point they seem to inadvertently reveal it in the dangling modifier’s double-voicing—perhaps in preparation for their confrontation of their own unreliability.

But the narrators aren’t yet ready to confront their own involvement in the suicides because they are still trying to "investigate them," because they are still more like than unlike Ms. Perl. Gradually, as the boys become more insightful about various approaches to the suicides, they begin to identify with the girls, and this identification helps them recognize the implications of their own behavior:

Once the copycat suicides occurred, the media descended on our street without letup. . . . Each day the reporters attempted to interview Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon, and each day they failed. By showtime, however, they seemed to have gained access to the girls’ very bedrooms. (223-224)

By this point in the narration, the narrators have changed significantly from the early narrators, from the boys who snooped in the girls’ rooms, smelling used underclothes and looking for used tampons, for trophies to tout to their pals. As the narrators’ voices and visions become more informed by their adult perspectives, they begin to acknowledge their similarity with the media:

Like us, [the media] became custodians of the girls’ lives, and had they completed the job to our satisfaction, we might never have been forced to wander aimlessly down the paths of hypothesis and memory. For less and
less did the reporters ask why the girls had killed themselves. Instead, they talked about the girls' hobbies and academic awards. (224)

However, the boys continue to misunderstand the rationale for their own mission—a rationale that changes during their lives and during their narration. The narrators begin the novel from their perspective as boys, seeking, exploring every crevice of the girls and their lives, trying to "score" with them, to know them. But as the novel progresses, the narration is increasingly influenced by the narrators' adult perspectives, by their disgust with how the Lisbons were treated and their identification with the Lisbons: "Every night the reports revealed a new anecdote or photo, but their discoveries bore no relations to what we knew to be true. . . . Knowing the rest of the city accepted the news as gospel only demoralized us further" (emphasis added 225). As the narrators are increasingly aligned with the girls, they feel impeded and co-opted by the media—their competition:

Outsiders, in our opinion, had no right to refer to Cecilia as 'the crazy one,' because they hadn't earned their shorthand by a long distillation of firsthand knowledge. For the first time ever we sympathized with the President because we saw [was it Nixon] how wildly our sphere of influence was misrepresented by those in no position to know what was going on. Even our parents seemed to agree more and more with the television version of things, listening to the reporters' inanities as though they could tell us the truth about our own lives. (225)

Mr. Eugene says, "It was like picking over a corpse after a while. . . . And the liberal media distortion didn't help either. Save the Lisbon girls. Save the snail darter. Bullshit!" (245). While the narrators seem to agree with Mr. Eugene, they do so only after realizing that they, too, have been picked over by and have picked over others. As they recognize the media's scrupulous, intrusive, scrutinizing and unreliability, they recognize the price they, too, pay for the media onslaught and become protective of the girls.

However, as the boys recognize that the media's knowledge and presentation are insufficient, they also come to accept the insufficiency of their own representation and understanding—while still believing that their approaches and conclusions are relatively superior:
We knew that Cecilia had killed herself because she was a misfit, because the beyond called to her, and we knew that her sisters, once abandoned, felt her calling from that place, too. But even as we make these conclusions we feel our throats plugging up, because they are both true and untrue. So much has been written about the girls in the newspapers, so much has been said . . . that we are certain only of the insufficiently of explanations. (247)

Finally, after recognizing their complicity in the media's behavior and the futility of their own efforts, the narrators also, after two decades, articulate and accept their roles not as the girls' objects of desire--which the boys so wanted to be--but as their pet dogs, led on a constructed search:

They made us participate in their own madness, because we couldn't help but retrace their steps, rethink their thoughts, and see that none of them led to us. . . . And we had to smear our muzzles in their last traces. . . . It didn't matter in the end how old they had been, or that they were girls, but only that we had loved them, and that they hadn't heard us calling, still do not hear us, up here in the tree house, with our thinning hair and soft bellies calling them out of those rooms. . . . where we will never find the pieces to put them back together. (248-49)

Conclusion

_The Virgin Suicides_’ illustration of deep loss contrasts starkly with the sardonic tone of grief seen in _Heathers_. However, unlike the other texts in this dissertation, these two texts explicitly contend with the role of media, contagion, and art in promoting suicide. In order to do this--and to reduce their complicity in promoting the tradition--these texts minimize intertextual similarities and eliminate almost all extratextual references, including those to real suicides, thus disenfranchising themselves from the very texts and cultural mechanisms upon which they comment. Perhaps these texts need to deviate from the standard single-protagonist suicide of typical female suicide narratives in order to impugn community and media reactions to the deaths, to problematize suicide contagion, and to explode the tradition of female suicide narratives. Finally, both texts are so extreme in character, form, plot, and tone that they become parodic forms of the objects of their own criticism.
However, no matter how revealing these post-modern commentaries are on the power of suicide narrative, they exist within a powerful, centuries-long tradition of fictional suicide that, as this dissertation will continue to show, is unified by several diverse aspects of narrative. Further, while *Heathers* has attained cult status, cults, by definition, include relatively limited, demarcated populations in very specific subcultures. That is, although *Heathers* was a popular mainstream movie and remains popular to a particular group of viewers, these texts have not attained sustained, mainstream, or canonized status. Although it may take several decades to measure the impact of these more explosive texts on the tradition of female suicide narratives, it appears already that their parodic commentaries are diffused by the larger context of female suicide narratives, one that continues to produce narratives like *Thelma and Louise*, popular, mainstream narratives that continue to unself-consciously deploy more entrenched and, because of their mainstream popularity, trenchant messages about suicide, particularly female suicide. Finally, although this dissertation discusses several kinds of cohesiveness in female suicide texts' characters, themes, and forms, these texts also share a dynamic cohesiveness in their attention to microsimilarities of image, and in their tri-textual undulations. This textual cohesiveness is, then, a principal ingredient in and effect of what I will describe in Chapter 4 as the female suicide masternarrative. Although more recent texts challenge the narratives' tri-textual treatments in ways that parody the masternarrative, these parodies are, at this point, quite limited—especially given the masternarrative's larger reification, a reification partly revealed through its narratives' tri-textual progressions and unities.
NOTES

1. According to Cathy Davidson, although the book was available even after it was withdrawn from the market, it was not widely read.

2. Lu Anne’s mirror scene suggests loosening ego-boundaries with her characters, and, of course, also recalls Susan’s seeing in her mirror the demon and the “reflection of a madwoman” (1897) and Anna’s wondering, while brushing her hair in the mirror, if she is going mad.
"The surprising thing is that Flaubert, who was a man, actually got it."

Drawing by Handelsman; copyright 1995
The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.
Illustration 1
CHAPTER 4

The Female Suicide Masternarrative and its Epistemological Effects

At the age of thirty-seven, she realized she'd never ride through Paris in a sportscar with the warm wind in her hair, so she let the phone keep ringing and she sat there softly singing all the nursery rhymes she'd memorized in Daddy's easy chair.

"The Ballad of Lucy Jordan"

Introduction

Before I contend in chapters five and six with the particular messages delivered by the masternarrative's thematics, character, and structure, let me continue to explore the general potential for these narratives to affect psychosocial, cultural, and epistemological norms and understandings. If we consider Chapter 2's sociological arguments and empirical evidence for why we should be concerned about fictional suicide narratives and Chapter 3's arguments that these narratives are cohesively unified at least in their intertextual references, then it makes sense to problematize not only what appears to be a mass of similar female suicide narratives, but also their epistemological force and their potential narrative consequences.

Handelsman's cartoon (1995; see illustration 1), an illustration of a mother reading *Madame Bovary* to her daughter for a bedtime story, with the caption, "The surprising thing is that Flaubert, who was a man, actually got it," comments on men's ability to understand women's issues. Although its comment on the role of novels as teaching tools is meant to be farcical--no parent would read *Madame Bovary* for a child's bedtime story--the farce depends upon some acceptance that
literature can be personally informing, and the farce is obtained by the cartoon's unrealistic reading situation, not by a denial of the potential epistemological force of narrative, but by an essential recognition of the possibility that narratives affect social learning and that they can construct important beliefs about myths and sex roles.

However, Shel Silverstein's song, "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan," makes some indirect reference to a more situationally-realistic possibility for girls' narrative instruction in its chorus: "At the age of thirty-seven, she realized she'd never ride through Paris in a sportscar with the warm wind in her hair, so she let the phone keep ringing, and she sat there softly singing all the nursery rhymes she'd memorized in Daddy's easy chair." Although Lucy may be trying to console herself by singing songs that she associates with her father's comfort (and note, that in the cartoon, the girl's room is decorated with a picture of a little girl standing in front of a house), the context in which Lucy consoles herself suggests that Lucy's adult life, (including her house and her "white suburban bedroom in a white suburban town") may have failed to meet some of the promises suggested by the nursery rhymes or the context in which she memorized them--perhaps either the promises of the rhymes themselves or of a larger patriarchal protection and comfort. At thirty-seven, Lucy, has, after all, what is stereotypically associated with a grown woman's "fairy tale," a comfortable house with gardens and children, a husband whose income enables her to stay home and enjoy her fairy-tale role of wife and mother. This role, of course, is not enough for her, and Lucy jumps off the roof.

Finally, perhaps both the cartoon and the song's chorus suggest that it might behoove us--as twentieth-century critics and writers, and in light of later twentieth-century research on suicide contagion--to reconsider the potential consequences of narrative, at least of suicide narratives. While sociologists have studied, as noted in Chapter 2, the role of fictional narrative on suicide contagion, these studies have been limited. In 1971, at the beginning of sociologists' more focused attention to contagion, Calvin Frederick and H. L. P. Resnik said, "To date, there has not been a single article dealing specifically with suicidal behaviors as learned behaviors nor
any reference to treatment technique based on learning theory" (37). Since then, as I will discuss in later chapters, Raymond Jack (1992) and others have explored the therapeutic role of cognitive restructuring and attributional retraining in the treatment of suicidal individuals. While this work is new, recent, and significant, my effort here is to reiterate the point that contemporary sociologists do, indeed, recognize that suicide is a learned behavior, and that this behavior can be compelled by fictional narratives.

This mutually-informing relationship between fictional and real suicide may also be evident in the "mass" dynamic of both real and fictional suicide. As I have shown in Chapter 3, fictional suicide narratives have, indeed, established a collective coherence with each other in relation to their various textualities and their commentary on art, media, and suicide. Indeed, these fictions seem to produce a "mass effect" similar to the one David Lester's 1988 article describes in regard to suicide. After studying world suicide rates from 1970 to 1980, Lester identified a "critical mass" phenomenon in suicide, concluding that "nations with higher suicide rates experienced greater increase in their suicide rates" (279). He hypothesized that a given suicide rate creates a certain amount of publicity about suicide and a particular likelihood that a person in the society knows someone who has committed suicide. Once the suicide rate reaches a critical level, the publicity and probability of knowing suicides increase to such an extent that the effect of suggestion (or imitation) makes the behavior self sustaining and perhaps accelerates it. (279-80)

Lester's explanation of the critical mass in suicide contagion relies upon the private and public narration of true suicide stories to people, who, modeling themselves after decedents, then increase the suicidal mass. Perhaps a critical mass effect is also responsible for sustaining the diachronic, cross-cultural reproduction of similar fictional female suicide narratives, for this subgenre, the existence of which depends upon and thrives because of various "mass" effects: its support by several authors, its reproduction in the mass media, and its consumption by mass audiences—especially, for instance, by large viewing audiences.
Having acquired its own critical mass, this subgenre then perpetuates and masters itself and its context—its thematic efforts, characterizations, narrative structures, and its consumers. I have discussed in Chapter 3 various ways in which the subgenre’s texts inform each others’ imagery and some of their thematic treatments, and later chapters will explicate other similarities of theme and structure. But this subgenre of narrative is so strong that not only are similar female suicide narratives reproduced throughout the centuries, but narratives are rewritten to incorporate female suicide in them. For instance, in James Fenimore Cooper’s 1826 novel, Alice Monro returns safely to England, but in the 1993 movie version of *The Last of the Mohicans*, she commits suicide by jumping off a cliff.

And sometimes the narratives explicitly reveal the masternarrative’s strength within the individual narrative. For instance, early in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance*, Coverdale says that Zenobia’s name "is merely her public name; a sort of mask in which she comes before the world, retaining all the privileges of privacy" (8). The editor’s footnote says:

Praised for her beauty and intelligence, the historical Zenobia was probably responsible for the murder of her husband and his son by a former marriage; she then ruled Palmyra in the name of her infant son. Under her rule, Palmyran armies conquered Egypt in A.D. 269 and the next year overran Asia Minor. Her armies were finally defeated and the queen and her son captured by Aurelian, who granted the queen a pension and a villa at Tibur. (n. 8 p. 250)

This note may encourage us to wonder about the fate of Hawthorne’s Zenobia—who is beautiful, intelligent, and who foregoes a surname. It even invites us to wonder if she may be held responsible for the death of her husband and stepson—but it does not invite us to anticipate her suicide.

While the narrative elements of female suicide narrative are overdetermined in a variety of ways that I will further discuss in chapters five and six, let me now return to a more general discussion about the possible epistemological effect of female suicide narratives. The messages delivered by individual female suicide texts are compounded by what I will call the *female suicide masternarrative*, the
diachronic, cross-cultural pattern for the fictional story of a woman's suicide that arises from the convergence of similar actions, techniques, themes, plots, and characterizations across the class of female suicide narratives from the last two centuries and that informs fictional depictions of female suicide, as well as real people's behavior, beliefs, and knowledge regarding suicide. Although the female suicide masternarrative is the subject of this dissertation, let me digress momentarily to more fully discuss the general concepts of masternarrative and narrative consequences.

Narratives effect observable consequences in a variety of ways. Recall from Chapter 2 Johann Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which resulted in a particularly infamous sequence of suicide modeling. For a more contemporary and short-lived example of a narrative producing striking narrative consequences, consider the rise in NYC gang violence on the nights following the 1979 showings of Walter Hill's contemporary gang film *The Warriors*. I vividly recall reading several newspaper reports about the violence that theater viewers perpetuated and suffered immediately after watching the film—which is "Notorious for the number of violent incidents it allegedly instigated in theaters" (Maltin 1456).

Although the violence following *The Warriors* generally involved male violence, women's bodies seem particularly subject to a variety of narrative consequences. For instance, for decades voluptuousness had been a standard feature of North American concepts of female beauty (excluding the hiatus during the 1920s flapper period), but, following the 1962 release of Stanley Kubrick's popular film *Lolita*, North American definitions of female beauty became--and remain--dominated by the image of thin, adolescent-like, even pre-pubescent body types. This film played one role in exacting more contemporary changes in the concept of American female beauty, but the American female body was also affected by another long-lasting example of narrative consequences. Although women rodeo riders had been regular competitors on rodeo circuits during the century and into the twentieth century, when western film director Gene Autry excluded representations of women riders in his films, women were eliminated from real rodeo competitions (LeCompt).
In both cases and in compelling ways, narrative contributed to the forces that construct the perceptions and uses of the female body. However, while I am interested in how narrative consequences affect and effect human behavior, in order to satisfy my conceptualization of "masternarrative," narratives must effect human behavior and other narratives. This, of course, immediately poses two questions: first, how do we quantifiably define what it means to "master" people or narratives (that is, how many people or narratives must be affected, and how similarly, before narratives are "masternarratives"); and, second, how readily observable or exactly quantifiable must trends in behavior or narrative be in order for them to be considered mutually informing and influential?

First, it is not necessary for there to be absolute, measured, or even measurable correlations between any one particular narrative and any one kind of behavior in order for one to argue the existence of a masternarrative. Indeed, the nature of suicide studies precludes such absolute measurements: as discussed in Chapter 2, psychological autopsies do not necessarily include narrative reviews--and even if they did, psychological autopsies, while attempting to construct a picture of the deceased's life (and, of course, a life that presumably already involves more isolation than average), rely entirely upon information obtained from witnesses to that life, not from the life or death itself. Psychological autopsies are inherently incomplete, and, while they may identify some anecdotal associations between narrative exposure and the beliefs about and practices of suicide, they cannot deny such influences simply because the deceased's friends and family may not be aware of them.

Nevertheless, studies--such as those on suicide contagion, Mary Lou LeCompt's on the effect of movie westerns, and Vito Russo's book and Epstein's and Friedman's film The Celluloid Closet on how the depiction of homosexuals in American films has affected behavior clearly--illustrate a direct correlation between some kinds of artistic and news events and related trends in human behavior and perceptions. Moreover, even if particular texts or acts can or could be scientifically counted, how many acts of any particular behavior or how many like narratives
would quantifiably define or suggest the influence of a masternarrative? I can't be sure—which is both a limitation and an asset. Indeed, I want to resist positivist, definitive treatments of narrative consequences and the masternarrative because, while my project illustrates the fruitfulness of interdisciplinary approaches to narrative and of approaching narrative studies with some attention to measurable trends, part of the difficulty, the challenge, and, I believe, the value of this project is its theoretical and methodological concern with relativeness and trends, with its attention to the relationship between concise, clearly observable narrative characteristics and larger, less absolutely or perfectly quantified trends in both narrative and behavior.

Furthermore, given the many combinations of the different ways in which, degrees to which, and amounts to which both human behavior and narrative are related, one could speculate indefinitely about the minimal requirements necessary in order to classify any one narrative or any body of like narratives as masternarrative constructs. So, at this time, let me divert attention from questions of minimal requirements for masternarratives and propose, instead, a relative, even humanistic, way of looking at kinds of narratives and behaviors, a way that invites others to consider each possibility independently rather than within a definition that attempts to constrain this theory with an absoluteness more appropriate to the hard sciences. It seems to me that this approach to the concept of masternarrative is also wise because, while, clearly, some element of any discussion of masternarrative must rely on some empirical knowledge about human behavior, the world, fortunately, precludes concise, absolute computations of relationships between many kinds of cultural influences on human behavior. Having complicated considerations of what any group of narratives must do in order to be classified as cronies of a masternarrative, let me reiterate that for me, a masternarrative must, at least, affect a significant collective of human behavior and human narratives; I will charge the reader with defining "significant."

Finally, having devoted some attention to defining the masternarrative, and in anticipation of my discussion of the female suicide masternarrative, let me
emphasize that a masternarrative is never one single narrative. I mean this in two ways. First, no one particular narrative can be a masternarrative because the effects of any particular masternarrative must be illustrated in a collective of narratives. Furthermore, because the very concept of masternarrative relies upon observable trends that are distributed in diverse ways throughout a collection of narratives that also maintain their own, individual differences in the narratives and in our responses to them, it is impossible to identify which one particular narrative of that group of narratives is The Master. Thus, while I will describe the female suicide masternarrative, I will cull its defining elements from a collective of female suicide narratives in which individual texts share many of the masternarrative's elements, but in which not one narrative abides by all of them. In this way, while the female suicide masternarrative powerfully exists, there is no—and there can never be a—paragonal title embodying it. Thus, my project offers readings of several texts in order to describe and illustrate the force and fluidity of this masternarrative and its very immaterial, but consequential, presence. However, the female suicide masternarrative may be the paragon of masternarrative because these narratives share, as will become clear throughout this project, a host of characteristics and because suicide contagion potentiates its collective and individual narratives' effects—its potential for narrative consequences in such dire ways. While not all fictional female suicide narratives satisfy all of the conditions of the female suicide masternarrative, several satisfy enough of the masternarrative's prerogatives to establish telling and troublesome patterns both in plot, theme, and in traditional concepts of character. If we consider the similarities among The Awakening's Edna, Madame Bovary's Emma, Anna Karenina's Anna, "To Room 19"'s Susan, and others, a character trend emerges which is compelling in its own right and which, through its composite constructions, theoretically defines the model female suicide protagonists. Again, although the protagonists maintain their individual distinctions, they are generally caucasian women in their twenties and thirties who rarely ask for help or indicate their suicidal feelings or intentions to others, do not agonize over or resist suicidal feelings because of their concern for others, do not establish elaborate
plans for committing suicide, forego suicide notes, commit suicide impulsively and with their first attempts, and almost always die in the last moments of the narrative. If they are mothers, they are detached from their children, but they often ensure that their children will be cared for after their deaths. While some of the protagonists are in dire financial straits, most are financially secure, although they are dependent upon men for that security. The protagonists are also emotionally dependent upon men—or the idea of romantic connection with a man: they are passionate women who are in unhappy, usually traditional, heterosexual relationships and who commit suicide after interrelational failure, impasse, or loss occurs, often after either being abandoned or rejected by a primary love interest.

These trends of plot, character, and theme—which I will more fully discuss in following chapters— influence and often predetermine our reading experiences. They involve not only the deaths of particular kinds of protagonists, but the formulation and embodiment of protagonists’ lives and deaths around a separate, external but very influential body of pre-texts whose endoskeleton is the sole act of a female protagonist’s suicide. And the result of this narrative contagion is a powerful masternarrative which then grows outside of itself or extends to the exterior of the whole to become a kind of exoskeleton supporting and framing the substance and form of individual texts, as well as its own frame—the expansive frame of the entire textual corpus. As such, the endoskeletal act of female suicide supports a more expansive yet elusive, self-serving exoskeletal mastertext that extends beyond the act of female suicide to encompass other components of narrative, culture, real behavior, and even "factual" understandings about women and suicide.

The masternarrative reveals its coherence and strength in several ways, not the least of which is how its breadth allows for diversity in its texts. I have already discussed some of its intertextual coherences in Chapter 3 and, earlier in this chapter, the masternarrative’s overdetermination of The Last of the Mohicans. Further, some of the masternarrative’s elements transcend categories of genre and appear in songs, films, short stories, and novels. Even within genres, the masternarrative allows for great diversity: clearly, the tones, authors, and implied
authors of Doris Lessing’s "To Room 19" (1963) and Yukio Mishima’s "Patriotism" (1960) differ significantly from each other. However, Susan and Reiko, in many ways antithetical characters, experience similar situations: both are housewives who are abandoned, discarded by their husbands for others, both die at the end of their stories. Moreover, the female suicide master-narrative is so strong that, even though the protagonists of some texts—such as The House of Mirth and Children of Light, which I discuss in this dissertation—kill themselves in ambiguous situations, the texts are classified as female suicide texts.

Indeed, the master-narrative’s presence is so strong that Alice Fulton’s "Queen Wintergreen" (1992) ends with its fully alive, conscious protagonist, Peg Mearns suddenly stepping into a large river, her long skirt becoming heavy with water—and Peg clearly on the brink of an assured suicide. Although "Queen Wintergreen" is very different from the typical female suicide texts, Fulton’s narrative does everything but confirm Peg’s suicide. Margaret Mearns is aging and debilitated, does not want to burden her son by living with him, has no place where she can live independently, and wants to "flee" from what, having accepted his marriage proposal, she feels is her obligation to marry Jarvis. She also believes that death rejoins loved ones, and, remembering her first, beloved husband, on a "perfect" night, "calm and desolate," she puts down her cane and steps, fully dressed, into a river, thinking as she does so that she "never understood why a person was urged to pray for the souls of the faithful departed." But she begins to pray the Act of Contrition, "easing herself into the state waterway, which at first felt coldly foreign, then as her skirts turned to fetters, warmer, more familiar" (75-76). Further, in the notes to the collection, Alice Fulton writes of the inception of the story, of reading about her great-grandmother’s death and being "chilled by the recurrence of certain extraordinary events across the generations." Fulton does not clarify what these events are, but says, "the facts formed deep structural repetitions" and mentions the vanished Irish-American culture, with its "mild heroics" (366).

As I will show, the female suicide master-narrative has mastered itself in a variety of ways, has developed and contained its structures and myths such that they
have thrived and may continue to thrive for centuries. While most of the particular narratives do not explicitly introduce the notion of suicide contagion (see Chapter 3), the narratives themselves are perpetuated by a critical mass effect whereby particular female suicide narratives are pre-configured by their intertextual predecessors. And, while most female suicide narratives do not explicitly expound on the notion of suicide, in this process of textual contagion, one wonders if the "mass-effect" of suicide in fiction exacerbates the theoretical threat of suicide contagion through fictional representations of suicide; that is, if the collective of female suicide texts develops its own unified mass of narrative energy that masters fictional protagonists and that, potentiated by the phenomenon of suicide contagion, acquires the potential power to master real women's lives. Before I examine the particular components and dynamics of the female suicide masternarrative in succeeding chapters, I would like to theoretically explore—with the help of earlier formalists, structuralists, and Marxists—how this masternarrative nourishes itself and has the potential to influence the psychosocial development of real individuals and of larger societies.

Historicizing "Masternarrative"

Historic-geographic folklorists—influenced by Antii Aarne and Kaarle Krohn, Finnish folklorists; Vladimir Propp, a Russian formalist; and, later, Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French structuralist—attempted, in their classification of texts and their variances, to discover, describe, and log the progression of urtexts, textual archetypes they believed existed at one time, even if they had become contemporaneously inaccessible. The historic-geographic folklorists believed that, by classifying variants of a particular story, they could hypothetically reconstruct at least an approximation of the original, albeit extinct, narrative. In the case of female suicide narratives, it appears that, because the masternarrative has been disseminated and deployed so ubiquitously and because it is a theoretical construct based on a compilation of similar, but also different, narratives, it would be practically and theoretically impossible to identify its original birthplace or form. That is, since the female suicide masternarrative is a theoretical construct compiled by several texts, it
can never be located in or originated from one text. Furthermore, given the
tenacious, diachronic and cross-cultural manifestations of particular elements of
many female suicide narratives, it would seem that, at the least, essential parts of the
urform of female suicide narratives are, unlike the alleged urforms of other texts,
readily available to us in contemporary forms, that they have calcified rather than
dissolved throughout the centuries. I am, therefore, not interested in trying to
discover an archetype of the female suicide masternarrative, but in understanding
how the shared elements of individual narratives combine to create the cross-cultural
masternarrative that thrives today and how they function in the construction of
women’s realities.

Nevertheless, in important ways, my approach is influenced by Propp’s
Morphology of the Folktale (1928), in which he identifies a predictable, fixed,
mandatory sequence of thirty-one acts or "functions" in Russian folktales, focusing
on their units of narrative structure, on how they relate to each other and the whole.
I, too, aim to locate structural similarities in female suicide narratives, but the only
mandatory criterion for inclusion in my corpus is that a main, female character
actively and intentionally kills herself. While this act defines my textual corpus, I
am equally interested in the narrative trends that accompany it and how they relate
to trends in real suicide, even if these narrative trends do not abide by the strict rules
of occurrence or placement to which Propp held his Russian folktales. Furthermore,
while Propp shows how the same act can have different roles in different tales—for
example, how killing someone can be an act of heroism in one tale, but an act of
villainy in another—I want to problematize our perceptions of the act of female
suicide, to see this act—which some critics view as an act of empowerment—as an
ambiguous and ambivalent act occurring within a larger, controlling process, an act
that has different roles and meanings within the same text. Finally, while Propp
focuses on elements of plot, my concerns begin with plot similarities and extend to
issues of character, theme, authorship, audience and to the larger social
consequences of narrative.
While there are substantial differences in the nature of Propp's work with folktales and my work with female suicide narratives, it is useful to respond to some of the criticism of Propp's method and of structuralism in general. Fredric Jameson criticizes Propp's work for being tautological in its corpus, resulting in a self-validating structural homology. Jameson claims that Propp's focus on structural similarities excludes those texts which do not belong and, thus, "triumphantly validate[s] the corpus with which he began!" (P.U. 120). At first, Jameson's accusation makes sense, but it loses ground if we are familiar with the texts and the masternarrative in question. To focus on textual commonalities in an attempt to understand their collective impact is not to deny individual texts their differences, but to set them aside temporarily in order to perform a different hermeneutic task, one that also has implications for how we understand the texts' differences. Given the entrenched similarities in the narrative techniques of female suicide narratives, it seems to me that the more pressing task is to delve into those textual trenches and take a good look at them. Furthermore, the very attempt to explicate dominant narrative similarities requires exactly that which Jameson criticizes: selective textual circularity. While there are female suicide narratives or texts which diverge from the trends on which I will focus, my corpus, if it is to be instructive about the masternarrative strategies, must be inherently homologous. Indeed, within this corpus, it is impossible to avoid some degree of homology—and that is exactly the impetus for and the point of the project.

Other critics have warned about the "rewriting" of texts through structuralist analysis. Jameson denounces:

a system of allegorical interpretation in which the data of one narrative line are radically impoverished by their rewriting according to the paradigm of another narrative, which is taken as the former's master code or ur-narrative and proposed as the ultimate hidden or unconscious meaning to the first one. (22)

Further, he says:

both the insufficient formalization of [Propp's] model (its anthropomorphic traces) and the irreversibility it attributes to its functions are different aspects of the same basic error: namely to have rewritten the primary narratives in
terms of another narrative, rather than in terms of a synchronic system. [1]n
this Propp rejoins Frye, whose 'method' also amounts to the rewriting of a
body of varied texts in the form of a single master narrative. (122)

According to Jameson, the object of study is "the interpretations through which we
attempt to appropriate the text more than the text itself," and interpretation

is here construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting
a given text in terms of a particular interpretive master code. The
identification of the latter will then lead to an evaluation of such codes, or, in
other words, of the 'methods' or approaches current in American literary and
cultural study today. (10)

Inherent in his commentary is a critique of such re-writing, essentially, of literary
criticism:

Leaving aside for the moment the possibility of any genuinely immanent
criticism, we will assume that a criticism which asks the question 'What does
it mean?' constitutes something like an allegorical operation in which a text
is systematically rewritten in terms of some fundamental master code or
'ultimately determining instance.' On this view, then, all 'interpretation' in
the narrower sense demands the forcible or imperceptible transformation of a
given text into an allegory of its particular master code or 'transcendental
signified': the discredit into which interpretation has fallen is thus at one with
the disrepute visited on allegory itself. (58)

Indeed, to interpret select elements of texts is, in some ways, to re-write them
if one equates the acts of re-presenting texts and of prioritizing and focusing one's
exploration with the act of rewriting texts. However, the term rewriting also
suggests the inherently opposing notions of copying, repeating, changing,
appropriating, even violating or perverting. While it seems fair that Jameson
criticizes narratives that unselfconsciously allege historically accurate representations,
representation and criticism usually require some focus if they are to be accessible.
Jameson is right to question the codes that compel and construct our interpretations,
but this questioning is not necessarily paramount to textual violation. His "re-
writing" is inevitable in all re-envisioning, and it becomes counterproductive to
attack the general idea of interpretive codes, codes which, like psychological defense
mechanisms, are essential if we are to maintain some shared coherences. While
such codes, focuses, and biases can be grossly distorting, they can also facilitate
important understandings. Finally, to ask what female suicides mean—and what their masternarrative means—is to assume the existence of some kind of allegorical code from the outset. However, interpreting individual female suicide texts and their mastertext within this grand interpretive allegorical code requires a systematic identification and assessment of the masternarrative, of how both the textual masternarrative is rewritten and how the interpretive master code is culturally codified.

On a similar note, Seymour Chatman, a narratologist, says:

[T]o transfer Propp's and Todorov's method to any narrative macrostructure whatsoever is questionable. Most [narratives] do not have the necessary overarching recurrences. . . . I do not mean that Formalist-Structuralist theories of macrostructural analysis are not valuable. . . . , [but] that they must not form Procrustean beds that individual narratives cannot sleep in. (92-93)

My intention is not to force individual texts into a single Procrustean bed, but to gather them together in order to make inductive sense of what has become a tradition of shared narrative techniques, of the conditions which have come to accompany, characterize, and define the act of female suicide, and to contend with larger issues of narrative action and consequence. Individual female suicide narratives need not satisfy all of the trends of the masternarrative in order for them to contribute to our understanding of its construction, its collective impact or meaning, or for me to claim that, even as individual narratives diverge from the masternarrative, they have been influenced by and are complicit in it.

While Propp has been charged with being purely classificatory, too empirical, insufficiently abstract, and with overlooking the deep narrative structure and meaning of the tales (Lévi-Strauss, Jameson 120-22), his method has also been praised for "the possibility it offered of reducing a wealth of empirical or surface narrative events to a much smaller number of abstract or 'deep-structural' moments," a reduction that allows us "to compare narrative texts which seem very different from one another" and "to simplify a single involved narrative into redundant surface manifestations of a single recurrent function" (Jameson 120). Female suicide
narratives, by definition, share a single, recurrent function such that, with their many differences, they invite comparison.

And, while Chatman is right to observe that "structuralist taxonomies rest on the forms rather than substances of narrative content" (89), structuralist observations also invite an interpretive extension into narrative content and meaning. For instance, in "Structural Analysis of Myth" Lévi-Strauss utilizes and then surpasses structural classification to analyze the Oedipus myth and Indian face paint decorations. Jameson says of Lévi-Strauss's interpretation of Indian face painting:

The starting point will be an immanent description of the formal and structural peculiarities of this body art; yet it must be a description already pre-prepared and oriented toward transcending the purely formalistic, a movement which is achieved not by abandoning the purely formalistic for something extrinsic to it . . . but rather immanently, by construing purely formal patterns as a symbolic enactment of the social within the formal and the aesthetic. (77)

Such is the case with female suicide narratives, whose formal patterns become our access road to the interrelationships of the social and the aesthetic in the narratives themselves, as well as in the larger social reality of non-fictional worlds. Indeed, the form, story, plot, and character of female suicide narratives are inextricably related to their content, meaning, message, and social impact—and it is because of the sustained and influential link that I link master and narrative to create masternarrative.

This syntactic reconstruction also suggests the semantic differences between my concept of masternarrative, Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the grand narratives, and Jameson's concept of master narratives, while suggesting points of convergence in the three terms. In The Postmodern Condition (1979), Lyotard discusses the obsolete, hypothetical grand narratives of speculation and legitimation—the "traditional" and "new" roles of "grand narratives" in the legitimation of scientific knowledge. And, in The Political Unconscious (1981), Fredric Jameson examines the ways in which the "underground" master narratives in our political unconscious help construct scientific and historical knowledge. Both focus on the
role of narrative in the legitimation and construction of scientific and historical knowledge, and both concern themselves primarily with the buried, abstract existence and effects of narrative on scientific knowledge.

Jameson's and Fredric's concepts are theoretically and pragmatically different from my notions about and concerns with the female suicide master-narrative's historical, but also current and future influence on lives, behavior, and knowledge. Indeed, consumers of female suicide texts are quietly enculturated with the master-narrative code that, unlike Propp's audience of Russian folktales, they need not be "devotees" of the texts to anticipate the codes. They may even be unconscious about their cultural literacy with female suicide texts, both with their expectations for and assumptions about particular texts, as well as their concomitant expectations of, knowledge of, judgments toward, and reactions to suicidal women. My effort will move toward an exploration of the thematic interpretation and epistemological impact of these texts—of their narrative consequences in fiction and reality. However, although my notion of master-narrative differs in important ways from Lyotard's and Jameson's concern with the buried, abstract existence and effects of narrative, their theories also facilitate my discussion about more concrete and contemporary narratives and master-narratives, especially in relation to how the female suicide master-narrative constructs behavioral and sociological knowledge. While I will discuss the master-narrative's observable textual characteristics in later chapters, for the remainder of this one, I will, with the help of Lyotard and Jameson, explore how narrative can function epistemologically in our psychosocial processes, particularly how individual female suicide narratives, beginning as fiction, can collectively acquire characteristics of allegory, biography, and history, and can then, in their collective, assume mythic proportions that influence real people.

Narrative as Epistemology: Master-narratives as Legitimators of Knowledge

Jameson's notion of the master code or master narrative is in many ways a direct extension of Lyotard's grand narratives. However, while Lyotard argues that in modern times narrative has been reintroduced as a legitimator of knowledge (30).
Jameson argues that the "'scientific' periods of history" are characterized by "the relative retreat of the claims of narrative or storytelling knowledge in the face of those of the abstract, denotative, or logical and cognitive procedures generally associated with science or positivism" (in Lyotard xi; emphasis added). But Jameson revises his view and finally argues that, while there is actually a "revival of an essentially narrative view of 'truth,'" "the vitality of small narrative units at work everywhere locally in the present social system, are accompanied by something like a more global or totalizing 'crisis' in the narrative function in general." According to Jameson, the "older master-narratives of legitimation no longer function in the service of scientific research--nor, by implication, anywhere else." Jameson resolves the seeming contradiction that narrative functions vitally at the local level yet is in crisis on the global level by positing that "the great master-narratives" have not disappeared, but gone "underground" to our "political unconscious," where they continue to affect our actions and thought (in Lyotard xi-xii), and, since the master narratives function within our political unconscious, the "object of study is less the text itself than the interpretations through which we attempt to appropriate it" (9).

However, with female suicide narratives, the texts and our interpretations of them are equally at issue because, while the master-narrative of female suicide influences our actions and thoughts on an unconscious level, it also manifests itself on a very conscious, concrete level--and it is in both places that this master-narrative constructs a very different kind of knowledge than the one of which Lyotard and Jameson speak, not a scientific knowledge (although, as I suggest in chapters one and five, psychosocial biases surely have influenced the "empirical" knowledge of female suicide, which seem to be informed by their own master-narrative of female suicide), but a personal, interpersonal and psychosocial knowledge which is in direct contradiction to some empirically-defined demographics. So, in contrast to Lyotard's and Jameson's primary interest in the obsolete narratives of legitimation and the buried narratives of our unconscious, my interest is not in rehistoricizing extinct grand narratives, but in explicating why the dead protagonists of female suicide narratives have "thrived" in their master-narrative and how they have
participated in the construction and legitimation of particular kinds of knowledge
and beliefs about real suicidal women. While Lyotard says that, in the "language
game of science," the game of dialogue involves "an indirect recognition that it is a
question of a game and not a destiny" (28), the language and narrative dynamic of
the female suicide masternarrative for some women, become destiny.

My concern is with the dynamic of the particular, explicit narrative texts,
with the underlying cultural narratives and trends that enable and even encourage
women to meet the female suicide masternarrative, and with society's embrace of
taboo against against female suicide. While we can still use some of Emile
Durkheim's theories to understand the context within which people commit suicide--
for instance, the social isolation and deregulation that enables them to ignore the
social constraints--we must also recognize that the same society that allegedly
substantiates anti-suicide messages also insidiously and chronically compels female
suicide through its media, its myths, its narratives. Lyotard says:

The state spends large amounts of money to enable science to pass itself off as
an epic: the State's own credibility is based on that epic, which it uses to
obtain the public consent its decision makers need. It is not inconceivable
that the recourse to narrative is inevitable, at least to the extent that the
language game of science desires its statements to be true but does not have
the resources to legitimate their truth on its own. (28)

In female suicide texts, the state is not "the state" of which Lyotard speaks, but a
state, a misogynist condition that exerts a great deal of energy passing itself off as
an epic through which to gain public consent about gender roles so that the totality
of the masternarrative is then used to perpetuate views against suicidal women, to
concurrently glorify them and indict them, to perpetuate both a sort of epic
protagonist, a Suicidal Woman, and a consensus about this protagonist, her
counterparts, and her destiny. And this consensus is then continually rearticulated in
the narratives, creating a mutually reinforcing loop of legitimation through narrative
which is used destructively to define women's positions and values within the very
culture that produces its fictional characters, its real women, and its understandings
and interpretations about both.

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Indeed, according to Barbara Gates, "although, by mid century, the facts themselves were clear: throughout the nineteenth century women consistently had a suicide rate lower than that of men," "For the most part, fictions about women and suicide became more prevalent and seemed more credible than did facts" (125). She says that women were "fictionalized," and that suicide was "displaced" to women (125), that, regardless of the facts, "most Victorians believed what they wished to believe about the frequency of female suicide" because they "wanted and expected suicide, like madness, to be a 'female malady'" (125). Gates says that "Repeated representations of women and water and women and flight confirmed the statistical knowledge of female means of suicide. . . . Yet the profusion of images also helped perpetuate the inaccurate myth of frequency of female suicide" (143), and that "Beliefs about women and suicide were ingrained in women as well as men--so ingrained that women opted to live them out" (148).

As the female suicide masternarrative validates its own truths (especially with the help of suicide contagion), two things are mutually reinforced: the narratives' form and the psychosocial products of the culture that sustain that form. That is, in the same way that Lyotard argues that the traditional role narrative has played in legitimizing scientific knowledge "gives ammunition to narrative by virtue of its own form" (29), each female suicide narrative adds to the masternarrative's arsenal, further reifying it. Furthermore, contrary to Lyotard's description of traditional narrative knowledge, the "knowledge" represented in female suicide narratives, if it is to be convincing, requires--and has attained--a cumulative progression and a pretense of universality, which, because it is sometimes satisfied and validated, then supports and conjoins the narratives' foundations of form and character (30).

Thus, the knowledge purveyed by the female suicide masternarrative both remains on our heels and, with its critical mass, rolls before us. In modern science, Lyotard notes that the search for a first proof or a transcendental authority has been abandoned in attempts to determine "who decides the conditions of truth," that such conditions or "the rules of the game of science, are immanent in that game," that "they can only be established within the bonds of a debate that is already scientific.
in nature, and that there is no other proof that the rules are good than the consensus extended to them by the experts" (29). Again, Lyotard argues that, with modernity, narrative has been reintroduced as a validator of knowledge. That there is a renewed dignity for narrative (popular) cultures... Narration is no longer an involuntary lapse in the legitimation process. The explicit appeal to narrative in the problematic of knowledge is concomitant with the liberation of the bourgeois classes from the traditional authorities. Narrative knowledge makes a resurgence in the West as a way of solving the problem of legitimating the new authorities. It is natural in a narrative problematic for such a question to solicit the name of a hero as its response: Who has the right to decide for society? Who is the subject whose prescriptions are norms for those they oblige? (30)

Similarly, the conditions that purvey the "truth" found in the female suicide masternarrative are also part and parcel of the masternarrative, are dependent upon the its protagonists or "heroines" who illustrate cultural and authorial assumptions--and who, by authorial consensus, but, contrary to what happens in real life, will commit suicide far more often than fictional men, will fail to indicate their suicidal intentions to others before committing suicide, and will not consider the effects their suicides will have on their surviving friends and family members. This heroine's truth prescribes quite sustained beliefs and behavior systems for protagonists, but, in vital ways, this same truth, while intersecting with and informing real women's sense of interrelational self, does not accurately reflect real women's experiences with the act of suicide.

However, as I discuss in Chapter 5, this is a complicated intersection: although the masternarrative does not quantitatively represent women's experiences with suicidal behavior, it qualitatively represents some part of historical women's suicidal conditions and paths. This narrative representation, coupled with the force of suicide contagion, has compounded and complicated the masternarrative's consequences for the experiences of real women, consequences which are inextricably related to the masternarrative's deflections and reflections of real women's experiences with sexual love and suicide. And, because of the general phenomenon of suicide contagion, these texts--although numerically exaggerated--
may serve as suicide models for real women such that the fictional texts may actually proportionally close their unreliability gap.

While I will detail these complications more fully later, for now let me explore how, even as the masternarrative misrepresents some of the suicidal practices of historical women, it becomes, through its narrative power, complicit with the phenomenon of suicide contagion in promoting suicide and in propagating negative views of suicidal women. Lyotard says, "the name of the hero is the people, the sign of legitimacy is the people's consensus" (30). In describing the legitimation of scientific knowledge and the establishment of norms in this way, Lyotard is also, in some ways, describing narrative's role in suicide contagion. In the female suicide masternarrative, the heroine's norm becomes the people's norm--first, other heroines' norms, then the "assumed" norms of real people. That is, even as real women do not emulate most of the behaviors and characteristics of The Suicidal Woman, the narrative reification of such norms establishes a cultural context in which historically real suicidal women are considered and judged.

Thus, the "people" of the masternarrative become "the operators of . . . knowledge": since women kill themselves in this way and under these circumstances, they will kill themselves in this way and under these circumstances. With each act of suicide, the suicidal "norm" of women is further advanced, and the form of the masternarrative, of this text which is grossly unreliable in important ways, gains deliberate momentum and acquires the status of pseudo truth. Because of its role in the purveyance of some inaccurate sociological proportions, the masternarrative, over time, legitimizes, valorizes, and establishes epic untruths about suicidal women which are validated, by repetition, as truths and which acquire the truth status of myth, a myth externalized in the culture and internalized by the consumers of that culture.³

For instance, in female suicide narratives, one legitimated knowledge is that women have and are nothing without positive interpersonal connection, especially heterosexual romantic connection. But this belief system, while predominantly held by and about women in real life, especially those women who do indeed commit
suicide in response to interrelational loss, is also a primary cause of male suicide: as I will detail in Chapter 5, men commit suicide more often after divorce or widowhood than women do, with women usually committing suicide less after divorce or widowhood than during marriage. Nevertheless, as The Suicidal Woman gains critical mass among authors and heroines, her suicide experience becomes the consensus for behavioral learning and the consensus of mythicized, consumed truths. Indeed, Ronald L. Akers says that in the "steps to suicide," an essential step is "learning and applying definitions of suicide" (299, 305), and when these texts ask, "Who is the subject whose prescriptions are norms for those they obligate?" and, "What should women do when they no longer have satisfying emotional connections with men and children?" they implicitly answer in the name of the protagonist. Finally, as real women accept the myth and live out its injunctions, the myth becomes descriptively true and the adage, "Women die for love, men, glory" is further indoctrinated in sex myths (Canetto 1992-93).

But of course, no matter how precise the psychological autopsy could become, it could never accurately describe how this master-narrative promotes the suicides of particular women because the necessary evidence to establish a causal relationship accompanies real women to their graves. That is, we can infer through evidence of general suicide contagion that these stories must be complicit in contagion even if, apart from anecdotal evidence, we cannot identify the exact source or narratives of contagion. In this way the master-narrative becomes for some women an elusive model of real female suicide; that is, it becomes impossible to locate which particular narratives any particular woman has used to configure her life and her interrelational constructs, which texts have become intertextual with her life's narrative--which is doubly ironic given that such sources, so difficult to identify anecdotaly, surround women in songs, plays, poems, movies, and printed narratives.

But this dynamic of real women and protagonists, of the master-narrative's reflection and deflection of reality, is complicated in ways which will continue to surface throughout this project. First, at the same time that the master-narrative is
used in fiction to disproportionately overrepresent female suicide, it compels some women to accept its behavior norms and to indeed valorize such norms in ways which conflict with the behavior of most women. And, while women actually commit suicide at far lower rates than men, the masternarrative also reflects, in ways I will also detail in Chapter 5, many women's actual feelings about and reactions to interrelational experiences. The nexus of this reflection and deflection of real women's realities is at the heart of the masternarrative's power: as women consume such narratives in songs, movies, poems, and stories, as they readily identify with the protagonists' interrelational losses for a variety of reasons, it becomes more likely that some of those women will identify with and model their behavioral decisions after The Suicidal Woman to become part of that twenty-five to thirty-three percent of the people who commit suicide. At the juncture of the masternarrative's concurrent reflection and deflection of reality, it insidiously evolves from being an imaginary fiction meant to describe an imaginary event, to a fictional norm which is in imaginary conflict with the dominant reality, to a societally-condoned description and then, for some, a prescription of appropriate life decisions. As we have seen in theories about suicide contagion and narrative's participation in the legitimation of knowledge, narrative "proof," while it is not empirically-sufficient proof with which to describe most women's choices, does describe and perhaps prescribe the choices of some. The masternarrative's domination of suicide fiction and its narrative trends are not sufficient proof that they reflect trends in reality, but a cross-cultural loyalty to the masternarrative illustrates that it holds a very true, lasting appeal to be retold and reheard. And in this mutually-reinforcing loop of the masternarrative's prowess, our "knowledge" of women and of female suicide seeks and finds circular legitimation through these narrative forms.

And it is in the unproblematized replication of the masternarrative that the fictional narrative of female suicide gains allegorical strength, much like the allegorical impact of Jameson's master code. Jameson says that schemas present essentially allegorical operations "when we become aware that any individual mode
of production projects and implies a whole sequence of such modes of production (33). Since I will discuss The Suicidal Woman's allegorical impact in relation to Jameson's example, let me quote him at length:

Allegory is here the opening up of the text to multiple meanings, to successive rewritings and overwritings which are generated as so many levels and as so many supplementary interpretations. So the interpretation of a particular Old Testament passage in terms of the life of Christ . . . comes less as a technique for closing the text off and for repressing aleatory or aberrant readings and senses, than as a mechanism for preparing such a text for further ideological investment, if we take the term ideology here in Althusser's sense as a representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of history.

In the present instance, the movement is from a particular collective history--that of the people of Israel, or in other words a history culturally alien to the Mediterranean and Germanic clientele of early Christianity--to the destiny of a particular individual: the transindividual dimensions of the first narrative are then drastically 'reduced' to the second, purely biographical narrative, the life of Christ . . . [I]t is precisely this reduction of the alien collective to the valorized individual biography which then permits the generation of two further interpretive levels, and it is precisely in these that the individual believer is able to 'insert' himself or herself . . . , it is precisely by way of the moral and anagogical interpretations that the textual apparatus is transformed into a . . . machinery for ideological investment. (30-31)

Female suicide narratives also accrue to the status of allegory in much the same way that Christ's life becomes an interpretive allegory for the Old Testament and for Christianity. The protagonist of the female suicide masternarrative becomes, through the telling and reinterpretation of a masternarrative which is retold throughout the world, a role model for women, a "Christine" whose life and fate--which, like Christ's, is both prescribed and chosen--is used to construct a standard of goodness and behavior for women and to explain the outcome of fictional and real suicidal women, a standard which is dictated and upheld in the Bible. In the same way that Christ's sacrifices--including his consensual death--become role models for Christians, Christine's fate becomes a kind of standard by which women are reminded of their culturally-imposed priorities: if you fail at codified interrelationships or you seek the satisfaction of your own desire, you die. And,
when, having been indoctrinated with narratives in which Christine, failing at interpersonal connection, reneges on her husband and children and dies by her own hands, we allegorically apply our knowledge of her outcome to earlier events in her narrative in much the same way that Christ's life is retroactively used to interpret the Old Testament. In this way, the action and method of her death illuminates the meaning—or meaninglessness—of her life, finally reiterating not that marriage made her miserable, but that without it or some great love affair, her life is not worth living.

Furthermore, Christine's life and death become a kind of reverse prophesy for happiness that contrasts with the lessons Christianity finds in Christ's death and rebirth. While Christ dies in glory, Christine dies in what is touted as glory by some interpreters, but what is, ultimately, the last straw of devastating abandonment or desire, the only "honorable" out, both her relief and her punishment. Then, unlike Christ's passive suicide, which earns him unparalleled spiritual respect, and his reincarnation, which establishes the opportunity for grace and salvation for all people, Christine's glory-less, graceless suicide becomes a lemming-like reiteration of what happens when women flout the Biblically-condoned route to spiritual and emotional grace, when they detach from their husbands and from their Biblical father, who, according to the Bible's male authors and to many of its interpreters, allegedly commands women to marital allegiance at all costs and who classifies suicide as self-murder, a mortal sin. And, while Christ's death and rebirth are used to validate the Christian life and the promise of a heavenly afterlife, Christine's suicide and repeated textual reincarnations are used to validate interrelational constructs for women, fears about such constructs, and the promise of unhappiness and sinful death should she, like Christine, fail to find satisfaction in those constructs.

And in this repetitive end, two paradoxical things happen. On the one hand, in contrast to Christ's singular end and rebirth, the suicidal female is not valorized, but degraded: Christine's rebirth in every re-writing or re-reading of new texts of the masternarrative, in contrast to Christ's singularly glorious rebirth, becomes yet
another banal beginning of another woman's clichéd end—which I discuss further in Chapter 6. However, the repeated associations of interrelational failure and suicide, instead of banalizing the causal association of interrelational loss to suicide or the emphasis on interrelational connections with men, condones and sanctifies potentially destructive interrelational norms, collectively and insidiously reiterates the cultural warnings for women: if you cannot find happiness with men or children, or if you seek gratification for a divergent kind of happiness, you must suffer and die.

While, for Jameson, allegory is the "opening up of the text to multiple meanings," the allegorical function of the female suicide masternarrative, instead, hinders multiple meanings and interpretations, promotes singularly universal ones, even if its meanings are riddled with dualities and ambivalence. Nevertheless, the female suicide masternarrative functions allegorically in its moral cadences, its successive rewritings and overwritings, such that previous writings overdetermine the characters, actions, and narrative endings of future narratives and further reify the effects and messages of preceding texts. And, by function of their qualitative and thematic dominance in narrative and art, the individual texts and their allegorical interpretations gradually and collectively become a massive, mastering text—which then becomes a fictional biography, first about the life of one character, and then a collective biographical—but fictional—"history" about the lives of numerous characters.

In this way, the female suicide masternarrative becomes allegorical, much like the story of Christ becomes an allegorical way to re-read the Old Testament. However, while, in the Christ allegory, the story of one man’s biography is superimposed on a civilization which precedes Christ’s life, in female suicide narratives, the allegorical masternarrative compels the story not backward to a revision and rewriting of the historical past, but forward, to a predetermined future for female characters which has already been written and lived, overwriting the collective of female characters’ lives. In this way, instead of allegorically interpreting the life of any unique, particular character to re-interpret the lives and histories of past characters, people, and civilizations, the female suicide
masternarrative functions primarily to prophesy, interpret, and intercept the futures of other characters and women.

This larger allegorical code of women's relations with men is, of course, a firmly-rooted political allegory:

With political allegory, then, a sometimes repressed ur-narrative or master fantasy about the interaction of collective subjects, we have moved to the very borders of our second horizon, in which what we formerly regarded as individual texts are grasped as 'utterances' in an essentially collective or class discourse. (Jameson 80)

Individual female suicide narratives have become "utterances" in the collective discourse of the masternarrative of female suicide, one which encourages real women to be the primary actors and protagonists in the ideological and mythical apparatus that is their own undoing. Their political unconscious, having been inculcated with fictional histories of female suicides, compels some of them to attempt suicide. And, because of their compunction to commit suicide, suicidal protagonists are often praised, glamorized, and admired, while real women who attempt but do not complete suicide are doused with derision and antagonism (see chapters five and six). Like the "allegorical narrative signifieds" to which Jameson refers, these two, very different reactions to female characters and to real women reflect the "collective fantasies about history and reality" and a "fundamental dimension of our collective thinking" which explicitly discourages but which implicitly urges women to complete suicide (34).

The narrative of Christ's life is for some people a fictional story, for others a history through which they find faith-based spiritual knowledge and guidance, and Jameson's main interest is the narrativization of history, the way narrative gains historical status, the way history becomes narrative, and how the writing of history manifests and influences our political unconscious. He proposes that "history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious" (35). My overriding concern here is both the same and the
inverse of Jameson's: it is not in how we narrativize history, but in how the female suicide masternarrative writes and pre-historicizes our characters and ourselves, in how the fictional life of Christine gains, in its retelling, allegorical strength, historical status, epistemological validity, and, finally, the status of truth—a pseudo, but, nevertheless, mythicized truth.

While, indeed, "history is not a text, not a narrative" the texts of fictional female suicide stories have become "historical," an absent and present historical cause in complicated ways. They are historical in relation to their characters because we begin reading the fictional female suicide narrative after it has been written, long after the protagonist is dead: it is, in essence, her history that we access through a kind of readerly reincarnation of her life when we open the book. Since the story of one and then another and then another suicidal woman is retold so often, this story functions, within the fictional world, almost as a historical narrative, as one that is frequently re-told, that retells itself. Thus, the female suicide narrative, unlike Jameson's narrativized history text, is primarily a text which, through its repetition, becomes a kind of fictional, biographical history of female suicide—past and future—that is only accessible to us in textual form. And, unlike Jameson's narrativized history, the female suicide masternarrative, in its repetition, overdetermines future works and performatively contributes to our social learning data banks; thus, through the relatively simple act of repetition, female suicide texts become at once history and prophesy.

And they have done so by at once foregrounding the act of women's suicide through repetition while backgrounderg it through its relegation to the last moments of narratives, by devoting so little narrative attention to the act or its after effects. By repetitively highlighting the act of female suicide, the texts satisfy one of Jameson's requirements for the construction of a "historical totality": the isolation and the privileging of one of the elements within that totality (a kind of thought habit, a predilection for specific forms, a certain type of belief, a 'characteristic' political structure or form of domination) such that the element in question becomes a master code or 'inner essence' capable of explicating the other elements or features of the 'whole' in question. Such a
theme or 'inner essence' can thus be seen as the implicit or explicit answer to the now impermissible interpretive question, 'what does it mean?' (27-28)

As the endoskeleton of the masternarrative of female suicides, the death of the woman has become the "privileged element" through which we interpret the rest of its story and discourse. And, as the structural manifestation of the narrative's "inner essence," the act of female suicide will indeed help me answer in remaining chapters the essential question "What does it mean?" And by answering this question in relation to the masternarrative's structure, we can perhaps interpret individual texts, the masternarrative itself, and the interpretive master code that "enables" the re-writing of the masternarrative in "new" texts.

The problem is, of course, that this masternarrative is a false "collective historical narrative." However, because its influence has not yet been measured, recorded, or even argued until now, no matter how influential the masternarrative may be on some women's lives, the effect remains an abstract presence, a theoretical proposal rather than an empirically proven certainty. Given the difficulty in proving the presence and the cultural barriers which will continue to prevent its being measured, the historical influence of fiction's construction of women's lives—and knowledge about women's lives—will, for most people, likely remain a theoretical and rhetorical construct.

But, considering the presumptive conclusions about suicide contagion, we can infer that the female suicide masternarrative's epistemological effects must be present in—that is, represented by and lived through—the lives and choices of those women who succumb to suicide contagion and imitate Christine. Indeed, one wonders if, without the masternarrative, even fewer women would commit suicide than already do. However, even if only twenty-five percent of the people who commit suicide are women, those women are one hundred percent dead, even more erased than their fictional models are—models who will be reborn each time their stories are read anew. Yet in their real suicides, the unique, nonfictional histories and lives of real Christines are subsumed by a collective, fictional narrative that merges with and may even subsume their unique historical realities. Although
sociologists have not yet measured the influence of fictional, printed suicide narratives on women, our information gap about their lives may possibly be, at least in part, filled with potentially contagious fictions that also serve as the prescriptive biographies and histories of real Christines, making, indeed, history into text and text into history.

And this relationship between history and text is, as Jameson points out, inherently problematic. He notes that one issue of structural Marxism is "the relationship of praxis to structure, and the possible contamination of the first of these concepts by categories of purely individual action, as opposed to the possible imprisonment of the second of these concepts in an ultimately static and reified vision of some 'total system'" (49). Indeed, this has become the very problem--and the very opposite problem--of the fictional female suicide master narrative's relationship to real history. On one hand, both the habitual structure of the master narrative and the customs of its protagonists do not reflect real women's practices; but, by virtue of their dominance, they come immeasurably to contaminate the structure and praxis of real women's narratives--beliefs, options, even actions. Similarly, the structure of the fictional narratives contaminates the praxis of real women, such that real women's praxis is contaminated by the master narrative's structure, by exactly that "static and reified vision of some 'total system'" of women's relations with men. Finally, all four elements--both structures and both praxes of imagined and lived narratives--are constrained and influenced by the other three elements, are locked into a reified dynamic of interrelational dependence and suicidal options. Thus, imaginative, fictional female suicide narratives gain, in their reproduction, allegorical, biographical, and even historical and truth-yielding status in ways that violate the "true" experience--and history--of women's lives. Given these powerful interactions of history, fiction, reality, knowledge, and truth, it is not surprising that the repetition of standard elements of the female suicide narrative have become ancillaries of the master narrative, a part of a mythic text that influences our approach to it and to "the Real itself," to how we view women, and, most importantly, to how they view themselves.
NOTES

1. Others have problematized the preponderance for fictional and nonfictional attention to female suicide. Margaret Higonnet, for instance, says, "women’s suicide became a cultural obsession" in the nineteenth century (68).

2. Others have made similar observations about the ambivalent meanings of earlier female suicide texts. For instance, Margaret Higonnet addresses some of the dualities of female suicide in the nineteenth century, how it became "fetish and taboo" (1986 68). Also see Ruth P. Thomas on the ambiguity of women’s positions (330).

3. While I will discuss in Chapter 8 how the female suicide master narrative is defined by male constructs, let me note here that its predominance is also defined by male constructs— although, the lack of them. That is, female suicide narratives are proportionately dominant in narrative because of the paucity of male suicide narratives. This is not to suggest an advocacy for the increase of male suicide narratives, but to emphasize that the female suicide master narrative is also compelling because of what it says about its larger cultural context.
CHAPTER 5

Interrelational Distress and the Female Suicide Trajectory

*It was this fatal marriage that had put her at odds with herself and everything else.*

*Constance Ring*

**Introduction: The Real and the Fictional**

Preceding chapters problematize treatments of the fictional and the real in female suicide narratives as they explore the female suicide masternarrative's potential to influence knowledge constructions--to affect life and knowledge, to effect narrative consequences. Now, forgoing further qualifiers of the "real" and the "fictional," I will rely on the traditional, Socratic understandings of these terms and consider how the masternarrative's treatments of character and theme may influence perceptions about and conditions of actual and fictional female suicide, especially in relation to women's interrelational distress. Although my primary focus is the fictional narratives, because one of my primary interests is the epistemological relationship between representations of, "knowledge" about, and acts of fictional and actual suicide--or, if you will, the relationship between suicidology's own informational trajectory or masternarrative of female suicide and the fictional masternarrative's trajectory--and because I want to contextualize the fictional narratives within the larger culture of female suicide and gender, I make references to suicidology texts published throughout the last three decades. This range presents itself rather naturally because the contagion studies began in the early 1970s, but it is also enables me to practically and sufficiently explore the research trends, to interpret the fictional texts with a range of information from sociological research,
and to direct my efforts on behalf of the people most immediately affected by any masternarrative—living people.

Although I devote some attention to the protagonists' maternal relationships in Chapter 6, by "interrelational," I will, following Alexandra Kaplan and Rona Klein, primarily refer to women's sexual, romantic or marital relationships with men (1989). Some of the chapter is devoted to speculation because of the difficulties inherent in studying suicide and because, as noted in Chapter 1, we cannot reconstruct the world to compare how suicide rates would change in another global context of fictional narratives. However, regardless of the speculative necessity about some of the narrative consequences of these texts, we can, with more certainty, speculate about how the anxieties manifested in them relate to—and, especially, reflect—larger cultural prescripts about women's usefulness and larger cultural anxieties about their desire and will.

As a segue from earlier chapters' concerns with fiction's impact on behavior, knowledge, and expectations to this chapter's more specific concern with suicide and heterosexual love, let me cite this lengthy, but remarkably telling excerpt from Amalie Skram's Constance Ring (1885).

Pulling a book from his pocket, [Lorck] offered to read her a new story by Kielland.

Delighted, [Constance] told him that was a wonderful idea. When he had finished reading, they began to talk about the story. The subject of love came up.

"Kielland doesn't seem to have much respect for the feeling," Constance said. "He's quite contemptuous. He could just as well have written something about a beautiful, true love."

"Well, yes," Lorck remarked with a shrug, "but the idea of a beautiful, true love is outmoded, you know."

"I suppose," said Constance. "That must be why it isn't the main theme in books anymore, at least not in our . . ."

"Not in our lives either," said Lorck. . . .

"Well, has it ever been, really?" Constance asked. . . . "I wonder if it all hasn't been poetic nonsense."

"And you complain about Kielland! Why do you want him to write about something you don't believe in yourself?"

"We're used to finding it in books. But as far as that goes--complain- -I certainly didn't mean to."
"At any rate, you're mistaken. People died of love in the old days."
"You mean, killed themselves if they couldn't get the person they wanted?"
"Yes, or just died of grief—consumption, or something like that."
"It must be wonderful," Constance exclaimed, suddenly serious.
"To die of love?" he asked, straightening up in his chair.
"I mean to be able to feel so intensely. But those days are gone forever, don't you think?"
"Lord yes—well, let's say that it hasn't been my fate to experience such a miracle."
"Nor mine," Constance said with a sigh.
"Although, Lord knows, somebody less well balanced could nurse an unrequited love for a lifetime," Lorck said. . . .
"Or one that's returned," Constance remarked.
"No, that's something else. If it's returned, it isn't love any longer."
"A love that's returned isn't love any longer?" . . .
"Not according to common views of propriety—because there has to be marriage then, of course. . . . Then it's over. . . . Love fades, you see, especially between married couples." (75-77)

A bi-levelled *mise en abyme*, this excerpt articulates some of the content and sources of myths about love and death on two narrative levels: within the context of *Constance Ring* and within the context of the female suicide masternarrative. First, the excerpt proleptically anticipates Constance's dying for love after Lorck's love has faded. And, because Constance bases her romanticization of dying for love on fictional, narrative constructions of death, interrelational myths, knowledge, and expectations, her romanticization demonstrates and perpetuates some of the essential myths and potential powers of the female suicide masternarrative.

Further, the excerpt illustrates some commonly-assumed sex contrasts regarding love and suicide. For instance, Constance valorizes and hopes for a romantic love, celebrating even deadly passions, but Lorck seems safely distant from such possibilities. Constance speaks of the current potential for dying for love, but Lorck says people did so "in the old days"—suggesting that people—including him—don't die for love now. When Constance says it would be "wonderful" to die for love, Lorck straightens in his chair and asks, with some incredulousness, for clarification, to which he ironically responds that it hasn't been his "fate to experience such a miracle." Constance imagines how wonderful it would be to die
for love herself, and Lorck associates this response to "somebody less well balanced"—that is, than he is. When Constance imagines requited love, Lorck insists that love fades, especially in marriage. As this chapter will show, in several ways, this couple anticipates several of the differences between the representations of and assumptions about love and suicide for men and women.

Men, Marriage, and Suicide

Although the present discussion about male suicide must be limited, some commentary about the relationship between fictional and nonfictional male suicide meaningfully situates my more focused concerns about female suicide narratives within a larger context of suicide and narrative and, thus, clarifies and reiterates these concerns and suggests prompts for later exploration. I am fascinated, but disturbed by two songs about male suicide and men's desire for love and partnership: "The Good and the Bad," by Ted Hawkins, and "If You Don't Love Me (I'll Kill Myself)," by Pete Droge. Hawkins's song begins with the lyrics, "Living is good when you have someone to live with. Laughter is bad when there's no one there to share it with. Talking is bad if you've got no one to talk to. Dying is good when the one you love grow tired of you [sic]." Pete Droge's character sings, "If you want, I'll be by your side. And if you don't--maybe suicide. And it's my love that'd kill me dear. If you won't hold me and have me near," and, repeatedly, "If you don't love me, I'll kill myself."

While 1994 Hawkins's song was not listed on music popularity charts, Droge's was popular on U.S. radio stations in the U.S. for several months in 1994 and 1995 and appeared in the feature films Dumb and Dumber and Outbreak (1995). "If You Don't Love Me (I'll Kill Myself)" was called a "swaggering, self-effacing turntable hit" (Q Magazine), and excerpts on Droge's homepage call it an "irresistible, upbeat rocker that expresses . . . Droge's sly sense of humor," an "irresistible . . . suicide singalong." One piece reported that national magazines "from Rolling Stone to Entertainment Weekly also sang Pete's praises as they
hummed along to [this] irresistibly acerbic pop gem" (Pete Droge web page 11-29-96).

Given what I now know about suicide contagion, every time I hear Droge’s song, with its threatening lyrics set to its perky tempo, I grimace. This song is touted by at least three reviewers for its "irresistible" sound, a sound which is, indeed, irresistible—and yet this compelling, attractive tune is set to lyrics that are doubly threatening: first, in the explicit threat offered by the persona singing, "if you don’t love me, I’ll kill myself"; and, then, by their threat to promote suicide contagion, a threat presumably exacerbated by the "sing-along" tempo.

However, each time I hear both songs, I am also struck by their rare representations of suicidal feelings in men. Some narratives—especially popular country music—feature men who contend with lost love, and there are, of course, exceptions to the trend to avoid characterizing men as suicidal at all, including over love: I have already discussed Goethe’s Werther, Daudet’s Risler, and Brown’s Harrington and William, and Shakespeare and Dostoevsky create suicidal male characters. But, fictional men rarely feel, act on, or consummate the urge to commit suicide, and if male interrelational distress is represented in fictional narrative, it almost never involves male suicidal feelings, and even more rarely results in male suicide.

Consider, for example, Meier, of Constance Ring, who, after meeting Constance, "only wanted to fling himself at her feet, to be allowed to kiss the hem of her dress—then he would immediately go away and kill himself" (46). And, although Vronsky attempts suicide, in a telling breach with the mimetic approach of the rest of Anna Karenina, he survives what should have been a highly fatal effort—a gunshot wound to his chest.

The persona of John Entwistle’s song "Thinkin’ It Over" also has serious suicidal feelings:

Whatcha gonna do when your wife finds another, takes the kids and the car, half of the house?  
Whatcha gonna do? Move in with your mother, or spend your time lookin’ to find a new spouse?
Thinkin' it over, it ain't worth the worry.  
startin' over to make a new life.  
Thinkin' it over, I decided not to bother.  
I decided to take my own life.  

I'm on the ledge outside my window.  
Ground is ten stories below.  
As I look down the crowd look up [sic],  
wondering whether I'll jump or not.  

Whatcha gonna do? Disappoint all those people,  
or make a splash in the headlines next day?  
Whatcha gonna do? Waste the time of those policemen  
or let your audience have their own way?  

Thinkin' it over, I decided not to bother.  
I decided to take my own life.  
Thinking it over, it ain't worth the worry.  
I decided to take my own life.  

Whatcha gonna do? Disappoint all those people  
or make a splash in the headlines next day?  
Whatcha gonna do? Waste the time of those policemen  
or let your audience have their own way?  

Thinkin' it over, I decided not to bother.  
I decided to save my own life  
Thinking it over, I decided not to bother.  
It's too high a price to pay for an unfaithful wife.  

This narrative is remarkable because it is about a man who considers committing suicide for love and because—unlike typical suicide narratives, which is to say, those involving females—he quickly decides against it. Part of the speed with which he makes the decision and perhaps of the titillation effect of the narrative is related to its song form—its genre as a short, performed narrative. However, the protagonist could have as quickly decided to jump—as Lucy Jordan does in "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan." Indeed, while in some ways all of these songs promote at least the consideration of suicide, none of the songs about male suicide sell suicide as effectively as "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan"—which charted when it was first
performed in (1979) and which was prominently featured in the film *Thelma and Louise* (1991).

Moreover, Entwistle’s narrative is striking because—in contrast to typical female suicide narratives, which fail to acknowledge the ways in which cultural forces such as audience and media promote the female protagonists’ suicidal acts—this male protagonist explicitly evokes and then successfully resists the media’s, his street-audience’s, and his imaginatively-suspended listening audience’s anticipation of his potential suicide. Finally, although these male characters diverge from art’s tendency to avoid presenting suicidal men and from several sociological and psychological descriptions of men as suicidal for a variety of reasons (which usually exclude interrelational ones), these characters do not complete suicide.

Indeed, there is often a disconcerting lack of commentary on suicidal men’s interrelational conditions in the social science and artistic literature—which, again, is why the above narratives are remarkable. Statements that *minimize* the role of interrelational stress in men’s suicides frequently do so in conjunction with statements that *emphasize* the role of interrelational distress in women’s suicides. For instance, Raymond Jack says that "female self-poisoning has historically been motivated most frequently by events in the 'private' or relational domain, whereas that of men more often is related to events occurring in the 'public' realm of work, financial and legal problems" (1992 xiii); Charlotte Sanborn writes, "Suicide attempts in response to loss or abandonment by loved ones appear in both sexes. But Dr. Herbert Hendin . . . says that suicide as a response to an inability to tolerate loss of mastery and control in work situations is seen predominantly in men" (152); and David Lester writes that "[w]omen tend to be suicidal more often in response to interpersonal problems, whereas men tend to be suicidal more often in response to intrapsychic conflicts and to commit suicide in response to job loss and legal problems" (1988 8, also cites Beck 1973 and Farberow 1970).

While these quotes from sociological literature do not deny that interrelational distress is a precipitant of male suicide, they help establish and reflect the gross sex-dichotomies between suicide precipitants for men and women, dichotomies that
underrepresent, deny, or neglect the role of interrelational distress in men's suicides. That facilitate the generalization that women die for love, men for glory, and that likely contributes to the larger invalidation of male interrelational concerns. Robin J. Lewis's and George Shepeard's study to identify the gender stereotypes and context-related assumptions about suicide identified this impulse to quash the male interrelational. Undergraduate college students responded to dramatized accounts of suicide that were identical except that the suicide precipitants were either the end of a relationship or the loss of an athletic career. Lewis and Shepeard report that, "male athletes who suicided were rated as more well-adjusted than were males who suicided as a result of a failed relationship," and "male athletes who suicided were rated as more well-adjusted than" the other groups included in the study (1986 192-93).

While male interrelational need and pain is regularly invalidated, several reports challenge the assumption that men are anti-interrelational or that they are less relational than women are. Like the male characters I will discuss later in the chapter, it appears that real men want to be married. Robert A. Lewis says men value marriage; that, contrary to some popular myths, most U.S. men want to be married; and that more traditional men desired marriage more than their fiancées did (1986 14). Bruce Nordstrom, citing several studies, reports, "men seem to want to get married. Though men do marry when slightly older than women, a greater proportion of men than women eventually marry, [and] husbands report being more satisfied than wives with marriage" (31; citing Bernard 3-58; Whitehurst 22-24; Dizard; and Renne). Nordstrom also notes, "fewer men than women try to get out of marriage by initiating divorces . . . and men remarry after divorce more often and more quickly than women" (31; cites Pettit and Bloom, Jaffe and Kanter). Finally, Jonathan Kramer and Diane Dunaway report that "94% of all men marry, and they remarry much more quickly than women do after being divorced or widowed" (40).

Perhaps men want to be married because, according to Lewis and Salt, "Married men tend to be healthier, both physically and emotionally, than single men" (1986 12; cite Harrison 1978). They cite findings that married men aged
twenty-eight to thirty-two were "more satisfied with their lives than either single or married women; [and that] single men were the least satisfied of all these four groups" (12). Nordstrom cites other reports that "husbands enjoy more health benefits than women by being married" (31; cites Gove 1972; Gove and Tudor; Gove and Hughes). These "health benefits" seem to include increased male lifespans: widowers die more quickly after the deaths of their spouses than do widows (Nordstrom 31), and, in the U.S., married men live longer than single or divorced men (Lewis 12; cites Gove 1972; Gove and Hughes).

Research also indicates that divorced, single, and widowed men are also at much higher risk of suicide than are married men. E. W. Bock and I. L. Webber found an extremely high rate of suicide among elderly widowers compared to elderly widows, which they attributed to the widowers' greater isolation from family members and organizations (1972), and Peter Sainsbury reports that "widowers aged 20-25 have an exceptionally high [suicide] rate" (14). From 1959-61, single men were found to be ninety-seven percent more likely to complete suicide than married men (Lester 6 citing Gove 1972 211-12), and "divorced men commit suicide five times more often than do married men" (Kramer and Dunaway 40; also see Cancian, and Masters, Johnson, and Kolodny). Furthermore, divorced men have significantly higher suicide rates than divorced women (among many, Durkheim 1966 266 and Canetto 1992, AAS). Male suicide rates are also relatively higher in countries where the divorce rate is higher (Lester 1988 11; citing Stewart and Winter). Consistent with Bock's and Webber's observations, Silvia Sara Canetto notes that men are most at risk for suicide when they are isolated (AAS 1992), John T. Maltzberger reports that aging white men are at the greatest risk for suicide (51), and other epidemiological and clinical studies have consistently reported that suicide risk is higher in isolated men than in any other sub population. As Lewis notes, the direction of causality between men's marital status and their suicide rates is not clear: married men may live longer because marriage promotes their health, or women may marry men who are healthier than men who remain single. However, Lewis says it is reasonable to assume "that one reason men continue to marry at
high rates is that formal marriage still fulfills many of men’s needs for affiliation, love, sex, and companionship" (12).^3

This research underscores the importance of marriage on men’s health and challenges the predominant representation of men as immune to interrelational issues. However, while I directed my research toward female suicide, I saw in the general information on suicide strikingly little effort to fully characterize, explore, or understand the particular relationship between men’s interrelational and suicidal psychodynamics. It appears that, while social science readily acknowledges the general, larger indicators of interrelational effects on men as they are reflected by suicide and marriage statistics, it has devoted much less attention to the particular psychodynamics of male interrelational loss and suicide. And, as popular representations of men regularly endorse notions of the Marlboro man, as they minimize men’s interrelational needs, and as texts fail to feature suicidal men, they understate the importance of male interrelational development and the magnitude of male suicide, promote unreal and "unhealthy" models of emotionally distant men, facilitate the notion that men in emotional pain are "sissies," and they likely contribute to the classic problem of men’s reluctance to seek professional help for interpersonal problems.^4 Further, given the larger cultural impetus against male suicide for interrelational distress, it seems possible that, while the gross association between male suicide and interrelational distress is clear, the insufficiency of more particular, even anecdotal studies of men and lost love may be related to the inadequate development or the absence of an accepted classification for interrelationally-related male suicide behavior—and to the vacuuming presence of other, more traditional, accepted causes of male suicide, such as financial or professional loss.^5

Thus, narratives in which men feel suicidal over lost love are doubly striking: first, because they offer rare treatments of suicidal feelings in men, and, second, because they associate suicidal feelings with interrelational distress, feelings that appear to be more typical of men than they are reputed or generally accepted to be. However, because male characters rarely commit suicide, these narratives also
underrepresent the male-dominated behavior of suicide. While *Children of Light*’s Al Keochakian approximates the mark when he tells Gordon Walker, "Face it, man. Without [your wife], you’re fucked. You’ll go down the tubes" (15), the novel tellingly strays from the reality mark and hits a bull’s-eye on the fictional one when, not Walker, but his lover, Lu Anne, goes "down the tubes"—aptly, by drowning—after which Gordon and his wife, who appears to have remained faithful to him, reconcile.

Let my observations be a tribute to Entwistle’s song because it represents male interrelational distress—and survival after it. Indeed, who would disagree with this character’s final decision to live? Thus, while fictional texts underrepresent the problem of male suicide, they also present a healthier final outcome to interrelational loss for men: life. This presents another of several complexities that emerge throughout this project: given the risk of suicide contagion, I would be disturbed by an increased production of suicide texts for either sex. And, presumably fictional male characters survive interrelational distress, in part, because of their ability to disengage emotionally from it. Although I do not condone the production of additional suicide models for either sex, it might behoove us to provide more positive and realistic models of actively interrelational, even distressed, men whose lives, of course, do not end in suicide.

While culture’s embrace of anti-relational male myths promotes rugged independence for men to be male-serving and preserving, this embrace also backfires: the same cultural compulsion for men to remain ruggedly independent and to disregard their needs for intimacy encourages men to "follow their hearts," which are often distressed hearts whose conditions worsen because of gender prescriptions for male independence, prescriptions which may lead to isolation, disintegration from society, and, finally, suicide. Thus, the constructions that allegedly serve men finally compel them to discard the socially-integrating taboos against male interrelational pain and suicide in order to honor their private, invalidated, even secret selves.

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However, male interrelational myths are also nation-serving because the "glory" for which men are supposed to die is not, of course, associated with romantic distress, but with efforts to maintain or regain honor, with patriotism and protectionism, or in response to trials of honor involving athletic failure, legal, or financial problems (even duels, which suggest the willingness to die for romantic love, are propositioned with murderous rather than suicidal impulses). These nation-serving myths that dismiss men's interrelational distress and their personal needs are also popularized by fictional literature: for instance, Vronsky's enlistment in the army may suggest his death wish in the face of Anna's death (especially given his earlier suicide attempt), but a battle-field death is clearly more male-validating than would have been a suicide death on the front of love. Also consider Shinji's political suicide in "Patriotism"--committed without sadness about his imminent interrelational loss, without hesitation even though his suicide will compel his wife's. Likewise, consider Yukio Mishima's own suicide on behalf of the Japanese Imperial Army, a suicide that was politically ineffective and that left behind a wife and two children.

While there may be no suicide master-narrative associated with male interrelational or interpersonal loss (unless it is one that invalidates the male interrelational), Japanese narratives of seppuku and hara-kiri and a variety of Western war narratives share themes that glamorize men's dying "for glory" and that may well comprise another kind of suicide master-narrative (see Chapter 6 for additional commentary on culturally-condoned suicide). The concept of glory is, of course, consistent with the notion that men have fewer interrelational needs and greater national responsibility than women, but it also serves the financial and political institutions that send men to war. The preponderance of male-hero suicide war narratives and the paucity of male suicide narratives following interrelational loss further suggests an overriding cultural compulsion for men to disengage from and "tough out" romantic interrelational loss, to reserve their suicide-like actions for nationalistic efforts and for a context in which soldier and civilian lives depend on troops' interrelational connections--which, until recently, have been male
connections—and for a context that also requires soldiers to regularly confront and "tough out" the interrelational ruptures that occur when their companions are killed. In the mean time, another context on which many men's lives turn is regularly denied and invalidated—the domestic context of male interrelational intimacy.

Women, Marriage, and Suicide

While male interrelational needs are regularly underemphasized in fictional and non-fictional accounts of men, women's are regularly attended to and promoted in both psychosocial and narrative texts. Given that men appear to be at significant risk of suicide following divorce or spousal death and that men commit approximately seventy-five percent of all suicides, the dominance of female suicide in fictional narratives becomes doubly perplexing. Fictional narratives support the perception that men do not commit suicide for love, and, by contrast, complement, relief, and example, they bolster the perception that women do. Indeed, the sociological and literary contexts of suicide seem mutually informed in complicated, even convoluted ways that will emerge throughout this chapter and the next. In order to methodically approach some of these complications, I will first discuss the sociological understandings about female suicide; then the literary texts, first, as a group, and, then, individually; and, in the chapter's conclusion, I will explore the nexus of sociological and literary texts.

Sociological texts present various, often conflicting information regarding sex, suicide, and marriage. Consistent with more recent findings about men, marriage, and suicide, the general sociological literature—that is, commentary that does not make distinctions for sex—frequently concurs with Ronald W. Maris, who says, "in general, marriage does protect against suicide" (1989 104). Alec Roy reports that the suicide rate for married people is the lowest; the rate for single people is twice that for married individuals; and that the rate for divorced, widowed, or separated individuals is four to five times higher than it is for married people (1989 1415). Several studies note the same findings internationally: Sainsbury cites "significant correlations between the suicide and divorce rates of countries and
of the districts within them" (24 cites Kramer and Pollack), and Ad Kerkhof and David Clark observed similar correlations in European countries (50) and in the United States, where Lester also reports that suicide rates "increase for men and women as divorce rates increase" (Lester 1988 20, 33; Stack 1981).  

These general reports about marriage and suicide concur with the male-focused commentary on suicide and divorce; however, when women are brought into--or out of--the discussion, it explodes with signifying contradictions. Many of the theories and reports about women concur with the non-sex specific commentary about the protective effects of marriage against suicide; that is, they associate marriage with a protective effect for women. Because across cultures and time, women commit suicide at a fraction of the rate of men, and because they have been concurrently subsumed in traditional family roles, for decades social scientists believed that patriarchal society and traditional family roles safeguarded women against suicide. Sociologists believed female suicide occurred "when women deviated from their less conflicted, traditional roles," roles that enabled women to satisfy their essential need to serve others (Kushner AAS). Today, theories of patriarchal protection remain strong as some psychologists, arguing that women are still most protected from suicide by staying at home, predict that women’s suicide rates will rise as women join the labor force.  

However, some social scientists and psychologists have observed that "women are really far more at risk for a whole range of disorders at home than in the workplace" (Kaplan and Klein 269). In the 1970s, Walter R. Gove found that since World War II, married women have had more mental illness than married men, that "never-married men have higher rates of mental illness than never-married women," and that "single females were 47 percent more likely to complete suicide than married females" (compared, recall, to single men, who were 97% more likely to commit suicide than married men; cited in Lester 1988 5-6). Trovato also "found that, contrary to predictions, divorce decreased the risk of suicide in women ages" (Canetto 1992-93 9). And Canetto notes that "most studies suggest that being a housewife is associated with a heightened risk for psychological disorders" (Canetto
According to Gove, "there have been changes in the women's role that have been detrimental to (married) women and that, as marital roles are presently constituted in our society, marriage is more advantageous to men than to women, while being single (widowed, divorced)" is more disadvantageous to men than to women (Lester 1988 5-6; cites Gove 1972 211-212 and 1979). Gove concludes "that marriage reduces psychiatric stress for males but increases psychiatric stress for females" (Lester 1988 5), and Canetto similarly says, "for women, relationships, and particularly marriage, may be more a source of stress than support. Conversely . . . for women, being single may not be as disadvantageous as it was once assumed" (1992-93 9).

These findings challenge many of the more common, dominant understandings about and representations of women, marriage, and suicide, understandings that appear within a cultural context that regularly describes and represents marriage as protective against suicide and women as "dying for love." For instance, Jack says that "female self-poisoning has historically been motivated most frequently by events in the 'private' or relational domain" (xiii); Lester that "[w]omen tend to be suicidal more often in response to interpersonal problems" (8; cites Beck 1973, Farberow 1970); and Robert E. Litman and Carl I. Wold that female callers to a Los Angeles suicide hotline are "women who were suicidal in relation to a separation and divorce" (Litman 1989 146; Litman and Wold 1973). This perception has biased suicidal women's self-perceptions and interrelational understandings, also: according to Sylvia Sara Canetto, "It has been reported that women themselves tend to attribute their suicidal behavior to interpersonal relationships more often than men, even when both have experienced interpersonal conflict or loss" (Canetto AAS 1992).

While these binary presentations are taken from contrasting comments about men and women, they also support commentary that focuses specifically on women. According to Alan Berman, Silvia Sara Canetto, and Amy and Holtzworth-Munroe, suicidal behavior in marriage tends to involve depressed, young adult or adult

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women whose non-lethal drug overdoses are precipitated by serious marital problem (272; Canetto cites Weissman). Kaplan and Klein say, "when a woman's relational priorities and needs are so blocked or distorted that she perceives no further possibilities for growth within relationships her vulnerability to suicide will be great" (259). They also report that:

Evidence for women's suicide attempts being embedded within relational disappointment or disruption runs consistently through the literature. Many authors cite relational loss, rupture, or conflict as the most common immediate precipitant . . . . Simpson (1976) noted that suicide attempts are often precipitated by threat of loss, abandonment, or a relational impasse. Birtchnell (1981) concluded that quarreling and hostility in current marital relationships were the predominant characteristics distinguishing depressed suicide attempters. (271)

These observations seem contradictory: how can women in general be both endangered and protected by marriage, both suicidal and thriving after lost love? The combinations of several dynamics both support and challenge, advance and conflate findings about men, women, and suicide. These varied dynamics result in the heuristic blending of specific categories and subsets into the general categories and larger sets, of one kind of behavior into a related but different behavior, and of one kind of marital status into another. In the process, they promote the generalization that "women die for love, men for glory." As I hope to make clear, even these convoluted mergings are meaningful signifiers about Western culture's larger rhetorical system of female suicide, a system that combines the most destructive characteristics of both androcentric and gynocentric envisioning and of specific and general heuristics to manipulate conceptions about suicidal women and to potentiate the detrimental, even suicidal effects on women.

Representations of women and suicide are partially constructed by an androcentric bias: the non-sex specific commentary about the protective effects of marriage contradicts findings about marriage's detrimental effect on women. Because the predominant tone in the discussion emphasizes the subset of contentedly married men, perceptions about and expectations for other subsets of interrelational groups--such as women, married women, and suicidal women--are dominated by
perceptions about the happy/married/male subset. Moreover, because this general envisioning of marriage and suicide supports the predominant understanding that men are interrelationally disinterested or happy, it neglects one of the largest subsets extracted from combinations of sex, marital status, and suicidal behavior—men who commit suicide. Thus, while the majority of people committing suicide are men, and while general statistics indicate that interrelational distress plays a major role in this trend, interpretations of marriage betray a vital-androcentric research-advanced and culturally-condoned view that privileges the protective effects marriage offers men.

However, discussions focusing on women, marriage, and suicide are dizzyingly multi-directional, both patho-gynocentric and vital-gynocentric (that is, representing and promoting women’s pathology, illness, and death, as well as their health and life). While women in general are described as benefitting from marriage and from patriarchal protection, they also have been regularly described as suffering detrimental effects from marriage, and suicidal women are specifically described as suicidal over interrelational concerns. Furthermore, while suicidology neglects the particular psychodynamics of interrelational distress on men at the same time that it acknowledges the larger, general relationship between suicide and male interrelational distress, suicidology repeatedly attends to the particular psychodynamics of suicidal women at the same time that it loses sight of larger trends for women in marriage and suicide. And, conversely, with so much particular attention being devoted to the suicidal repercussions of women’s interrelational loss (i.e., marital dissolution, infidelity, and divorce), the protective sense of marriage for women is more often promoted than challenged. That is, if discussions continually reiterate that women kill themselves after interrelational rupture and neglect to mention that women often thrive after divorce, their rhetorical effect would seem to encourage women to get and stay married.

Of course, it makes sense that suicidology directs its attention to characterizing suicidal rather than married women—but it also makes sense that suicidology would direct more attention to the particular psychodynamics of male
suicide, which are clearly related to men's interrelational status. However, although statements challenge the notion of marriage's protective effects on women, and women commit the minority of completed suicide, the larger, non-sex specific sociological discussion of suicide and marriage takes, with its vital-androcentric approach, a patho-gynocentric one.

The rhetoric and ambience of patho-gynocentricity is also facilitated by the merging of different kinds of behaviors into descriptions of sex-specific trends. The syntactically-contrasted, sex-related descriptions of men and women cited above describe "suicidal behavior"—which includes uncompleted as well as completed attempts. In the past two decades, these two behaviors have been recognized as related, but different behaviors; and if women commit suicide at one quarter of the rate of men, but attempt suicide eight times more than they complete it, then, clearly, the most numerically significant behavior in the totality of "suicidal behavior" is non-fatal attempted suicide. By conjoining descriptions of non-fatal behavior with descriptions of "suicidal behavior," the characteristic of "suicidal behavior" is dominated by the predominant behavior and its participants: women who make non-fatal attempts after suffering interrelational distress. Thus, even though men commit suicide far more than women do, general myths about women and love—not simply myths about suicide, women, and love—are obtusely informed by the specific descriptions of the minority sex of suicide completers.

And, yet, these interpretations of women's suicidal behavior do seem to be derived from larger truths about suicide. For example, if, while comparing the suicide rates of married people with the suicide rates of single people, no distinctions are made for sex, marriage would surely have a generally protective effect against suicide because the suicide rates for half of the members of the married group—men—would be significantly lower because men do indeed commit suicide less often when they are married than when they are single. This clearly reduces the overall rate of suicide among married people, but it shows how sociological emphases and fictionally-advanced myths derive from men who do not commit suicide and from women who do. That is, while assumptions about and
representations of the protective effect of marriage are skewed by the large factor of happily married, emotionally healthy men. Descriptions and assumptions about all women are pathologized on the basis of characteristics of suicidal women. Thus, like the representational default of fictional narrative, the discussional default of social science literature is vectored in opposite ways for men and women: discussions about marriage are predominated by the vital-androcentricity of marriage’s protective effects for men, while discussions about suicide are predominated by the patho-gynocentric behavior of attempted suicide—even though men complete suicide at a much higher rate than women. Perhaps, were statistics available that compare the concrete numbers of men and women whose suicides are precipitated by interrelational distress, interrelationally-prompted male suicides might be found to approximate the numbers of like female suicides.

While I have tried to problematize the nexus of suicide observation, theory, and narrative, my attempt is not to debunk substantiated numbers, but to explore how their manipulations through statistical and research emphases affect larger understandings about, assumptions about, and representations of sex and suicide, both in theory and in fiction—especially because, as I hope will become clearer throughout the chapter, fictional and non-fictional presentations about suicide appear to be mutually-informing in diverse and disturbing ways. My attempt to understand the implications of the relationship between representations of fictional and non-fictional suicide are augmented by related concerns expressed by some sociologists who also note the contrary perceptions about and representations about women.

Antoon A. Leenaars’ work underscores the possibility that heuristic manipulations may have affected findings or understandings about sex and suicide. After examining men’s and women’s suicide notes for the variables of unendurable pain, interpersonal relations, rejection-aggression, inability to adjust, indirect expression, identification-egression, ego, and cognitive constriction, Leenaars found no sex-related differences between men’s and women’s expressions such as, "I love you," "I am in unbearable pain," "I am hopeless and helpless," "I cannot cope," and "This is the only way out for me." Leenaars states, "there appears to be no known
sex differences in the suicide notes of males and females if age is controlled for in the sample," and she infers there are no differences in the psychological conditions of male and female suicide (59, 58). Like Robert A. Lewis's challenges to male stereotypes about suicide, Leenaars says her findings raise questions about the findings of Cohen and Fiedler (1974) and Lester and Reeve (1982) that females express greater negative emotions; females show greater interpersonal concern; females appear to be more disorganized. In our sample, both males and females exhibited heightened emotions, interpersonal concerns, constriction and other fallacious logic. It may well be that males are as emotional, interpersonally troubled and constricted in their thoughts as women in their suicide notes and, by implication, suicide (although the modes(s) of expression may differ due to gender role). (58)

Leenaars says her findings suggest that some of the earlier findings "regarding overall sex differences in suicide notes . . . may have been a function of the age ranges and sex in the samples and not sex alone" (59). Furthermore, Lewis says that evidence about men's sex roles is not empirically derived, and Lester says, "Virtually no research has been conducted on the interpersonal relationships of those who complete suicide" (1988 13, 1972).

While Leenaars and Lester propose that descriptions about women who commit suicide may be insufficiently constructed, representations of real— and, as shall become clear in succeeding sections, fictional—suicidal women share several interrelational characteristics. For instance, even when Leenaars makes distinctions for age and sex, some of her conclusions are compatible with other descriptions about women. She says:

young and middle adult females appear to exhibit a greater concern about their relations than their male counterparts although the reverse is evident in Late Adulthood; i.e., Late Adult males appear to be more concerned about their relationships than Late Adult females. . . . the concern about relations is clearly more evident for females in some age ranges but not all. (59)

Recall that others report that suicidal behavior in marriage tends to involve depressed, young adult or adult women whose non-lethal drug overdoses are precipitated by serious marital problem, and that relational disappointment or disruption are repeatedly cited as precipitations of women's suicide attempts.
especially when they perceive the threat of loss, abandonment, or relational impasse (Berman, Canetto, and Holtzworth-Munroe; Canetto 272 cites Weissman 1974; Kaplan and Klein 259).

Joyce B. Stephens' descriptions of suicidal women are also congruent with those noted above. Stephens studied the life histories, personal interviews, and writings of fifty women who had each made an average of 2.8 non-fatal attempts to commit suicide, serious attempts that accompanied an expressed intent to die and that necessitated emergency medical care. She found that the majority of women explicitly associated their attempts with their partner's sexual infidelity, that the attempts were reactions to the despair that had accumulated throughout years of infidelities or to the despair produced by a single, atypical infidelity. All of Stephens' participants made "repeated efforts to work out the problem with their partners but in not one case did they report receiving cooperation from their partners. Rather, they were met with more lies and avoidance" (82). Stephens' participants most commonly characterized their partners as uncaring and indifferent, and their partners' infidelities were frequently "combined with almost nightly absences from the home" (82, 83). Many of Stephens' subjects were battered women who felt "like prisoners" in their relationships with their men (83), women whose self-worth "existed only in terms of unremitting attention and devotion from their men," and who immediately interpreted flagging attention from their partners as emotional abandonment, which "plunged them into despair" (81). Furthermore, the "center of their lives was their partner and they required that he reciprocate. For them, there could be no meaningful existence outside of the relationship" (81), and before the attempts, "In nearly all cases, the men had either gradually withdrawn from or abruptly fled the relationship" (81). Stephens's subjects had "a consuming investment in their relationships with their partners," and they described themselves as "unable to exist without their partners" (81). And Lester also says that suicidal individuals experience frequent rejection by the spouse (1972, 1988 7).

As will become evident, several sociological descriptions of suicidal women also describe the protagonists and their interrelational paths. Because of this
likeness, let me devote some attention to theories about women’s psychological
development that will also illuminate the larger context of women’s suicide, fictional
and non-fictional. As contemporary psychologists attempt to understand women’s
suicide more adequately, they also are trying to better understand women’s
psychological development on its own terms—rather than as it has been historically
understood, in relation to men. For decades, all of the major developmental
theories—following Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, and Harry Sullivan—measured
women’s psychological health using the same barometers with which they measured
men’s—which is to say, according to how separate, individuated, and "independent"
women are (Kaplan and Klein 258; Miller 1984; Canetto). But, while women are
supposed to be separate from and immune to men and children, they also have been
traditionally prescribed to be primarily interrelational with and devoted to them.
Because theories of psychological development have not accommodated gender
differences, "women do not fit" and are "commonly found to be deficient," lacking
something they should have, such as "a fully developed superego or an identity
before marriage," or having something they shouldn’t, "such as neediness or overly
enmeshed relationships" (Kaplan and Klein 258). Thus, at the same time that the
role of female interrelational distress has been emphasized in suicidology,
developmental theories have minimized the importance of interrelational satisfaction
in women’s overall psychological health.

In response to phallocentric models of development that obscure what Kaplan
and Klein call the "growth-enhancing aspects of [women’s] developmental
trajectories" (258), some psychologists have proposed gynocentric ways of
discussing women’s psychological growth and maturity (Bettridge, Zimmerman,
Canetto, Kaplan and Klein; also see Sanborn).11 For instance, in her 1974 essay,
"Family Structure and Feminine Personality," Nancy Chodorow, analyzing Robert
Stoller’s 1964 studies, says "in any given society, feminine personality comes to
define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine
personality does" (43-44). Chodorow attributes this phenomenon to women’s almost
universal responsibility for early child care. In early childhood, mothers and girls
experience each other as "more like and continuous with themselves." So identity formation in girls entails a fusing process of attachment. Boys, in being experienced and defining themselves as opposite their mothers, define themselves as male through a separation process that establishes firm ego boundaries in relation to being male. As a result, psychosocial development is intertwined with sex issues: male development entails and is defined by differentiation, separation, and individuation; and female development entails and is defined by attachment, intimacy, and continuous relational development. Similarly, in 1984 J. B. Miller noted that, while boys, like girls, have an "interacting sense of self," beginning in infancy, cultural norms "reinforce relational development in girls" more than in boys (1984 4).

Critical of the phallocentric models of development, researchers at the Stone Center at Wellesley College (including J. Jordan, A.G. Kaplan, J.B. Miller, I.P. Stiver, and J. Surrey) have begun to evolve a model of women's psychological development that, instead of building on the "deficit mode" that is created when women's development is measured in relation to male-oriented models, derives from women's experiences. The Stone Center model, articulated by Kaplan and Klein in their 1989 article, "Women and Suicide," "posits a continuous path of relational development that begins in infancy and evolves in complexity, strength, nuance, and meaning throughout life. Rather than seeing maturity as equated with increasing levels of separation, the Stone Center researchers posit that growth is fostered by action-in-relationship" (258). Furthermore, in contrast to theories "that imply that a woman's most fundamental wish and need is to be passively loved and taken care of" (for example, Deutsch), the Stone Center's relational view of development states that women's sense of self finds meaning and value in active relationships characterized by interrelational connectedness—mutual care, effort, and relational responsibility (258). And, in contrast to traditional models of the self that discuss the center as "a center of productive initiative—the exhilarating experience that I am producing the work" (such as Kohut 18), the Stone Center view argues that female core-self structure and self-esteem are grounded in mutual, growth-enhancing connections with others. Thus, women are centered neither by this "productive
initiative," nor by the separate "I," but by a sense of self that participates in a mutual emotional process (259).

Charlotte Sanborn accepts the Stone Center model, although with some implicit qualifications of it. She supports the contemporary effort to account for female development, but she notes the need for more total merging of identity-forming behaviors in men and women, including work. Without limiting her description to either sex, she says:

A healthy sense of self-esteem needs a stable, acceptable body image; a realistic sense of self-entitlement; the capacity for love, tenderness, and intimacy; and the mastery of experiencing loss and being able to sustain oneself in the face of it. (149)

Furthermore, Sanborn says:

Based on distorted definitions of what it means to be a man or woman, traditional roles have prevented both sexes from realizing their full human potential. Women have been cut off from the outer world and deprived of the working self, while men have been cut off from the inner world and deprived of the feeling self. (153)

Although some of these gynocentric theories have been accused of embracing essentialist rhetoric, they have also usefully directed psychologists toward efforts to understand women’s development on terms that are not entirely subsumed by male models of development, and they helpfully illuminate the masternarrative and its theoretical effects. However, at times Kaplan and Klein begin to sound almost prescriptive because of their sweeping, unqualified generalizations about women. For instance, they say, "Indeed, what women live for, what keeps them alive, are the opportunities to experience themselves in this [interrelational] way" (259); and, "It is through active participation in a relational connection that is mutually grounded and empathically based that a woman’s core self-structure becomes articulated" (258; cite Miller 1986). These statements are not absolutely essentialist, they are uncomfortably inclusive. For instance, while the Stone model and other newer theories promote understanding and support of women’s interrelational needs and of many women’s reactions to relational impasse, Kaplan and Klein do not comment on the need for cultural norms that also support women’s individuation efforts—which
would include, as Sanborn suggests, attention to occupational and diversional needs. While I recognize the value of the Stone Center model and theories, I am uncomfortable with Kaplan's and Klein's perhaps inadvertent but nevertheless all-inclusive wording. In their attempt to define women as a group, Kaplan and Klein—especially through the lack of simple adjectival qualifiers such as "many" women—do a disservice to the range of self-fulfillment found within that group.

Conversely, although Kaplan and Klein emphasize the mutuality of interrelational connection, they posit it as a self-centering necessity for women, but as an apparent option for men. For instance, they say, while "members of both sexes can and do engage in such an exchange, our society especially supports this model for women" (258). This comment locates the interrelational gendering of women in societal supports, but, the Stone Center model doesn't explicitly advocate or even note the need for cultural changes that will validate women's typical and atypical interrelational processes, but also encourage and validate women who divert from traditionally-defined concepts of womanhood. Further, the model does not call for changes that will encourage men to more readily honor and attend to their interrelational needs. Indeed, as Chapter 6 will illustrate, even though fictional female suicide is predominantly prompted by interrelational issues, the narratives also implicate the occupational limitations imposed on women. Finally, Kaplan's and Klein's likely unintentionally prescriptive tone begins to echo some of the perhaps equally "unintentional," but also restrictive prescriptions of the female suicide narrative.

Nevertheless, while I note some possible oversights in Kaplan's and Klein's presentation, their concerns are in many ways compatible with mine. In 1988, Stephens expresses surprise that, despite the number of female suicide attempts in the western world and "the prevalence of published studies which emphasize the role of conflict in the social relationships of suicidal women, there has been a general failure to pinpoint and describe the specific forms these conflicts assume" (73). Stephens attempts to describe these conflicts, and Kaplan's and Klein's work augments hers on the intersection of the social and the interpersonal in women's
psychological development. However, this work, which is grounded in more psychological concerns with interpersonal development and its relationship to suicide, is fruitfully augmented by others who present more sociohistorical contextualizations of women's suicide. For instance, Leenaars, finding no psychological differences between the suicide notes of men and women, says sociologists should ask if suicide rates are more influenced by gender roles and other social aspects rather than psychological factors (60). Recall from Chapter 2 that Stephens says:

If suicidologists agree on one thing, it is that ultimately suicidal behaviors are not understandable as specific acts but are rather possible outcomes of more general social processes which precede the act and provide a matrix from which self-destructive attitudes and roles may arise. Viewing suicide attempting as processual in nature, it becomes necessary not only to identify those patterns of interactions which foster personal despair and self-hatred but also to trace these patterns developmentally. (73-74)

In 1992, Raymond Jack advanced this effort in his remarkable book, Women and Attempted Suicide. Jack's primary concern is with non-fatal self-poisonings, but his perspective also has vital implications for discussions about women's suicide, real and fictional. Jack notes that early in the twentieth century, two psychiatrists correlated women's self-poisoning rates to social conditions, but that the socialization issue in non-fatal self-poisoning has been neglected until recently (15). While, like others, Jack discusses the developmental patterns of suicidal behavior in women, unlike others, he pointedly and critically relates them to sociohistorical and cognitive conditions in order to show how non-fatal self-poisoning, rather than being the pathologized behavior it has been assumed to be, is actually a normative response to women's socialization. Whereas the Stone Center model attempts to describe women's psychological development through sex and the specific effects of women's role as caregivers of children, and, thus, grounds its interpretations of women in the interrelational and the physical, Jack focuses on how sociohistoric factors affect women's cognitive-psychological development and suicide. According to Jack, "Women are additionally vulnerable to helplessness, dysfunctional attitudes
and self-poisoning due to the effects of the sex role system and the medicalisation of their social and relational problems" (xvi).

However, while Jack’s theories challenge preceding theories, they also augment them. Jack’s descriptions of the interrelational conditions of women and the effects of those conditions on female suicide resemble those of several writers already cited. He says, "Family and relational problems—particularly those perceived as uncontrollable—have therefore been found to characterise the events which occur immediately prior to self-poisoning in women" (166). However, Jack positions this response within social conditions that promote women’s roles as dependent upon men for money, that locate women’s primary and sometimes only sources of growth and validation within the limitations of interrelational development. Unlike Kaplan and Klein, Jack is explicitly critical of the context in which women’s developmental conditions have emerged, especially their limited options:

Success for women is traditionally defined in terms of achievement in a narrow range of sex-appropriate roles centering on heterosexual relationships and the family. Feminine social identity and the female’s self-concept are therefore crucially dependent on the assumption and maintenance of these sex-appropriate roles, and there is limited opportunity for the development of alternative sources of social and self-concept. Success in the domestic domain is, however, socially undervalued in comparison with success in the male dominated 'public' domain— and thus women 'have to lose in order to win.' (191)

However, Jack’s description also augments the "double-edged sword" description of psychological development, health, and expectations that Kaplan and Klein say has been applied to women (that is, that women are expected to be dependent upon but independent from men). He says:

Lacking the alternative sources of self-concept and social identity which educational and professional opportunity provides for males and those of middle class origin, young, working class women are crucially dependent for the development and maintenance of their self-concept and social identity on those roles and relationships traditionally identified as appropriately female in the sex role system. In the domestic domain this promotes early involvement in courtship, marriage and childbearing; in the public domain it encourages participating in caring and service industries which are characterised by extensive part-time, low paid employment. (194)
And, furthermore:

the sex role socialisation of women encourages conformity with a dependent, 'helpless' stereotype of femininity which both emphasizes successful relationships with men and children as central to their social role and self-image and, at the same time, renders them ill-equipped to cope with breakdowns in these relationships. The early experience of parent loss and family breakdown, coupled with a current lack of alternative sources of social and self-esteem may render certain women additionally vulnerable to this helplessness in the face of extreme adversity. Such is indeed the experience of many women who poison themselves which, it is suggested, is the ultimate expression of the helplessness and dependency inherent in the stereotypic female role. (xiv)

Thus, the upset of personal relationships that is regularly implicated in female self-poisoning is "particularly threatening to [women's] narrowly based self-concept and social identity" (194). When "the 'helpless' attributional style common among women" is "present within stable heterosexual and family relationships," it enhances "the stereotypical female self-concept, communicating social identity and promoting adaptation to the role relationships involved in their maintenance." However, when women encounter interpersonal breakdown, the helpless attributional style, "while still serving the function of communication the social identity of female helplessness, undermines self-esteem and self-concept and fails to promote adaptation and mastery" (94-95).

Consistent with their normative helpless style, more women then seek medical and psychological care to address their interpersonal problems (among others, Jack 197). The helpless style is further perpetuated by the medical establishment's prescription of psychotropic medication—which has been prescribed twice as often for women as for men (95-107). Once this medication is obtained, women continue to rely on and even exacerbate the helpless attributional style and the solutions society offers them, solutions that further promote the helpless style in women. Jack argues that, by overdosing, women embrace their helpless roles. and.
in their unconsciousness, they become fully helpless—or, perhaps, fully feminine. And the self-poisoning epidemic in Great Britain peaked in 1976—and was associated with Britain's institution of the National Health Service, a service that primarily served women and under which the "authority of the pathology paradigm grew" and women were increasingly prescribed psychotropic drugs (xi). Thus, while self-poisoning is regularly described in relation to pathology and psychiatric abnormality, it is a reflection of sociohistoric and normative processes, rather than a reflection of "aberrant behavior guided by psychopathology" (xv), a normative act that is the direct result of women's socialization to be dependent on men, to rely entirely on interpersonal relationships for self-esteem, and to be helpless, a reflection of the roles women are socialized to embrace, an exaggerated but normative result of their sex role socialization, of the prescribing of medication, and of the collapse of their only sources of validation—their interpersonal relationships (Jack 194-95).

Thus, while Kaplan and Klein describe similar female roles and acknowledge that female development is constructed by women's roles as primary caretakers, Jack describes the female psychological condition in relation to women's domestic roles, as well as other sociohistorical factors, such as the development of health services and their use of psychotropic medication.

While Raymond Jack's description of the psychological states and options for women concur with much of what is suggested by the Stone Center model, his sociohistoric and cognitive theories also challenge some of the physiological and psychological premises of that model and others. But, in the same way that the "truth" about suicide theories, descriptions, and texts appears located within a confluence of sometimes confusing, competing visions of women and suicide, the descriptions of conditions around and the forces imposed upon suicidal women lie not solely in Jack's model or in the Stone model, but in their confluences. While women's development, suicide, and cognitive relations are significantly grounded in their conflicting roles as dependent, helpless caregivers and nurturers, it might behoove us to entertain the notion that female roles and female suicide are also informed by the sociohistoric conditions of fictional narrative, by a master-narrative
of female suicide that constructs models and informs conditions of female suicide for fictional as well as historical women.

**Like Sheep to the Shambles, Lambs to the Slaughter**

As I hope is becoming clear, the social, fictional, and epistemological relations of female suicide are complex. And, as I will continue to show, they both condone and critique female suicide, especially in their mergings of reliable and unreliable representations of it. Further, the interrelational trajectory presented in the masternarrative of fictional female suicide illuminates, challenges, and supports some of the social science and psychological theories of female suicide and psychological development. Like the typical suicidal women described by Berman, Canetto, and Holtzworth-Munroe (272) and by Kaplan and Klein (269), the protagonists are housewives between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four who suffer from a "range of disorders," including depression and madness, that emerge in relation to their roles as housewives, wives, and mothers, and whose suicide attempts, which frequently take the form of drug overdoses, are precipitated by serious marital problems (272; also see Weissman 197. See above for other descriptions of suicidal women).

However, fictional female suicide protagonists present a wide range of heterosexual relationships: they are happily single (Herminia), unhappily single (Zenobia, Lily), faithfully married (that is, excluding imaginary lovers, Reiko, Susan, and Lucy), and unfaithfully married (Anna, Emma, Constance, Edna, Lu Anne, and Thelma). Nevertheless, within this collection of diverse interrelational situations, disturbing patterns emerge--patterns that selectively combine and support the most lethal suicide tendencies and theories from both the patriarchal protection and the gynocentric paradigms, and, in the process, create fairly distinct character trends and situations for suicide protagonists. Because the texts often comment on larger notions of marriage either through or around their protagonists, let me address their general treatment of marriage before I contend with their interrelational treatment of specific protagonists.
As will become clearer throughout this project, one of the defining qualities about these texts is the variegated ambivalence in and around them, including their promotion and problematization of marriage. Marital discord is a primary component of the narrative dynamics of fictional female suicide narratives—most of which contain no happily married couples. Some of the narratives offer rare examples of couples who are happily married—for instance, the Ratignolles, Reiko and Shinji, the Prince and Princess Shcherbatsky, and Levin and Kitty. But at the same time that they offer many more examples of unhappy, often "fatal marriages" than of happy ones, the texts illustrate and contribute to the impetus for compulsory marriage and fidelity for women.

However, these texts which promote and prescribe marriage also offer explicit judgments against it. Dolly says, "But a girl is not asked [whom she wants to marry]. She is expected to choose for herself, yet she has no choice; she can only say 'Yes' or 'No'" (246), and Oblonsky complains, "How stupid that old ceremony is, walking round and round singing . . . a ceremony in which nobody believes and which stands in the way of people's happiness!" (629). Lorck says, "Love fades . . . especially between married couples," that "it's worn away by time and habit," and that marriage is "a thoroughly objectionable institution" (77). Lorck disagrees with Constance's speculation that marriage is more successful when older couples marry, arguing that later marriage is especially bad for women, for whom "The older they become, the harder it is to find a husband. And then children have to be considered" (78). As characters in Constance Ring, Anna Karenina, and The Woman Who Did argue, if men marry too late, their philandering ways are habituated and they are prone to adultery; if men marry too young, they haven't sewn their oats, or they change and fall out of love with their wives, which also predisposes them to adultery.

The texts' critique of marriage sometimes progresses from the moderate to the gruesome, with marriage regularly being equated to slavery and slaughter. A guest at Kitty's wedding says, "What a darling the bride is, like a lamb decked for the slaughter! . . . [O]ne does feel sorry for a girl" (415), and Herminia Barton
describes brides as like "blind girls who go unknowing to the altar, as sheep go to the shambles" (39). Several of the texts represent wifehood as a form of slavery, which is accepted by some women, not by others, but which is a condition of most. During Kitty's wedding, the priest says, "Through Thee the wife is knit to the husband for a helpmeet and to procreate the human race" (412), and Princess Lvova says, "We are all submissive wives, it is in our nature" (414). But one of the guests says, "Now hear how the deacon will roar, 'Wives, obey your husbands'" (415), and even Dolly asks Anna, "What wife, what slave could be such a slave as I am in my position?" (577).

At first, Herminia offers a moderate criticism of marriage, saying, "It is the dependence of women that has allowed men to make laws for them, socially and ethically" (15). Herminia looks forward to falling in love, which she says "is a woman's place in life," although she doesn't think "anybody will ever induce her to marry,—that is to say legally" (21). But soon Herminia argues that marriage has sprung from "vile slavery" (41), that it degrades "pitiable victims [who] languish and die in its sickening vaults" (47). She says:

The notion of necessarily keeping house together, the cramping idea of the family tie, belonged entirely to the régime of the manmade patriarchate, where the woman and the children were the slaves and the chattels of the lord and master. In a free society, was it not obvious that each woman would live her own life apart . . . and would receive the visits of the man for whom she cared,—the father of her children? Then only could she be free. Any other method meant the economic and social superiority of the man, and was irreconcilable with the perfect individuality of the woman. (69-70)

The narrator—who at other times explicitly condones marriage— alludes to the strong, blinding, and questionable cultural pressures to marry when he reports that the "poor slaves of washerwomen and working men's wives" for whom "contented slavery to a drunken husband was the only 'respectable' condition—could n't understand for the life of them how the pretty young lady could make her name so cheap" (78; also see pages 168, 172-75 for additional comparisons to slavery). Perhaps the novel's most scathing rebuttal against marriage is this excerpt spoken by the narrator, apparently
as Herminia's indirect, untagged thought (because it contrasts so blatantly with his support of marriage cited below):

Based upon the primitive habit of felling the woman with a blow, stunning her by repeated strokes of the club or spear, and dragging her off by the hair of her head as a slave to her captor's hut or rock shelter, this ugly and barbaric form of serfdom has come in our own time by strange caprice to be regarded as of positively divine origin. The Man says now to himself, 'This woman is mine. Law and the Church have bestowed her on me. Mine for better, for worse; mine, drunk or sober. If she ventures to have a heart or a will of her own, woe betide her! I have tabooed her for life: let any other man touch her, let her so much as cast eyes on any other man to admire or desire him—and knife, dagger, or law-court, they shall both of them answer for it.' (176-77)

As these texts show, usually only the women "answer for it." And the narrator inadvertently supports Herminia's description and undermines his own call for marriage when he says:

The right sort of man doesn't argue with himself at all on these matters [of love and marriage]... because he can't help himself. A woman crosses his path who is to him indispensable, a part of himself, the needful complement of his own personality; and without heed or hesitation he takes her to himself, lawfully or unlawfully, because he has need of her. That is how nature has made us; that is how every man worthy of the name of man has always felt, and thought, and acted. (emphasis added 29-31)

Of course, the narrator promotes the very claiming and possessiveness addressed elsewhere in the texts, and that which causes the protagonists substantial grief.

While the narrator of The Woman Who Did offers some critique of marriage, family members and friends more frequently promote marriage in general and for the protagonists. Even though Dolly and Levin reassure themselves that unmarried women have the option of being housekeepers, Dolly, even after the interrelational and financial difficulties she and her children suffer because of Oblonsky's philandering, can conceive only of marriage for her daughters (549), and Levin recognizes Kitty's "fear of the humiliation of being an old maid" (361). Anna's and Constance's aunts find their nieces husbands, but with coercion: Anna's aunt "contrived to put [Karenin] in such a position that he was obliged either to propose or leave the town" (461), and Constance's aunt does "everything in her power to
establish the connection" between Constance and Ring, a coupling others doubt from its onset (4). During their marriage problems, as her Aunt Weügel tries to maintain this "connection," Constance asks, "Why were you so eager for me to marry?" Her aunt says:

One must do what's right! The world is arranged so that women must marry. We may be unhappy for a while, but an unmarried woman has far greater burdens to bear. We have to choose the lesser of two evils. . . . Believe me. Constance, if you were an old maid, being unmarried would seem to be the one thing standing between you and happiness. (114)

Constance receives no more support from her mother, who calls her complaints about marriage "foolish talk" (19). The House of Mirth's Mrs. Bart tries unsuccessfully to secure a husband for Lily, and, when her "visions of a brilliant marriage for Lily" fade, fearing a life of "dinginess" for Lily and herself, she dies (35). When Alan Merrick's father can't convince Alan and Herminia to marry, he wonders if Alan is "going mad" (93). And Madame Bovary's Homais says that "it is against nature for a man to do without women. There have been crimes" (242).

While The Woman Who Did offers some of the most scathing criticism of marriage, it also promotes marriage in several ways. When Harvey proposes to Herminia, he says she has proven her "devotion to the right" and encourages her to "fall back this second time upon the easier way of ordinary humanity" to avoid bringing the "unnecessary trouble" on her head and that living "otherwise than as the law directs" brings (165-66). The narrator of The Woman Who Did explicitly promotes marriage on a moral basis, especially for men:

A man with an innate genius for loving and being loved cannot long remain single. He must marry young; or at least, if he does not marry, he must find a companion, a woman to his heart, a help that is meet for him. . . . The purest and best of men necessarily mate themselves before they are twenty. (29)

Of course, this narrator's advocation of men taking women "lawfully or unlawfully," cited above, precludes marriage—and it reiterates Herminia's description of men clubbing and claiming wives. Although the narrator's philosophy of marriage conflicts with Herminia's, he admires and has compassion for Herminia, and he
believes her life is more tragic because "she risked and lost everything" for a man who was unworthy of her: for Alan, who, according to the narrator, is unlike "those best of men, who are, so to speak, born married" because Alan is over thirty, unmarried, and, worse, "heart-free,--a very evil record" (31). Even Herminia, who contentedly meets her own modest financial needs, softens her anti-marriage position when she tells Harvey she is tempted to marry him, but that she won’t, not so much in honor of her principles, but for her "regard for personal consistency, and for Dolly’s position," because she can’t betray the "faith for which [she has] martyred [herself]," and "sell [her] sisters’ cause for . . . the consideration of society," especially when she wouldn’t marry Dolly’s father (167-68). And, finally, while Herminia devotes most of her life to resisting the forces that prescribe marriage for women, she commits suicide so Dolly will feel free to marry.

While Karenin is coaxed into marrying Anna, and we don’t know Daryl’s or Lionel’s early marriage perspectives in *Thelma and Louise* and *Children of Light*, respectively, most of the protagonists’ husbands or suitors fall in love with them and--consistent with what some sociologists report about men’s desire to marry--the fictional male partners seek marriage. Alan eventually abandons his attempt to convince Herminia to marry him. Léonce Pontellier "pressed his suit [for Edna] with an earnestness and an ardor which left nothing to be desired" (521). The day after Charles Bovary is married, he "seemed another man" who "might rather have been taken for the virgin of the evening before" (21), and later Charles "loved his wife infinitely" (31). Matthew Rawlings in "To Room 19" and Shinji Takeyama in "Patriotism" are also in love with their wives when they marry, and Ring is "head over heels in love with" Constance (84-85), as are Lorck (191), and Meier (46).

While some female suicide texts critique marriage, they more often condone it, and, aptly, the protagonists also generally want to marry. When Emma marries, she thinks herself "in love" (24) and later recalls walking "joyously and unwittingly towards the abyss," hoping to find "eternal bliss" in marriage (163). Reiko’s early marriage perspectives are conjoined with her husband’s: Shinji and Reiko experience "intoxicating passions" and "intense happiness" with each other throughout the
almost six months of their marriage (1111-12). Edna marries Léonce in rebellion against her father and sister, but with hopefulness and after Léonce pleases her with his suiting and flatters her with his "absolute devotion" (521). Constance and Ring seem "so much in love" to Mrs. Sunde at their wedding (166), and later Constance supposes she loved him "in a way" when they married (19). While Constance identifies several problems with marriage, she also has "a deep desire for a fully human life," willingly marries Lorck, first for financial security, and later falls in love with him (198).

However, like Herminia's lambs, the protagonists go willingly, albeit unknowingly, first to their often premature and somewhat compulsory weddings—and later to their premature and nearly compulsory deaths. And in their deaths, the texts both support and critique the validity of women's interrelational needs and the institution of marriage. The texts clearly associate the protagonists' violations of traditional female marriage norms with death: they die after having violated the supposedly protective walls of traditional family life. However, their interrelational dissatisfaction occurs because of the compulsoriness and oppressiveness of those limited traditional female roles. The protagonists are "feminine" because they have strong interrelational needs, but, in trying to satisfy those needs, they violate traditional concepts of femininity and femaleness in marriage. Finally, the texts criticize and protect the institution of marriage, revealing it as deadly, and—in contrast to what real women show—deadliest for the protagonists who violate its norms.

The Masternarrative's Interrelational Path: 'Til Death Do Us Part

While the protagonists and their husbands generally marry willingly, their love changes: amidst a gaggle of commenting onlookers at Kitty's and Levin's wedding, Mrs. Korsunskaya sighs and remembers "how absurdly enamored her husband then was [on their wedding day], and how different things were now" (413). Mrs. Korsunskaya's only contribution to Anna Karenina describes the same waned ardor predicted by Lorck and exhibited by several of the protagonists'
husbands, and this "stalemate" becomes an important link in the female suicide trajectory. As will become clearer after readings of several female suicide texts, the master narrative has constructed its own "continuous path" of women's interrelational development (Kaplan and Klein 258), a trajectory that typically includes interrelational possessiveness, indifference, constraint, distress, loss, and rebelliousness; unsuccessful attempts to meet interrelational needs; adultery; abandonment; and death—a trajectory that urges an almost compulsory walk toward a predetermined slaughter, and one that disturbingly resembles Joyce B. Stephens's descriptions of historical suicidal women. Because this path is so formulaic in these narratives, let me generally describe it here, before I go on to discuss how particular texts guide their protagonists down it.

The master narrative's interrelational path begins with the protagonists' early marital dissatisfaction, including feelings of restraint and constriction, and, usually following interrelational rupture with their spouses, the path continues with or is duplicated with their lovers. Many of the protagonists' partners satisfy the descriptions of male development discussed above: they devote much attention to work, little to marriage, and, as they disengage from interrelational endeavors and increasingly invest in a variety of activities, occupations, and freedoms not accorded women, the protagonists become dissatisfied in their housewife roles and dependent on and "clingy" toward their partners. Congruent with S. Pollack's and C. Gilligan's findings about how historical women and men define "fear" (which are discussed further below), when the protagonists become increasingly dependent upon their heterosexual relationship, their male partners—most notably, Vronsky—feel confined or threatened and exert their independence in a variety of ways, which, of course, exacerbate the protagonists' unhappiness and promote further interrelational rupture. The protagonists' dissatisfaction is often exacerbated by their overwhelming sense of purposelessness and dispensability, which, as I discuss in Chapter 6, also facilitates their suicidal paths.

Early in the narratives' representation of this distress, the protagonists often try and fail to find interrelational connection with their partners—or they are revealed
to have already failed. They "act out" in a variety of ways that express their interrelational dissatisfaction: Edna stomps on her wedding ring, Emma throws her wedding bouquet into the fire, and Constance wants to sleep in her mother's bed. While the protagonists sometimes attempt to re-engage with their partners, early in the narratives and sometimes early in their marriages, they accept the unchanging, dissatisfying conditions of their marriages.

At various points in the protagonists' marriages or affairs, the protagonists' partners commit at least two acts of abandonment which occur in various degrees and forms and which are of an emotional or physical nature, or both. Early emotional abandonment may take the form of the partners' interrelational, emotional neglect or carelessness--such as that experienced by Emma, Anna, Edna, Thelma, and Susan. This gradual step is always an essential link in the suicidal trajectory, even if it usually precedes the beginning of the narrative plot. Physical acts of abandonment occur either as non-sexual departures from the protagonist--such as Vronsky's, Lionel's, and Robert's--or as the sexual departure of infidelity--such as Ring's, Lorck's, Meier's, and Matthew's. Whichever the form, the abandonment usually occurs in at least two stages and precede, often immediately, the protagonists' adultery, suicide, or both, with the last--and often the fatal--abandonment occurring near the end of the narrative and serving as the final impetus to the protagonists' suicides.

As the following readings will show, the masternarrative's texts are fairly true to this interrelational trajectory. However, again, the masternarrative is defined by its strength and its accommodating flexibility. While the narratives honor many of the masternarrative's prescriptions for form, character, action, and theme, many of them vary elements in their individual paths. For instance, while Anna's adulterous relationship begins early in the novel and she dies after an extended period of celibacy, Constance's only adultery occurs on the night before her death. Lionel's departure from Lu Anne occurs and is repeatedly addressed early in *Children of Light*, but, although Maria Braun's abandonment by her husband occurs early in the film's plot, it is not revealed until the end of the story. After searching for her
soldier husband for four years, Maria, unsure of whether he is alive, reluctantly begins another relationship. She finds him eight years after he first disappears, but in the midst of enjoying their reunion, she discovers that he had located her—four years earlier, and that since that time he has been leasing her to her lover for payment. Seconds after learning this, she blows herself up in a kitchen gas explosion.

The unusual form of Maria’s abandonment contrasts with one of the texts’ most common forms of abandonment: male adultery. While not all of the significant male figures are sexually promiscuous or adulterous—consider Charles Bovary—adultery figures prominently in the female suicide master narrative, for major and minor characters of both sexes, sexes that are accorded tellingly different, even clichéd, treatment in regards to adultery. While infidelity and adultery are sometimes criticized regardless of the sex of the offender, the characters often accept, expect, and encourage adultery in men, often viewing it as a status symbol. Several of the male characters commit a variety of sexual improprieties, almost as a matter of manly course, ranging from minor ones, such as Robert’s early flirtations with Edna or Meier’s early flirtations with Constance, to general promiscuity, adultery, and procreation. Unlike Vronsky, who commits adultery with Anna after a year of knowing and falling in love with her and who wants to marry her, most of the male characters commit infidelities impulsively, because their freedom enables them to, for simple recreational gratification, without regard to its potential consequences, and without regret even when the consequences materialize in the forms of progeny and female distress, physical and psychological. Indeed, if male characters address the consequences of adultery, they usually do so in regards to the irritating issue of financial support for their illegitimate children.

In the female suicide master narrative—as elsewhere—the inspiration for, nature of, and outcome of women’s adultery is quite different from men’s. While most of their partners are out romping around in one capacity or another, the generally house-bound protagonists begin to feel interrelational distress and yearn for interrelational satisfaction. Their intimacy needs continue to emerge, and most of
their adulterous relationships—including Emma's, Anna's, Constance's, Edna's, and Lu Anne's—are primarily attempts to find love and interrelational connection. Although their adultery is occasionally accompanied by homodiegetically-levelled charges that they are abandoning their families (for instance, Karenin's and Golenishchev's charges against Anna), unlike male adultery, the protagonists' adultery always follows interrelational distress and some form of partner abandonment, is almost always an attempt to satisfy unmet interrelational needs and find connection with a man through sexual and emotional intimacy, and almost always occurs after months or years of falling in and resisting the expression of love, of agonizing considerations about whether or not to begin an extramarital relationship.13

Although the protagonists in this corpus commit adultery about twice as often as their husbands do, the texts' major and minor male characters engage in promiscuity, infidelity, and adultery almost twice as often as their major and minor female characters do. Furthermore, the protagonists-to-partners two-to-one adultery ratio is based on a skewed qualification of female adultery in the texts. That is, if we consider occurrences of suggested as well as substantiated male adultery, the ratio equalizes. While the texts do not confirm that Vronsky, Léonce, or Daryl commit adultery, all three participate in incriminating behavior: Vronsky's "freedom" philosophy and his vague, secretive "bachelor-like" activity; Daryl's four a.m. absence; and even Léonce's frequent, impulsive excursions to men's clubs. One even begins to wonder about Karenin's relationship with Lydia Ivanovna, who is extremely solicitous of his attention and his affection, which she receives and reciprocates.

By regularly suggesting, but not substantiating, infidelity by many of the male partners, the texts continue the vital-androcentric perspective discussed earlier in the chapter and create an ambiguity about male infidelity that aligns readers with the focalization of the protagonists—with their suspicions and their uncertainty about their husbands. However, because this same technique of focalization also must maintain the ambiguity of the adultery, it simultaneously undermines the validity of
the protagonists' suspicions or fears—which, of course, promotes, also as discussed above, the patho-gynocentric rhetoric observed elsewhere in contexts of female suicide. And, because these suspicions are protected by the narratives' larger, indeterminate focalization (that is, by a narrative technique that, even as it sometimes presents the male perspective, generally does not make the reader privy to what is occurring at the clubs, the elections, and in the middle of the night), by an indeterminate focalization that neither confirms nor denies the protagonists' suspicions, this ambiguity protects the suspect male partners from wifely and readerly indictment and blame, and, thus, rhetorically supports the positions and practices of many of the characters who suspect, accept, and look askance at male adultery.

On the other hand, contrary to the masternarrative's treatment of confirmed and questionable episodes of male adultery, a treatment that both exposes but then diminishes the total effect of questionable male adultery, the same masternarrative offers an exaggerated sense of female adultery—the correlative, it seems, to the above-noted patho-gynocentricty of other discussions and texts about female suicide. While not all of the protagonists actually commit adultery, female adultery, nevertheless, metaphorically and detrimentally figures in the lives and outcomes of the women who do not actually commit it: Susan's and Lucy's fates are directly influenced by adultery imagined, hallucinated, or fabricated, and Lily's by adultery imagined, alleged, or reputed. Lucy and Susan are both seduced to their deaths by un-real male adulterers, who are, fittingly, present at their moments of death; Lily is duplicitously treated by Gus Trenor and again by Bertha Dorset, which starts rumors that become an instrumental factor in her social and financial undoing. In *Thelma and Louise*, adultery is metaphorically and covertly presented as a female coupling that is both subversive and subverted. While Thelma commits adultery with the vagabond, her more powerful betrayal of Daryl and his marital mores occurs during and is signified through her absconsonion with and devotion to Louise. In these instances of more metaphorical female adultery, the texts invert their rhetorical move for male adultery: that is, while instances of male adultery are minimized and
protected by the texts' ambiguous, understated treatment of it, female infidelity is exaggerated through the imaginative, but rhetorically damning, effects of fantasy and hallucination. This rhetorical effort is consistent with and implicated by the similarly inversely-disproportionate treatment of male and female suicide in fictional texts and non-fictional contexts—and it helps explain the propensity to address and emphasize female suicide and female adultery in the texts.

This exaggerated presence of female adultery, however, does not cause equivalent levels of marital distress for their husbands. While Karenin clearly suffers as a result of Anna's adultery, the source of his suffering is obtained least of all in the loss of his interpersonal connection with her. Likewise, Daryl is more disturbed about being taunted by the vagabond, who has invaded Daryl's territory, than on Thelma's well-being or absence, and Léonce is more concerned with how Edna's absence will be interpreted and its effect on his business than with its effect on him, her, or their marriage. Like Karenin, many of the husbands are oblivious or indifferent to their interrelational "loss"—or to the signs of flirtation or adultery that sometimes follow it, more concerned with the effect it will have on their public lives than on their private ones. Often the men's interrelational indifference or mutedness is first a sign of the men's disengagement with the protagonists, then the cause of and reaction to the protagonists' questionable behavior—as it is with Léonce, Charles, and Lorck. Perhaps Matthew Rawlings manifests the most exaggerated form of this indifference in his pleased encouragement of Susan's fabricated affair.

While Constance Ring presents, through Alètte and Kristine, warnings about women's premarital sex, the masternarrative offers a stronger message in its collective killing of adulterous women—whether that adultery is actual, imagined, or symbolically represented. Ring is the only one of the adulterous or promiscuous men in these texts to die—and he dies several years after his infidelities begin, in an incidental boating accident. However, after "committing" some form of adultery, Emma, Anna, Constance, Edna, Lu Anne, Lucy, Susan, and Thelma all die. Thus, the masternarrative plot, particularly its ending, supports the texts' earlier, dialogic and thematic condemnations of female adultery and their embrace of female

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marriage and fidelity—at the same time that, through its collective of texts, it represents marriage as a form of slavery and slaughter, a slavery escapable only by self-slaughter. Although in some ways the texts expose sex-related double standards, the texts—not simply the characters—finally, more readily tolerate, encourage, even condone male sexual freedom, while they punish similar acts of female sexual freedom through, of course, pregnancy, poverty, and death. As I survey the interrelational progression of a large selection of protagonists, it becomes evident that the master-narrative champions the unsurprising, but powerful sophism: the best woman is a faithfully married one, regardless of the conditions of her marriage or her soul. This sophism is purveyed for a variety of reasons that, as will become clear, betray larger cultural anxieties about women’s desire and self-will.

Of course, women’s will has historically threatened patriarchal cultures. According to Barbara Gates, Victorians considered will power unnatural in women, "an indication that something was radically wrong"—and fallen women were shamed not only because they had transgressed, but because, in "falling," they exerted their unfeminine self-will (128). Moreover, Carlyle believed that self-will was the primary defense against suicide. So, in order to pay for their sins and redeem their willful acts of desire after being seduced and abandoned, Victorian female characters committed the "weak," "feminine" act of suicide. Gates says that, as the strong sex of a "patriarchal society that was dedicated to championing male mental and physical superiority and to rationalizing sexual differences," it became especially important for Victorian men to maintain the notion that women—naturally weak and feminine—committed suicide more frequently than did their stronger male counterparts—and for men to believe that women committed suicide more than men did, even long after statistics showed that women killed themselves much less often than men did (125). Similarly, Ruth P. Thomas says that fictional female suicide narratives of eighteenth-century France "served reality," especially the male belief that "chastity and fidelity . . . ensured the stability of the entire social structure" (330). And Silvia Sara Canetto says. "After all, the idea that women are suicidal for love is very congruent with beliefs in Western cultures that women’s nature is
primarily to be committed to, dependent upon, and identified with men, as Blias argued in 1984) (AAS 1992).

Of course, it is not revolutionary to note the seemingly universal cultural tensions about women's will, especially in relation to sexual desire. These explanations remain pertinent, and I make additional comments about culture's promotion of these texts in relation to its larger cultural anxieties and its "vulnerability" to women's desire and will throughout this dissertation. However, sociology's last three decades suggest another vital reason for the flourishing existence of the female suicide master-narrative: given what we now know about men's almost "taboo," but strong interrelational needs—especially that men respond to interrelational rupture, whether through death or divorce, with a higher, although "hushed," incidence of fatality than women do—then it especially behooves a patriarchy-serving culture to promote myths that will encourage women to get and stay married to men, regardless of the detrimental consequences this prescription may have for many women.

Indeed, these myths about suicide and gender serve, then, not only the macro-dynamics and power structures of a patriarchy and nation, but also the micro-dynamics of family, and, especially, the dynamics of men's "private" interrelational needs and, literally, their lives. Again, as Al Keochakian tells Gordon Walker, without his wife, he's in big trouble. However, at the same time that female suicide narratives promulgate punishment allegories about women who express their own desires, who leave their husbands, or who remain unmarried, they, ironically and paradoxically, as suicide models, also promote women's death—one of the very things men—who suffer fatally from heterosexual interrelational rupture—would presumably want to avoid. Although I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 6, let me note that, at the same time, female suicide narratives also purvey standardized male interrelational myths by, in contrast to Keochakian's unusual comment about men's need for women, minimizing the value and the loss of the protagonists for everyone, including their husbands.
Readings

Constance Ring

Constance Ring is one of the most representative examples of the master narrative—for its characterization, form, and for its trajectory of heterosexual interrelational distress, abandonment, and female suicide. When Constance and Ring marry, he is in love with her, and she, reflecting on her feelings later, supposes she had loved him "in a way" (19). But issues of distress and constriction arise early in their marriage:

After the wedding . . . there was a striking change in Mrs. Ring. She became quiet and timid and no longer seemed happy. Her eyes, once bright and full of life, were now red-rimmed and dull . . . . At dinner [Ring] found her pale and reticent, her face closed and unapproachable, an air of constraint in her movements. To raise her spirits, he lavished her with affection, which she did not reciprocate but bore patiently. (4)

Issues of constraint and possession continue to emerge: at the Kristiania fjord, Constance watches the boats "yanking at their moorings as if they were terrified and desperate to get free" (5). Three years later, Ring is "so proud" of Constance, who "belonged to him . . . to nobody else" that he wants to tell party guests "about . . . the woman God gave man to be his helpmate" (31). While he thinks of Constance as "so devoted to him—so willing lately to caress him" (35), her physical attentions are obligingly offered, with reserve, and sometimes after being coaxed. Constance also feels verbally restrained around Ring (166-68), and she wonders if "her life [is] always going to be like this—until she [is] old, old, old—never free to be herself again" (70). Ring's control over Constance is dramatized when she challenges his assumption that she should account for her whereabouts to him, even when she is at home, and he violently restrains her in a chair (71). These and other signs illustrate that early in her marriage Constance is essentially a sex slave to a man for whom she feels only "contempt and indifference" (9). Constance's signs of marital distress are more explicit than many of the other protagonists, and, like others, she has no hope for improvement: she wants to tell her mother that,
no matter how much they tortured her—she didn’t feel, would never feel. It was her duty and her calling to make this fat, self-satisfied man happy, a man who never asked about her feelings, who treated her as if she didn’t have a soul in her body—something to be wound up and played like a hurdy-gurdy. (70)

In contrast to the emotional, physical, and sexual constraint Constance feels in her marriage, Ring enjoys a variety of freedoms, including sexual ones. On his trip early in the novel, he "threw himself into his bachelor life, visiting fashionable women, enjoying himself thoroughly" (8). While Ring feels "pangs of consciences every morning" (8), his adultery occurs in a context that approves of, even enables and encourages male adultery, one that frequently blames men’s infidelity on women. When Constance tells her aunt and mother she does not like being married, they admonish her, tell her how lucky she is. Her mother says it is "her duty to love [Ring] and to make him happy" and warns her to "take care that he didn’t get tired of her" because there "is always the risk that he would look for love somewhere else—that was just the way men were" (20). And when Constance tells her cousin she saw Ring kissing the housemaid, Marie says:

It’s nothing to make such a fuss about. A man steals a kiss from a housemaid--it doesn’t mean so much. . . . But you have to remember that men are completely different than we are. They get accustomed to these affairs when they are young, and it’s so easy for them to slip back if their wives don’t--I’m afraid I have to say it--devote themselves body and soul to holding them fast. A wife can do that, especially when she has the physical attributes you do. . . . If only you knew how few men are faithful to their wives--there isn’t one pure marriage in a hundred. (91-92)

Then Marie lists "the affairs married men were conducting while their wives turned their heads the other way," including "several examples from their own circle" (91-92). Constance’s aunt also tries to convince her that men’s infidelity is insignificant; she tries to console Constance by telling her that her own husband, Constance’s uncle, had cheated. She says:

and he’s not the only one. We always think we’re the exception, but that’s very far from the truth. It’s such a problem with men--if they marry when they’re young, they haven’t sown their wild oats; if they wait until they’re older, their habits have become too much for them. (114)
Even Constance's mother tells her she is "not the only woman who had been deceived." and, when "dark hints" in a letter prompt her to suspect that her father was unfaithful, "gently her mother pointed out that she had perhaps not been as good and loving a wife as she might have been, that perhaps she wasn't entirely free of guilt herself" (126).

In *Constance Ring*, in addition to the adulterous men Constance's cousin, Marie, lists, Ring, Lorck, Meier, Constance's father, her uncle, and Kristine's brother-in-law are unfaithful. Kristine, who goes to her sister and brother-in-law to live after Ring impregnates and fires her, suffers such persistent advances by her brother-in-law that she has to vacate her sister's home--either during or just after her baby and her sisters have died from consumption. Throughout the novel, characters accept male adultery and repeatedly suggest that women are to blame if men cheat, whether the women are cheated on or with. Constance's mother and cousin have already allocated female blame for the women who have been cheated on, and when Ring tells the pregnant Alètte she must vacate her job and home, she says, "After this terrible thing I've done." Ring interrupts her, calls her a "vindictive bitch," and beats her to "show [her] what it means to ruin a man" (119-20).

Ring's escalating acts of violence undermine Marie Rikard's observation that "Ring is almost too good-natured," "the kindest, most agreeable person in the world" (84-85), and the discrepancies between public perceptions of Ring and his private treatment of Constance and Alètte reiterate that Ring--and Constance--live split lives, split selves, that she, hating Ring, endures him to appease him and her family members, to maintain their public appearances of harmony. Constance's minister also condones this split living in relation to adultery and promulgates, finally, female blame and responsibility for male adultery. He judges Constance even for speaking about Ring's infidelity: when Constance tells Reverend Huhn she hears that adultery is "not that unusual," he stifles her and says such talk "shows a moral deficiency in [her] thinking that is fundamentally unchristian" (110). While Reverend Huhn doesn't blame her for Ring's infidelity, he judges her for speaking of it and encourages her to stay married, apparently at all cost:

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no matter how strong your reasons, you should not destroy your marriage. . . . A Christian woman never abandons her husband. You would have cold justice on your side, of course, but not the love that forgives all, bears all, believes all, hopes all. (111)

When Constance challenges the reverend’s assessment and recommendations, he further augments the novel’s rhetoric of female blame by accusing her of "mocking God" with "sinful talk" (111). With the diffused support of male infidelity, it is perhaps not surprising that Ring continues to commit adultery during his "occasional piquant little adventures with the singers at Tivoli" (157-58), and, with the societal and familial impositions for Constance to stay married to a man she finds insufferable, it is perhaps not surprising that she does, but that she treats Ring with "icy coldness," that the two go "their own ways in peace, speaking to each other courteously when they had to" (158).

And, thus, the Rings stay married for several years, until Ring’s sudden drowning death. Ring’s death is exceptional in the female suicide mainstream because it is one of only two times an unfaithful man dies in the texts (the other is Harlan, the rapist in Thelma and Louise). After a period of numbness following Ring’s death, Constance "got it firmly in her mind that the hateful chains of marriage had fallen away and she was free of him forever" (171). But Constance continues to be affected by the rhetoric of female blame: when "she was finally fully conscious of her freedom, she began to suffer remorse about the past," and Constance blames herself for not being a more devoted wife (171). For almost three years after Ring’s death, Constance is depressed, isolated, and eccentric. When Marie coaxes her to attend a party, Constance is reacquainted with Lorck. When, six months later, he proposes to Constance, she thinks:

[Men’s] love was disgusting. They loved one woman and lived with someone else. Not that it really mattered—maybe that was all right, perhaps it wasn’t as squalid as it seemed. She had no wish to condemn anybody—she just wanted to keep her distance from it. (192)

While Constance tries to convince herself to accept the consensus about marriage, men, and adultery, she declines Lorck’s proposal—and is soundly reprimanded by Marie for doing so. Months later, when Constance’s suicide attempt—prompted by
her financial ruin—is averted by a second proposal from Lorck, she decides marriage
is "better than some hideous death by her own hand. . . . When it comes right down
to it, marriage is better" and accepts his proposal (199).

Constance chooses married life over death, but Constance also has "a deep
desire for a fully human life," which suggests that she has some desire for
interrelational connection (198), and after a period of shy reserve, Constance falls in
love with her new husband, Lorck. Shortly thereafter, befitting his earlier notions of
marriage, his love grows "passive," the marriage monotonous for him (202).
Constance inadvertently learns that Lorck had had a relationship with Kristine,
which was fraught with his infidelities and which continued until he proposed to
Constance, after which he promptly abandoned the pregnant Kristine. Horrified,
Constance falls out of love with Lorck and feels "a raging bitterness against the
callous society that made it so safe and comfortable for men to indulge their sexual
desires" (219). But, again, Constance tries to accept the philosophy espoused by
others: "She would bear her misfortune with dignity. . . . She would say nothing to
him. It was out of the question for a mature person to make a fuss about something
like this. . . . She would withdraw into herself and behave as if nothing happened"
(222). Lorck, echoing Anna's comments to Dolly about Oblonsky, promotes the
double standard, telling Constance:

you know that men don't live like monks--they can't, they shouldn't. . . . All
young men get involved in these casual relationships with some young girl or
another . . . not to mention the merely sexual liaisons. They really don't
mean very much--and the latter mean nothing at all. There's a need for a
surrogate, if you will, and it doesn't have the slightest influence on a man's
capacity to feel true love later on. (233)

And, echoing Ring and Oblonsky, Lorck feels morally improved by the experience:
"he could clearly see that his way of dealing with the situation had made him into a
better person. This had been beneficial" (246). But Constance is devastated by
Lorck's treatment of Kristine and his general approach to women. She sees in his
letters "the same kinds of endearments he had spoken to [her], sometimes even the

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exact words" (220), and she is struck by a sense of her own generic role in Lorck's life, of her own dispensability, and of the general dispensability of women for men:

That poor woman and her child. Why had she been cast off? By what right did men behave that way? They used up the youth, the health, the love of these women, as if they had been created for one purpose, used them until they had their fill. If they saw something more desirable, they cast them aside, leaving them to the fate their ruthless male egotism had prepared for them. . . . She no longer felt jealous; the nature of her pain was something different. She felt a sudden violent aversion to her husband; she couldn't stand the thought of him. (219)

Furthermore, like Anna, Emma, and others, Constance feels that she is just one in a string of women:

now it was her turn, that was all there was to it. . . . She was just like all the rest of them, and that took the glory away. Half unconsciously, she had thought of herself as an exception, as someone special in his life; now she saw that this wasn't the case. There had been so many of them. He had called them all by the same pet names he now gave her. . . . How long would it last? The bond of marriage was no obstacle to him. . . . She remembered his attempt to seduce her when she was married to Ring, and that coupled with the knowledge she now possessed made her almost think of him with loathing. (222)

As Constance deals with Ring's and then Lorck's adultery, she tries to negotiate her own relationship to female adultery. When Mrs. Sunde warns Constance that if she does not love Ring, "some unprincipled man could come along and charm" her, Constance laughs and says men, unfortunately, are not like that, and if they were, "At least that would be something" (166). Mrs. Sunde protests that "there is nothing in the world more disgusting than a married woman who keeps a lover," that "Free love is a sign of the worst depravity," and suggests it is "a wife's duty to love her husband and let him keep her" (166). When, after Lorck's love becomes passive, Constance feels "sweet pleasure" when Meier lays his arm on the back of her chair, she--like a good wife--wants "to get away from all that now, and in a single bound be safe inside the circle of love and happiness that had enclosed her for so many months" (210).

However, Constance's efforts to accept the attitudes regarding male adultery backfire by causing her to postulate on behalf of her own adultery. She thinks:
"perhaps it was nonsense to think that these affairs of the heart, in all their guises.
degraded a person, or hurt anyone. . . . Now she could see for herself how quickly
love could fall apart. What if she fell in love with someone else? Well, why not!"
(224). As her marriage further deteriorates, as Lorck's attentions decrease and
Meier's increase, she continues this negotiation:

And now she was attracted to another man, another man! Wanting, and
needing, to throw herself into his arms, to tell him she was his. The thought
of being an unfaithful wife stabbed through her; so it had come to that. "An
unfaithful wife!" She covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.
(239)

Constance resists Meier's attentions: "No, no, no! She had always been a
respectable woman; she would not let herself be anything else" (242); she vows to
overcome her love for Meier, telling him "she would despise herself if she were
unfaithful" (253), but, while Constance sits "With an anguished expression,"
"rocking back and forth, moaning softly," Meier is heartbroken to "to possess only
her friendship" (253).

Constance's feelings for Meier become inescapable after the carnival, when
"She knew she was his, but still, ever since that evening her behavior toward him
had been governed by this strange, stupid fear. The horror of being an unfaithful
wife was so ingrained in her. Adulteress--whore. Oh, those words were
unspeakable!" (270). Again, she bolsters arguments for her own adultery with
considerations of male adultery: "Suppose Lorck were in love with a woman who
wanted him as well. Would he think twice about it? Not for a minute. Not him,
nor any of the other married men she knew. Why should women have all these
scruples? Measure for measure--that was life's only valid principle" (270).

As Lorck becomes increasingly suspicious of Constance, he says, with the
continued language of possession, "Constance, my own Constance, be careful not to
hurt yourself" (270). Given the masternarrative's wedding of female adultery with
female suicide, these words signify on several layers: for the protagonists, to commit
adultery--or, for Constance to be inconstant by seeking sexual and interrelational
pleasure extramaritally—is to hurt oneself. And this commingling of female adultery and pleasure with injury continues:

Assailed by conflicting feelings, she felt a gnawing anxiety, a sense of oppression in her breast that was sometimes so intense that she moaned aloud. At other times she was drunk with the thought that tonight she would have his arms around her, his lips against her mouth; then she would shudder as if she had seen an abyss yawning at her feet. (273)

This passage conjoins emotional and physical pleasure with emotional and physical trauma—even, following such pleasure, with images of death by leaping. Constance continues to negotiate her feelings with words that continue to suggest that blame and death might follow her attempt to experience pleasure:

It was a dreadful injustice to [Lorck]. . . . She had to admit that she could stop it. She couldn’t really tell herself that she would die if she let Meier go, and failing that, how could she justify giving herself to him? If Lorck suspected what she was about to do, he would come and kill her. . . . What a cruel humiliation she was inflicting on him. (emphasis added 273)

Constance’s self-recriminations are exacerbated by her belief that Lorck, whom she imagines killing her, "had loved her so steadfastly" and had been faithful to her "even in his inmost thoughts" (273). She decides not to meet Meier later and returns to Lorck to ask for forgiveness, imagining how "happy and surprised" he will be to see her (275).

However, while Constance agonizes over her conflicted feelings for Meier and Lorck, Kristine suspects she has the consumption that killed her sisters and her baby, and she goes to the doctor. No Charles Bovary, Lorck is aroused by Kristine’s vulnerable, sickly condition, and "Suddenly—he wasn’t sure how it happened. . . and before he could restrain himself," he has sex with Kristine. Afterward, he reassures himself:

this was nothing to be concerned about. Constance would never know. So what harm could it do? He had not really hurt her or his relationship with her—he felt that from the bottom of his soul. This was something purely physical—something quite irrelevant. . . . His kind heart was to blame. He wasn’t an unfaithful husband—not in any way—he certainly would protest such an idea. (288)

But Constance sees what happens:
With a face as white and rigid as a sleepwalker's, she slipped out of the room a few minutes later, as soundlessly and unnoticed as she had come in. The blood burned in her veins and she felt as if she were crying 'fire.' Continually and with all her might—she couldn't imagine why nobody came running to put out the blaze. That faithless traitor, betraying her in her own home... and so calmly, so unrepentantly, so confidently—with a smile of delight on his lips. . . . Whereas she—oh she would get revenge—revenge—even if she had to purchase it with her own blood. Her heart... gnawed and stabbed in her breast. How cooling, how soothing to get revenge. (279)

Lorck's betrayal of Constance recalls her earlier feelings of abandonment following Ring's adultery, when her mother's response provokes in Constance a "bitter disappointment and a painful sense of abandonment" and the feeling that her mother "was suddenly alien to her, in league with her accusers" (21).

While, after seeing Lorck's adultery, Constance feels relatively helpless, the excerpt describing her reaction conjoins abandonment and death: its description of Constance in a deathly or ghost-like state, its violent images, and Constance's fantasy of revenge at first suggest the possibility that Constance might commit murder. Indeed, Freud theorized that suicide is "transposed murder, an act of hostility turned away from the object back on to the self," and, until 1651, when the OED dates the first use of the term "suicide," phrases such as "self-murder" and "self-homicide" were used to describe suicide, phrases that reflect superstitions and the Christian law that suicide is murder (Alvarez 67-68). And, since the violent images in this excerpt portray Constance's body in a torn state, it suggests that Constance's notion of revenge will involve self-murder rather than homicide.

However, while the passage strongly, but covertly, suggests an outcome of suicide, the text clarifies Constance's intended method of vengeance: "How cooling, how soothing to get revenge. . . . But he would have to know about it. Yes, certainly! Otherwise there was no point. She would tell him herself, laugh right in his shameless face. No, he'd find her in Meier's arms in the bedroom--some night when he came home late" (280). When Constance meets Meier later, he reiterates, yet again, the rhetoric of men's sexual possession of women, saying, "My darling--you're mine--all mine" (283).
After Constance becomes "all Meier's," the passage's focalization reflects this possession rhetoric: within two short paragraphs of their meeting, the focalization abruptly becomes Meier's. Through his perspective we learn he is irritated because when a photo falls out of his wallet, Constance learns that, while Meier has been adamantly pursuing and proclaiming undying devotion to her, he has been having an affair with her seamstress. The chapter returns to Constance's focalization--including her renewed aversion to adultery and, now, following the swelling rhetoric of female blame, her aversion to herself for committing it: "She had gotten her revenge. But had it given her any relief? She was sickened by herself. . . . She was disgusted with her husband, with Meier, with life--but above all, with herself" (285)--and within one day and three pages of this double abandonment, within hours of committing her only act of adultery, Constance is, as she anticipated being, killed for committing it--not by Lorck's hands, but her own.

Anna Karenina

While in many ways Constance Ring approximates the prototypical path of female suicide, the masternarrative's strength, flexibility, and insidiousness become evident by its presentation in a variety of texts. In contrast to Constance's experience with witnessed, adulterous abandonments, Anna contends with suspected adulterous abandonment and with non-sexual departure. However, Anna Karenina also abides by many of the masternarrative's interrelational trends. Her marital dissatisfaction begins early in her marriage; with Karenin, she feels an "unpleasant," "ordinary, well-known" feeling of "dissatisfaction" and "dissembling" (95). Nevertheless, Anna reports having "tried with all [her] might . . . to love him" and to love Serezha "when [she] could no longer love" Karenin (267). Anna complains that during the eight years of their marriage, Karenin has "been smothering [her] life, smothering everything that was alive in [her], that he never once thought [she] was a live woman, in need of love" (267). Karenin's disinterest in her and their marriage is clear: it is not until Karenin hears rumors about Vronsky and Anna that, he, "For the first time . . . vividly pictured to himself her personal life, her thoughts.
her wishes" (130), and even then, "he regretted having to expend his time and powers of mind on inconspicuous domestic affairs" (131). Like several of the protagonists' husbands, Karenin is also preoccupied by his work and other activities: Anna thinks Karenin is interested in "Nothing, but ambition, nothing but a wish to get on—that is all he has in his soul" (189), and her perception is confirmed by the narrator, who tells us after the steeplechase incident, "Externally Karenin's relations with his wife remained the same. The only difference was that he was even more occupied than before" (183).

After a year of loving Vronsky and with much distress, Anna and Vronsky begin their affair, and, like Constance's body, Anna's is one others seek to control and possess. While Anna feels "smothered" by Karenin, he thinks he gives her "complete freedom" by affording her shelter on the condition that she "observe the laws of propriety" (331). Anna does not observe them, and Karenin, unable to constrain her sexual and social body, constrains her maternal body and its product, Annie: because he forbids her to breastfeed, Anna will likely have her breasts bound to stop her lactation; and, because the wetnurse is not lactating and Annie appears to be starving, her comfort and growth are temporarily thwarted.

When Karenin momentarily agrees to grant Anna her "freedom" through divorce (392), she is prepared to relinquish it immediately to Vronsky: "Yes, you have taken possession of me and I am yours" (395); and Dolly tells Anna that Vronsky wants "to be [her] husband and have a right to" her (577). However, to hold Vronsky, she deprives him—her "husband all the same"—of one of the most assumed "rights" of husbands in these texts: the right to her body. While society assumes she is indulging her sexual body, she privately exerts what little "power" she can interrelationally, sexually, and reproductively to deny Vronsky the very thing she fears he will seek elsewhere (and, of course, in the process denies herself sexual gratification). Dolly questions the morality of Anna's celibacy: "It was the very thing she had dreamt of, but now on learning that it was possible, she was horrified. She felt that it was too simple a solution of too complex a question. 'N'est-ce pas immoral? ' was all she said after a pause" (578). Even though Anna
tells Dolly she also abstains from sex to prevent a possibly life-threatening pregnancy that would produce illegitimate children, Dolly expects Anna to be sexually devoted to her lover and to childbearing.

At first, Anna wants to love Vronsky "freely and boldly" (328), and she imposes celibacy on the relationship after she is shunned and after she endures a variety of social constraints because of the affair's invalid position in society. In Europe, Anna experiences a respite from these restrictions, and "the first period of her freedom and rapid recovery" is "unpardonably happy" (421). During this short time, Anna feels a psychological advantage over Vronsky, joyful because now she possesses Vronsky, who has "sacrificed his [professional] ambitions for her and never shows the least regret," because he "never contradicted her," "seemed to have no will of his own and to be only occupied in anticipating her every wish" (422). During this time, Vronsky first feels the "freedom of love" and freedom from professional obligations, "but not for long" (422). He re-immerses himself in political and social affairs, and, while he knows "that Society was closed to" them, he tries to re-enter it with Anna and notices "that though the great world was open to him personally, it was closed to Anna" (480). Indeed, when, against Vronsky's wishes, Anna attends the opera, she leaves in the middle of it, feeling "pilloried" and disgraced--but Vronsky stays (497).

While Vronsky continues to live "his own independent life" (246), Anna is increasingly shunned by society and is eventually abandoned by all of her associates and friends except Dolly (124). Anna is rejected by Vronsky's mother and his sister-in-law, who--using rationale similar to that used against Herminia Barton--refuses to see Anna because she has "daughters growing up" and "must move in Society" (481). Even Betsy, who strongly supports the affair in its early stages, becomes an emblem of society's response to Anna and Vronsky, with her cool distance and her wish not to know Anna "as long as [her] position [is] irregular" (577).

Thus, Anna's personal isolation is exacerbated by her friends' and her lovers' abandonment of her, as Vronsky continues to enjoy the freedoms and
privileges from which she is barred. As Anna is increasingly rejected by her friends and acquaintances, she becomes increasingly dependent on Vronsky. This dependence begins the first night she has sex with him: "she had no one in the world now except him, so that even her prayer of forgiveness was addressed to him."

Anna tells him, "It’s all over. . . . I have nothing but you left" (136). After one act of sex, Vronsky has become Anna’s world, her maker and her murderer, and as Anna’s world shrinks, her dependence on Vronsky increases and her doubt for him increases: she perceives "in everything a confirmation of that dreadful thought [that he ceased to love her]: in the fact that he had not dined at home the day before, and that he had insisted on having separate apartments while in Petersburg, and that even now he was not coming alone" (490). Anna’s fear is exacerbated by her dependent condition: she says to Dolly, "Remember, I am not a wife; he loves me as long as his love lasts!" (577-78), and she thinks, "He has the right to go when and where he pleases. Not only to go away, but to leave me. He has every right and I have none at all" (603). Finally, fearing "the terrible thought of what would happen if he ceased to love her," Anna tells Vronsky she will seek a divorce (603).

And, as Anna’s fears mount, Vronsky starts to feel constrained in his relationship with her. He is:

troubled by these love-meshes in which she tried to entangle him. As time went on, the oftener he felt himself caught in these meshes the more he desired, not exactly to escape from them but to try whether they really interfered with his freedom. Had it not been for this ever-increasing desire for freedom—not to have a scene each time he had to go to town to a meeting or to the races—Vronsky would have been quite content with his life. (583)

The next time Vronsky goes to the elections, he proclaims "his right to freedom" (600) by not giving Anna his itinerary: he thinks, "At first there will be, as now, something uncertain, something concealed; but afterwards she will get used to it. In any case I can give her everything else, but not my independence as a man" (584). Anna sees Vronsky’s "expressed his right to freedom" in his face and is reminded of her opposite condition. She thinks:

He has the right to go when and where he pleases. Not only to go away, but to leave me. He has every right and I have none at all. But, knowing this,
he ought not to do it! But really what has he done? He has looked at me coldly and severely. Of course it is indefinable, intangible, but it was not so formerly, and that look. . . . shows that he is beginning to grow cold.' . . . and just as heretofore, only by occupations by day and morphia by night could she stifle the terrible thought of what would happen if he ceased to love her. . . . Anna now acknowledged to herself that he was weary of her and would regret giving up his freedom to return to her; yet in spite of this she was glad that he would come. (603-04)

After the elections, he is struck by the contrast between their "innocent mirth" and the "dismal burdensome love to which he must return" (603)—and to which he returns, without notice, a day later than expected. When Vronsky says, to Anna, "I wanted to stay, so I stayed," she says, "Of course you wished to stay, and stayed. You always do what you wish. . . . Does anyone dispute your right?" (638).  

As Anna more frequently imagines that Vronsky is falling out of love with her and in love with another, she becomes increasingly affected by her own sense of dispensability and self-loathing, and Anna's tension between love, freedom, and fear continues: "He is glad of a chance to show me that he has other obligations. I know he has, I agree to that. But why prove it to me? He wishes to give me proofs that his love of me must not interfere with his freedom" (637). Anna, who wanted "only to live," now says:

I do not live, but only wait for a solution which is deferred and still deferred. Again no answer! And Stiva says he can't go to see Alexey Alexandrovich; and I can't write again. I can't do anything, begin anything, change anything! I restrain myself, wait, invent occupations for myself—the English family, writing, reading, but all that is only deception, it is all a kind of morphia. (637)

As Vronsky continues to enjoy social and interpersonal freedoms, Anna becomes fearful of abandonment and expresses the importance of mutual interrelational connection for her welfare. She says, "I only want you not to abandon me as you are thinking of doing. . . . What I want is love, and it is lacking. Therefore all is finished!" (673). Anna's fear of abandonment twists her into a downward spiral toward death. She regrets not having died during childbirth and says: "Abandon me! Abandon me! . . . I will go away to-morrow. I will do more. What am I? A
depraved woman. A stone around your neck! I don't wish to torment you. I don't! I will set you free. You don't love me, you love some one else!” (674).

Although there is no definite evidence that Vronsky is unfaithful to Anna, Tolstoy does several things to undermine readers' surety about this. While many of the master-narrative’s protagonists have unfaithful husbands, several of them have partners, like Vronsky, who participate in activities that offer frequent possibilities for infidelity. And in several ways Anna Karenina illustrates the larger dynamic in the female suicide master-narrative’s treatment of infidelity in men and women.

More than most female suicide texts, Anna Karenina offers some strong criticisms against male adultery. Levin’s hunting trip with Veslovsky and Oblonsky includes a discussion with adjoining comments about women, infidelity, appetites, hunting pleasures, and competitive killing, and it suggests, in its quick convergence of these topics in summarial discourse and story time, the metaphor of women as hunted animals by philandering men (540-41). Veslovsky recalls a peasant telling him "Don’t hanker after other men’s wives, but above all things strive to get one of your own!” (541), and Karenin says to Anna, "I don’t think that one can excuse such a man, even though [Oblonsky] is your brother" (101).

Levin, who, with Kitty, functions as a complementary, reliable voice for much of the novel, also criticizes adultery. When Oblonsky asks him what he would do were he a married man fascinated by another woman, Levin says "it’s quite incomprehensible to me. . . . just as incomprehensible as if I, after eating my fill here, went into a baker’s shop and stole a roll" (37). When he is married, Levin says, "I am ready to swear I can’t find in my soul a trace of regret for my freedom. . . . it is precisely of this loss of freedom that I am glad!” (403). And, when Oblonsky criticizes Levin for compromising his husbandly freedoms, saying, "A man should be independent— he has his own masculine interests. A man must be manly," Levin asks if this means he "should court the maid-servants.” Oblonsky echoes Lorck, Meier, Ring, and others: "Why not, if it’s amusing? Ça ne tire pas à conséquence! My wife won’t be the worse for it, and I shall have a spree. The
important part is to guard the sanctity of the home! . . . but you needn't tie your hands" (535).

And *Anna Karenina* includes several serial male adulterers who don’t tie their hands, but for whom adultery is a way of life, including Veslovsky and Prince Chechensky—who introduces the eldest son of his first family to his secret family in order to "develop" him (659). Tolstoy clearly illustrates the distress caused by Oblonsky’s adultery: when Dolly first learns of his adultery, she "could not get out of the habit of regarding him as her husband and of loving him" (9), but she is devastated by the affair, feels trapped, bound, and tortured. Anna—echoing Constance’s relatives and friends—urges Dolly to forgive Oblonsky: "These men may be unfaithful, but their homes, their wives, are their holy places. . . . They seem to draw some kind of line between the family and those others. I do not understand it, but it is so" (62-64). Anna’s solace rings ironic because Oblonsky has just told Levin how much he dislikes his home life and because this reasoning would have offered no relief to Anna’s later worries about Vronsky. But, finally, Dolly feels there is "no longer any question of separating" (65), and even though there is "nothing definite," she suspects his continued philandering and, like the women of *Constance Ring*, she looks the other way. Her suspicion is corroborated when, again echoing Ring and Lorck, Oblonsky says to Levin about his affairs, "How can I help it? I am made that way. And really so little harm is done to anyone, and one gets so much pleasure" (147).

While the women in these texts typically are deprived of such pleasure—and, if they try to experience it, they are soundly punished—some women in *Anna Karenina* commit adultery, apparently without serious repercussions: including Vronsky’s mother, Betsy, and the eight society wives Karenin recalls. However, although the circumstances of and feelings about these particular women are not articulated, in general, the adulterous women in this novel are judged more harshly than the men. According to Pestsov, the "inequality between husband and wife . . . lay in the fact that the infidelity of a wife and that of a husband were unequally
punished both by law and by public opinion," which Karenin attributes to "the very nature of things" (356).

And even as some of the women in *Anna Karenina* upset this "nature of things," the double-standard prevails, adjacent to the rhetoric of blaming women. Oblonsky's adulteries promote the blame dynamic and the double standard seen elsewhere in *Anna Karenina* and in other female suicide narratives. When one of Oblonsky's affairs causes Dolly distress, he says "it's all my own fault--my own fault; and yet I'm not guilty!" (1-2). While Levin disapproves of Oblonsky's behavior, he never upbraids him for it, even in thought, but remains Oblonsky's cordial friend. On the other hand, when Oblonsky kisses Dolly, Levin levels her with judgment and disgust, "Of course she does not believe in his love. Then why is she so pleased? Disgusting!" (516).

Vronsky, of course, also enjoys society's acceptance of his adultery. He knows in society's "eyes, the role of the disappointed lover of a maiden or of any single woman might be ridiculous; but the role of a man who was pursuing a married woman, and who made it the purpose of his life at all cost to draw her into adultery, was one which had in it something beautiful and dignified and could never be ridiculous" (116). Vronsky's affair is "known to all the town," and "Most of the young men envied him just on account of . . . Karenin's high rank and the consequent prominence of the affair in Society" (158). Even "Vronsky's mother . . . was at first pleased, both because in her opinion nothing gave such finishing touches to a brilliant young man as an intrigue in the best Society, and also because this Anna Karenina . . . was after all such as the Countess Vronsky expected all handsome and well-bred women to be" (159). Of course, Anna knows Vronsky has the capacity to commit adultery: he has a history of philandering, and if he committed adultery with her, he might do it again. And Anna's fears are legitimated by Dolly's thoughts: "[Oblonsky] left me for others, and the first one for whom he betrayed me did not hold him, though she was always pretty and bright! He threw her over for another. Is it possible that Anna will attract and keep Count Vronsky in this way. . . .--he will find others still more beautiful. as my horrid, pitiable and
dear husband looks for and finds them!" (578). Indeed, while Vronsky tries to convince Anna he is not free, he wields his freedom over her, he is free to work, travel, socialize—and to indulge in sexual licentiousness should he want to.

Anna’s jealousy and fear seem both excessive and warranted because, while Vronsky may or may not be unfaithful to Anna, he takes advantages of situations in which he is free to do so, and he puts Anna at the mercy of his whimsical social desires or power-assertions. Whether or not Vronsky betrays Anna’s trust, he undermines, rather than promotes, it. Her fear of abandonment is directly proportionate to her dependence on Vronsky. She says to him, "I am entirely in your power" (676), and because Anna remains powerless and ignorant about Vronsky’s activities, she cannot be sure of his loyalty to her, nor can she ameliorate her fears of his infidelity and abandonment. She can only interpret his artful signals; likewise, we can only interpret Tolstoy’s. And both Anna’s relationship with Vronsky and the novel’s treatment of Vronsky are fraught with ambiguity and indeterminacy. Indeed, Tolstoy maintains this indeterminate tension in Anna and in the readers by ensuring our ignorance about Vronsky’s behavior. That is, the text neither confirms, nor denies Anna’s suspicions. Thus, the text protects Vronsky’s privacy, protects him from acquittal, as well as indictment, and narratively supports his quest for private freedoms.

On the other hand, by maintaining this narrative perspective, Tolstoy brilliantly aligns readers with Anna’s focalization point. While Anna’s concerns at times seem exaggerated, given Vronsky’s history and his changing response to Anna, his philosophy about male marital freedom, and the narrator’s increasingly vague descriptions of his activities, we wonder if his behavior will mirror Oblonsky’s. Instead of allaying readers’ concerns about Vronsky’s potential for infidelity, the text increasingly suggests it is possible—which lends credence to Anna’s jealousy and distress, and which invites us to experience her indeterminacy and, thus, view her with compassion.

While many of Vronsky’s words and acts suggest his devotion to Anna, these signals are mingled with others that suggest that his devotion might wane—or has.
For instance. Vronsky’s philosophy and behavior regarding his husbandly obligations are akin to Oblonsky’s, especially his desire to prevent Anna from participating in and knowing about parts of his life—including his whereabouts, schedule, and promiscuous past. She says to him, "How is it that you can forget that a woman cannot forget these things? . . . Especially a woman who cannot know your life. What do I know? What did I know? Only what you tell me. And what proof have I that you tell me the truth?" (326). Tolstoy validates Anna’s concern when the narrator says, "The pleasures of a bachelor’s life, enjoyed by him on his previous travels abroad, were not to be thought of now." Tolstoy seems to invite readers to infer that "the pleasures of a bachelor’s life" are sexual pleasures, but then the narrator supports Vronsky’s feelings that Anna has overreacted by redefining or altering our assumptions about bachelor pleasures: "for one attempt of that kind had produced in Anna an unexpected fit of depression, quite disproportionate to the offense of a late supper with some acquaintances" (422). Although the narrator seems to clear Vronsky’s name—even to suggest that Vronsky’s scruples are strong, if he considers a "late supper with some acquaintances" bachelor-like behavior precluded by marriage, we, too, have to question this definition, especially since, Vronsky, who alleges devotion to Anna, later seems to never deprive himself of similar bachelor-like socializing.

Similarly, the narrator suggests Vronsky is honorable toward Anna when he reports Vronsky’s being "troubled by these love-meshes in which she tried to entangle him." But, Vronsky’s desire for freedom is reiterated, which again casts doubt on his interrelational philosophy and resounds, again, of Oblonsky’s philosophy: "As time went on, the oftener he felt himself caught in these meshes the more he desired, not exactly to escape from them but to try whether they really interfered with his freedom." At first, one wonders exactly what Vronsky means by "freedom," but Tolstoy defines it as a relatively harmless, even understandable desire in the following line: "Had it not been for this ever-increasing desire for freedom—not to have a scene each time he had to go to town to a meeting or to the races—Vronsky would have been quite content with his life" (583). The indirect discourse
suggests that Vronsky defines "freedom" by being able to freely leave Anna for public activities, but this may be indirect speech, rather than indirect thought, perhaps speech he uses to try to convince Anna of his fidelity.

A similar rhetorical rhythm occurs in the excerpt when Vronsky declines an invitation to see the "Society beauty" (602), which suggests his devotion to Anna. But, following this, he decides to return to Anna a day later than promised--and without notifying her of his delay--which suggests a careless, even destructive attitude toward his relationship with Anna, as well as a discrepancy between his public self-representation and his private practices regarding her, both of which would be concomitant with an act, present or future, of sexual infidelity. But, again, while the narrator reiterates Anna's sense that Vronsky's interest is waning, he calls the "mirth of the elections" "innocent," and then, to reverse the rhetorical vector, validates Anna's worry as Vronsky compares his "innocent mirth" with the "dismal burdensome love to which he must return" (603).

And, in yet another split representation of himself, when Anna tells Vronsky she will go to Moscow with him, he says he wishes for nothing so much "as not to be separated" from her, but, even though his words are tender, Anna sees the "angry look of a hunted and exasperated man" flash in his face and "rightly" interprets it to mean, "If so, this is a misfortune!" (606). The narrator has already indicated that Vronsky sometimes says one thing and thinks another, and Anna's correct interpretation of this look suggests that her other interpretations of Vronsky's expressions and behavior may be more accurate than he--or the narrative--admits. And the text further confirms Anna's suspicions of Vronsky's diminishing love for her when the narrator says that the irritation between Vronsky and Anna "was an inner irritation, caused on her side by a diminution of his love for her, and on his by regret that for her sake he had placed himself in a distressing situation, which she, instead of trying to alleviate, made still harder" (669).

These passages parallel the larger narrative pattern of Anna Karenina and of Anna's interrelational progression in two ways. These rhetorically fluid, frustrating passages become more frequent as Anna's fears grow. Furthermore, they and the
novel treat questions about Vronsky's character with alternating suggestions that he may or may not be honorable. While questions about Vronsky's infidelity or fidelity are frustratingly indeterminate, he lies to Anna, withholds information from her regarding his whereabouts, shows enough poor judgement, self-centeredness and a sufficiently changed behavior and philosophy toward Anna to suggest that he may renew his previously licentious behavior. We see him change: early in the novel, tells her he has "not a thought" he would hide from her (326), but, as she becomes more dependent on him, he lies to her. Further, although Vronsky may not be committing adultery, he abandons Anna for mirth, companionship, social activities—diversions from which she is excluded and for which he knows she longs.

And, while Vronsky’s sexual, professional, and social freedoms are supported by society, Anna, in her restrictions and isolation, is judged for her relationship with Vronsky. Indeed, when Vronsky’s mother hears that he refuses an important career move so he can remain near Anna, that "exalted persons were dissatisfied with him for it," and that the affair "was not one of those brilliant, graceful, Society liaisons which she approved, but a desperate Werther-like passion," she is displeased (158-59) and remains "merciless" toward Anna (481). In addition, the "majority of young women . . . only waited to be sure that public opinion had turned before throwing the whole weight of their scorn at" Anna (158).

Although Tolstoy makes clear that Oblonsky is not particularly admirable, the novel repeatedly illustrates society's bias against women and for men in adultery in the characters' and text's treatment of Oblonsky and Anna. Unlike Oblonsky's casual affairs, Anna's relationship with Vronsky is one through which she hopes to satisfy her interrelational needs. For Anna, as well as for most of our protagonists, to love is to live: "I am alive, and cannot be blamed because God made me so, that I want to love and live" (267). Even Dolly forgives Anna for pursuing what she believes is Anna's God-given interrelational needs:

And they are all down on Anna! What for? Am I better than she? I at least have a husband whom I love. Not as I wished to love, but still I do love him; but Anna did not love hers. In what is she to blame? She wishes to live. God has implanted that need in our souls. It is quite possible I might
have done the same. . . . I ought then to have left my husband and begun life anew. I might have loved and been loved, the real way. (emphasis added 541)

But Dolly, who proclaims her love and devotion to Anna, who doubts the morality of her sexual abstinence, has ambivalent feelings about her affair: she "theoretically . . . not only excused but even approved of Anna's action" (563), but she also thinks a "nice woman would not have accepted a post in such an irregular household as Anna's" (561). Dolly, faithful to an adulterer, cannot live; nor can Anna, as female adulterer, live, and her post-adultery death is foreshadowed in much the same way Constance's is. After she and Vronsky first make love, Anna is miserable, ashamed and afraid:

she dropped her once proud, bright, but now shame-stricken head, and she writhed, slipping down from the sofa on which she sat to the floor at his feet. . . . 'My God! Forgive me!' she said. . . . She felt so guilty, so much to blame . . . ; but she had no one in the world now except him, so that even her prayer of forgiveness was addressed to him. . . . He felt what a murderer must feel when looking at the body he has deprived of life. The body he had deprived of life was their love, the first period of their love. . . . But in spite of the murderer's horror of the body of his victim, that body must be cut in pieces and hidden away, and he must make use of what he has obtained by the murder. (emphasis added 135)

While Vronsky's murdered "body" is "the first period of their love," this passage also evokes the image of Anna as a murder victim—and, of course, it proleptically evokes the image of her body nearly split by the train in her "self-murder." Indeed, much earlier, one of Anna's friends says, "a woman with a shadow generally ends badly" (123), and Anna senses that somehow she will pay for her adultery with her life: "Soon . . . everything will get disentangled and we shall be able to rest and not torment each other any more. . . . Soon, and I shall not survive it. . . . I shall die, and I am very glad that I shall die: I shall find deliverance and deliver you" (328).

Kaplan and Klein believe that when women feel hopeless, they engage with others to "obtain a sense of meaning and authenticity," but when they feel intolerably alone or isolated, and when these feelings combine with overwhelming self-hatred, they are more vulnerable to suicide (275). In Anna's last hours, she
suffers these feelings in abundance, and we see her feelings in more detail than in the other narratives of my corpus because Tolstoy slows the narrative tempo of Anna’s final crisis and her death. Anna is on the cusp of tolerable and intolerable isolation and self-hatred before Vronsky’s last departure, and, although he tries to reassure her that he will always love her and that "he loved her more than ever" (674), Anna doubts him—and her doubt is validated again because, while Vronsky pities Anna and sees her "pale and trembling lips," "his legs carried him out of the room before he had thought of anything to say" (678).

Vronsky’s departure—described as if it is involuntary—is Anna’s fatal abandonment, and it is compounded by Anna’s increasing feelings of self-hatred, of a discrepancy between her love for Vronsky and his for her, and of her hopelessness. Anna’s thoughts about Vronsky’s alleged hatred for her suggest her own self-hatred: after Vronsky leaves, Anna believes he "hated her because he loved another woman" (679); she sees death "as the sole means of reviving love for herself in his heart" (679), and she believes Vronsky thinks of her "with hate and regrets" (685). She thinks "no respectable woman" can receive her in her "position" (686) and that even if she marries Vronsky, people—including her son, Serezha—will look askance at her (691). At the same time that her feelings of being hated flare, so do her feelings of being abandoned: "How could he go away leaving me in this condition? How can he go on living, without having made it up with me?" (683). Further, she senses a discrepancy in their love: "My love grows more and more passionate and egotistic, and his dwindles and dwindles. . . . And there is no remedy. For me everything centers in him . . . . But he wants more and more to get away from me" (690). Anna fears Vronsky’s kindness is obligatory and longs for freedom from her torturous condition: "Is any kind—not of happiness even but of freedom from torture—possible? No! No!" (691). And Anna’s own thoughts become tellingly indeterminate. She asks herself, "Can I not live without him?" (684), and if we remove the double negative, the question emerges, "Can I live with him?" She must do both, yet she can do neither.

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While until the moment of her death Anna vacillates about believing in and doubting Vronsky’s love for her and the possibility that they can be happy together, her doubts prevail, and she sees signs of lost love and deception even in the unknown couple on the train. And her fears are never truly confirmed or denied. Vronsky responds to her note, promising to return: "I shall be back at ten." This note muddies the abandonment because Anna doesn’t necessarily believe it; and, as Anna knows, to be "back at ten" is not all that she needs. Nevertheless, the note distinguishes Anna’s elusive abandonment from other examples of abandonment in the master narrative: while Vronsky’s legs "carry him away" from Anna during a crisis, he promises to return. But by this point, Anna’s faith in his return has already been undermined by his previous acts of unreliability. So, in keeping with other narrative strategies in this novel, Anna’s last, fatal abandonment is primarily more felt than real. Furthermore, even after she receives Vronsky’s response to her note, she feels caught in a chronic, torturous condition, utterly lost: "O God! where am I to go?" (694) and wants to kill herself to "punish him and escape from everybody and from myself!" (695). Like Constance, Anna feels a self-loathing that, inextricably linked to her adultery, also compels her death. Finally, in keeping with the master narrative’s trajectory, after either being interrelationally abandoned by her partners and after having committed adultery, in her abandonment by Vronsky, Anna finds the deliverance and death she anticipated before Annie’s birth.

**Thelma and Louise**

While Thelma also suspects that her partner is committing adultery, Daryl’s suspected adultery is much less featured in the film *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and possibly more likely than Vronsky’s is in *Anna Karenina*. And, while *Thelma and Louise* follows several interrelational trends of the female suicide master narrative, it differs significantly from other texts because its protagonists establish "extramarital" interrelational devotion to each other—women—after their interrelational connections with their male partners have failed. Like Anna, Emma, and Constance, Thelma marries while she is a teenager, and it is clear that her current state of fettered
unhappiness and dissatisfaction is an established, accepted condition of her marriage. Like other protagonists, Thelma tries to forge connection with her husband, Daryl, and his response to her efforts, although more acerbic than others', is also dismissive and demeaning:

'Daryl, Dar. Honey, you better hurray up.' 'God dammit, Thelma. Don't holler like that. Haven't I told you, I can't stand it when you holler in the morning.' 'I'm sorry, doll. I just didn't want you to be late.' [she puts on his watch] 'Thank you.' 'Hon.' 'What?' 'Have a good day at work today.' 'Uh, huh.' [she offers him coffee] 'Thank you, no.' 'Hon.' 'What?' 'You want anything special for dinner tonight?' 'No, Thelma. I don't give a shit what we have for dinner. I may not even make it home for dinner. You know how Fridays are.' 'Yeah. Funny how so many people want to buy a carpet on Friday night. You'd almost think they'd want to forget about it for the weekend.' 'Well, then it's a good thing you're not regional manager and I am.'

Daryl enjoys the same freedoms other partners do—to work, to leave, to wander. In contrast to Daryl's freedoms and privileges, Thelma's life is one of limitations and restrictions—distinctions symbolized by the contrast of his red Corvette with her junker that can "barely [make] it down the driveway." Presumably, Daryl doesn't think Thelma needs her own reliable car, since she has "never been outta town without" him, he "never lets [her] do one god damned thing that's any fun," and he wants her to "hang around the house the whole time while he's out doing God only knows what."

Like other protagonists, Thelma eventually rebels—by leaving, drinking and dancing in a bar, and committing adultery. But, of course, Thelma pays a high price for her rebellion, one portended early in the narrative: when Louise learns that Thelma didn't even attempt to get Daryl's permission to go on the trip, she says, "Shit, Thelma, why he's gonna kill you!" Louise's hyperbolic warning becomes less hyperbolic in the context of a masternarrative that resonates with the invocations of Vronsky murdering Anna, Lorck murdering Constance, and Walker wishing for Lu Anne's death. While Thelma asserts an independence no different from that practiced by the texts' male partners, Louise's comment is imbued with the meanings and double-voicing of a menacing masternarrative that all but promises
that Thelma will cue behind Constance and Anna to pay for her diversions from traditional female interrelational mores.

And pay, of course, Thelma does, by being beaten and robbed, payments that start and fuel an escalating trip of rebellious, but increasingly self-incriminating, behavior that culminates with her final payment—death. But Thelma’s and Louise’s gestures of rebellion occur between dispersed indications of their interrelational distress and restriction. Thelma already suggests her doubt for Daryl’s fidelity when she refers to his being "out doing God only knows what." When he doesn’t answer the phone at 4:00 a.m., Thelma ironically tells Louise that Daryl says, "I just wanted to make sure you was alright. I sure hope you’re having fun. You deserve it after all you put up with me. I love you, honey"—then Thelma pauses and asks, "So, how long before we’re in god damned Mexico?"

While Thelma’s reaction to Daryl’s absence is characterized not by the fear that undoes Anna, but by a sense of removed observation, the narrative proximity of Thelma’s discovery of Daryl’s absence to her decision to go to Mexico strongly suggests that Thelma’s decision to continue the trip is, at least in part, related to her suspicions about Daryl’s fidelity. Daryl’s emotional abandonment and physical, his controlling ethos, and Thelma’s new reaction to them are dramatized again, when, after Thelma reaches Daryl by phone, he puts it down to watch a football play and returns to say, "Get your butt back here, Thelma, now, God dammit." This interaction compels Thelma to distance herself—both emotionally and physically—from the Thelma who participated in the morning dialogue at the beginning of the movie: she says, "Daryl, you’re my husband, not my father. Go fuck yourself," and hangs up. During the next scene, as Louise tries to chart their travel plans in the coffee shop, Tammy Wynette sings in the background, "and we heard our little girl say to him, 'I don’t want to play house,'" lyrics that echo Thelma’s growing disinterest in being a housewife.15

In keeping with the masternarrative, Daryl’s abandonment includes emotional, physical, and possibly sexual departures from Thelma. However, while Thelma’s response to this abandonment clearly figures in the path to her death, it differs from
Anna’s and Constance’s responses because the very experience of being abandoned compels Thelma to psychologically and physically distance herself from Daryl—so much so, that, unlike the typical protagonist, who thinks of her partner in her last minutes or hours of life, Thelma does not think of Daryl at all after she decides to continue with the trip. As Thelma rejects Daryl and the marriage codes under which she has lived for several years, she and Louise forge their devotion to each other; indeed, Thelma can only go with Louise because she rejects those codes.

But at the same time, Louise also detaches herself from earlier interrelational hopes with Jimmy. Unlike most of the other abandonments, Jimmy’s only abandonment precedes the film’s time of action. Indeed, during the time of action, Jimmy tries to be helpful and wants to reconcile with Louise. When he says, "I’ll come back," it isn’t clear if he means "back to town" or "back to you," whether he means "from another woman" or "from New York." However, while the vague expression suggests a variety of forms of abandonment, it is clear that Jimmy left Louise—and that he has returned, with an engagement ring. But, Louise declines Jimmy’s proposal, and while the narrative doesn’t illustrate the source of her distress with Jimmy, we don’t discount her comment, "he’s no different than any other guy. Just loves the chase is all." While Jimmy may differ from most of the men in Thelma and Louise, the majority of men featured in the film are philanderers, including: Harlan, the truck driver, J.D., Louise’s rapist or rapists in Texas, and possibly Daryl.

And, as Thelma and Louise turn away from the men who have already turned away from them, they become increasingly transgressive in several ways. Of course, Thelma commits adultery with the perambulating J.D.—an experience that contrasts with the typical protagonist’s experiences because Thelma commits adultery impulsively, without remorse, and with a stranger, no less. I don’t want to minimize the significance of Thelma’s adultery with J.D., but this narrative also differs from others because Thelma establishes a more compelling bond with Louise than with Daryl or with the sauntering stud. From the onset of the movie, Thelma’s and Louise’s relationship is represented as transgressive: a server at the Playboy Club
asks Thelma when she’s going to "run away with" him, and Louise says, "Not this weekend, sweetie. She’s running away with me." Indeed, Thelma and Louise steal away together, and during their trip, Louise turns Jimmy away and invites Thelma to stay with her. Further, when Louise tells Thelma "Jimmy’s not an option," Thelma immediately says "something’s like crossed over in me, and I can’t go back. I mean, I just couldn’t live." While Louise’s wording aptly echoes phrases about heterosexual people "crossing over" to homosexual love, it also reflects the perennial catch-22 for the protagonists, one painfully illustrated by Anna’s misery: Thelma and Louise can’t live, with or without marriage. So, even when Thelma and Louise are being chased by the contingent of agitated police, they renew their support of and commitment to each other, saying each other’s names: "Thelma . . . this wasn’t your fault," and "Louise, whatever happens, I’m glad I came with you." Seconds before the movie ends, the camera zooms on the women’s nonverbal reiteration of this as they grasp each other’s hands--Thelma’s sans her wedding ring and Louise’s sans the engagement ring--as they drive into the canyon. Finally, their emotional union is imaginatively reiterated in the physical nature of their deaths--in their simultaneous, explosive merging as their bodies break up and burn together in the crash.

And in this merging, Thelma and Louise--while honoring much of the female suicide masternarrative--also shows again the extent to which individual narratives can diverge from, yet honor, the masternarrative. While Thelma and Louise offers several variations of the masternarrative--including the acts of and responses to abandonment, the nature of the protagonist’s coupling and extramarital betrayal, and the nature of their flight from tangible, real threats from individual men and groups of armed men--it also abides by several of the trends of the masternarrative. As Thelma and Louise are hurt by, break away from, and flee from men and defined gender roles, they experience a spiraling "insanity" and acting-out much like we see in many of the other narratives--most notably in Anna Karenina--one that results in behavior that displaces responsibility for the suicide from the situation to the
protagonists' inability to compose and restrain themselves, one that results in warrants, and supports their suicides.

**The Awakening**

While the masternarrative prescripts the protagonists' deaths, their male partners' abandonment can take many forms. Edna's, Lu Anne's, and Emma's husbands don't commit adultery, but they abandon the protagonists through actual departures from or rejections of them. Nevertheless, Edna's interrelational situation is also typical of many female suicide protagonists. Shortly after her marriage, Edna finds herself "face to face with the realities," conducts herself as "the devoted wife of a man who worshipped her," takes "her place with a certain dignity in the world," and grows "fond" of Léonce (521). And Léonce ardently courts Edna and alleges devotion to her, but the text problematizes his concept of devotion:

He thought it very discouraging that his wife, who was the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him and valued so little his conversation. Mr. Pontellier had forgotten the bonbons and peanuts for the boys. Notwithstanding he loved them very much, and went into the adjoining room where they slept to take a look at them and make sure that they were resting comfortably. (511)

By adjoining Léonce's indirect thoughts about his claimed devotion to Edna with an example of his careless, cursory relationship to his family--and by offering no reports or action of substantial engagement elsewhere in the text--the narrative suggests that Léonce's measure of interrelational connection or his reliability, or both, are insufficient. One night after Léonce has fallen asleep, Edna's tears came so fast . . . that the damp sleeve of her peignoir no longer served to dry them. She was holding the back of her chair with one hand. . . . she could not have told why she was crying. Such experiences as the foregoing were not uncommon in her married life. They seemed never before to have weighed much against the abundance of her husband's kindness and a uniform devotion which had come to be tacit and self-understood.

An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day. (512)
While Edna enjoys more opportunity to socialize and wander than many of our protagonists, her marriage doesn’t offer her the kinds of freedoms it offers Léonce, who has "the privilege of quitting their society when they ceased to be entertaining" (508). When Edna asks about Léonce’s dinner plans, his answer, although more polite than Daryl’s response to Thelma’s question about dinner, betrays a similar disregard for his wife:

'Coming back to dinner?' his wife called after him. He halted a moment and shrugged his shoulders. He felt in his vest pocket; there was a ten-dollar bill there. He did not know; perhaps he would return for the early dinner and perhaps he would not. It all depended upon the company which he found over at Klein’s and the 'size of the game.' He did not say this, but she understood it, and laughed. (510)

Léonce, like other husbands, enjoys the freedom to come and go as he pleases, and, later, when, like Vronsky, Léonce returns to the city to do "business" for several days," he is "eager to be gone, as he looked forward to a lively week in Carondelet Street" (512-13). Even when Léonce plans to be home for dinner, he "rarely returned before half-past six or seven" (547).

_The Awakening_ presents issues of possession more explicitly than most texts in this corpus. When Edna gets sunburned, Léonce looks "at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage" (509). Léonce "greatly valued his possessions, chiefly because they were his" (546), and one paragraph after describing the pleasure he derives "from contemplating a painting, a statuette," the text describes "Mrs. Pontellier, attired in a handsome reception gown, . . . in the drawing-room the entire afternoon receiving her visitors" (547). Like the other husbands, part of Léonce’s ownership of Edna is the "right" to have sex with her, but as Edna dawdles outside before going to bed, Léonce is in the house:

every sound indicating impatience and irritation. Another time she would have gone in at his request. She would, through habit, have yielded to his desire; not with any sense of submission or obedience to his compelling wishes, but unthinkingly, as we walk, move, sit, stand, go through the daily treadmill of the life which has been portioned out to us. (531)
Like Constance and Anna, Edna tolerates sex, never feels her husband "owes" her sex, and never seems to desire it with him.

And much like other protagonists who act out against, resist, and then rebel against their husbands, Edna resists, with increasingly public gestures, Léonce's rights to and rules for her. When she insists on staying outside, he forbids her from doing so and orders her to "come in the house instantly." Edna responds much like Thelma does when Daryl orders her to return home, with her own, perhaps, given the context, more literal, version of Thelma's "go fuck yourself":

With a writhing motion she settled herself more securely in the hammock. She perceived that her will had blazoned up, stubborn and resistant. She wondered if her husband had ever spoken to her like that before, and if she had submitted to his command. Of course she had; she remembered that she had. But she could not realize why or how she could have yielded, feeling as she did then. . . . 'I mean to stay out here. I don't wish to go in, and I don't intend to. Don't speak to me like that again; I shall not answer you.' (532)

And months later, when Léonce reprimands Edna for not "looking after" the cook and quickly departs, saying nothing more than, "I'm going to get my dinner at the club. Good night," Edna's response betrays a similar attitude:

She was somewhat familiar with such scenes. They had often made her very unhappy. . . . But that evening Edna finished her dinner alone, with forced deliberation. Her face was flushed and her eyes flamed with some inward fire that lighted them. After finishing her dinner she went to her room, having instructed the boy to tell any other callers that she was indisposed. (548)

Eventually, Edna abandons her attempts to connect with Léonce: when Madame Ratignolle says Léonce's club activities are an obstacle to their marital unity, Edna says, "Oh! dear no! . . . . What should I do if he stayed home? We wouldn't have anything to say to each other" (561-62).

However, Edna's reactions to Léonce's chronic abandonment of her grow increasingly strong. She stamps on her wedding ring, smashes a vase, and, much to Léonce's chagrin, abandons, without leaving "suitable excuse," the visitor program she followed "religiously" throughout her marriage. She does "as she liked," does not return the visits of her callers, and abandons household efforts (552).
refuses to go to her sister's wedding, to Europe, and to be "forced into doing things" (595), and she moves into her own home, looking forward to being alone, feeling free and independent (570). Léonce begs her to reconsider, thinking not about the effect her moving will have on their marriage, but "above all else, what people would say," "his financial integrity," and the "incalculable mischief" the move might do to his business prospects (581). He, like Ring, Karenin, and Walker, is more concerned with keeping appearances than with the state of his marriage.

But, while Edna rebels against the conditions of marriage, her youthful passions persist, and she continues to desire interrelational connection. This makes her susceptible to Robert Lebrun and Alcée Arobin, men who—like Francisco, Rodolphe, Léon, Vronsky, Harlan, and Lorck—devote a considerable amount of energy to try to win women's affections. Edna's desire for interrelational connection resurfaces, and, while Léonce's superficial engagement with her and Edna's dissatisfaction with him occur early in the marriage, they prime Edna for a relationship with Robert and set her on the master-narrative's interrelational trajectory. Of course, Robert and Edna fall in love, and her response to Rodolphe's first departure to Mexico suggests the strength of her desire for him and the potential force that his final departure will have on her at the end of the story.

First, when, before Edna knows Robert is going to Mexico, he abruptly departs from her during one of their routine visits, "She regretted that he had gone. It was so much more natural to have him stay, when he was not absolutely required to leave her" (539). When, she learns that he is going to Mexico, she looks "blank" and "bewildered" (539), and when Robert tells her he may not return, she says, "This seems perfectly preposterous and un-called for. I don't like it. . . . I've grown used to seeing you, to having you with me all the time, and your action seems unfriendly, even unkind. . . . Why, I was planning to be together." Clinging to his hand, "striving to detain him," she says, "Write to me when you get there" (542). After Robert leaves, Edna abandons her household duties entirely and lends herself "to any passing caprice" (552); when she loses hope that he will write, she grows despondent.
When Robert returns one year later, Edna admits her interrelational need to him: "You see I am all alone, and it is so long since I have seen you" (585-86), and he and Edna admit to feeling like "lost souls" without each other (586). After their first haphazard visit, her desire for connection and her fears of abandonment surface, even as the text approaches Edna's famous "independence" speech: "She wondered whether he would come back. He had not said he would come back" (588). When, indeed, Robert does not return, she again becomes despondent, but, during a second accidental meeting, they, consistent with the protagonists' lengthy pre-affair relationships, admit to loving each other after knowing each other for two years. When Edna dashes Robert's "wild dream" that she will become his wife because she is "no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not" (592-93), Robert pales and asks Edna to clarify her meaning--revealing, of course, his desire for some more validated, conventional, committed relationship to her. Edna is called away to Adèle's birth before answering, but, before leaving, Edna and Robert express fears of being left by each other: Edna asks Robert to wait for her, "no matter how late," and Robert begs her, "Don't go; don't go! Oh! Edna, stay with me... Why should you go? Stay with me, stay with me" (593).

During the birth, Edna hears Adèle cry her own fears of abandonment: "This is too much!... Where is Alphonse? Is it possible I am to be abandoned like this--neglected by every one!" (594), and the birth experience seems to provoke a change in Edna's philosophy of possession. After the birth, Edna, echoing Anna's feelings about Vronsky when she is in Europe and Emma's of Léon, "could picture... no greater bliss on earth than possession of the beloved one. His expression of love had already given him to her in part. When she thought that he was there at hand, waiting for her, she grew numb with intoxication of expectancy" (596).

But Edna's expectations are shattered when she finds Robert's note, "I love you. Good-by--because I love you"--after which she grows faint, which portends her death. The force of Robert's abandonment and its impetus for her suicide is clear: "She had done all the thinking which was necessary after Robert went away, when she lay awake upon the sofa till morning" (597). The relationship between Robert's
departure and Edna's suicide is further illustrated in the dual function of his note. While Edna does not leave her own suicide note, her survivors will find Robert's goodbye note to Edna. Although Edna's family will recognize by its form that the note is not Edna's, its content sounds very much like a suicide note and is congruous with Edna's recently-expressed sentiments to Dr. Mandelet about her wishing not to "trample upon the little lives" (595). Thus, as both the impetus for her suicide and a paradigmatic and syntagmatic note for it, Robert's note merges his and Edna's voices and actions; by writing this note, Robert's note writes Edna's death.

That is, the unit--"I love you. Good-by--because I love you"--is syntagmatic because it maintains syntactical coherence in both action sequences: the forward-moving actions of Robert's goodbye to Edna and Edna's un-spoken, perhaps unfelt, and possibly assumed goodbye to her family. It is paradigmatic because it serves as a unit of closure in two related, but different, departure actions, both direct responses to perceived abandonments, the forms of which result in, finally, very different results, but results consistent with fictional representations of interrelational distress: male life, female death. Of course, the note is only so in its content and meaning, not its form or its effects: because the text is not in Edna's handwriting, it will facilitate not closure for her survivors, but rupture, confusion, and instability. However, because Edna's departure is in direct response to Robert's, these very different actions--both departures--are also co-determinate parts of the same action. So, indeed, Robert writes Edna's goodbye note--in more ways than one.

Edna's and Robert's departures and voices are further conjoined and when, in her last thoughts, Edna recalls Robert's note: "'Good-by--because, I love you.' He did not know; he did not understand" (598). Robert, of course, did not wait to get clarification about Edna's refusal to be possessed or her desire for interrelational connection, and Edna's response to his departure and to being possessed is so strong that it precludes her trying to explain it to anyone--Dr. Mandelet, Robert or her family. Edna, suddenly left by Robert, feels "There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when
he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone" (598). So Edna embraces this aloneness in the sea. And although Edna’s suicide is classically interpreted as an attempt to find freedom, when considered in the context of her relationship with Robert, it also suggests that, regardless of her state of "possession," she is deathly vulnerable not only to the constraints of marriage and to being "possessed" by Léonce or the children, but to interrelational dissatisfaction, rupture and abandonment.

**Children of Light**

Unlike the other protagonists, Lu Anne Verger, of Robert Stone’s *Children of Light* (1985), has a history of mental illness that precedes—rather than develops during—the narrative’s time of action. She is also one of the only employed protagonists, and she enjoys many more freedoms to socialize, travel, and work than her counterparts do. Like Edna’s family, Lu Anne’s goes to Europe, and because they are away during most of the novel, Lu Anne is able to embrace, like Edna, that deadly freedom: to go unmonitored by a medical professional, to discontinue her medicine even though her schizophrenia worsens, and to seek interrelational bonding with Gordon Walker, who is notoriously dangerous for her.

The novel uses the family’s absence and Lu Anne’s schizophrenia to problematize concepts of interrelational responsibility, freedom, and abandonment. Although Lu Anne’s husband departs early in the novel, Lu Anne contends with issues of control with a partner who, while much less restrictive than many, wields a different, but prominent, control over her as her psychiatrist, a control manifested in Lu Anne’s desire to rebel against and thwart his psychiatric authority over her:

Wise as he was, he could not cure her. A part of her rejoiced in that as freedom; the part, she had no doubt, that was mad, bad, and dangerous to know. It rejoiced in refuge from his mastery, his shrewdness and compassion. There was a wood through which he could not pursue her with healing arrows and a dark tower of retreat. (30)

And while Lu Anne doesn’t feel enslaved by Lionel, she does by the pills he prescribes: "I don’t want to take them anymore. . . . And be a slave and lose my
work and our sex life, a zombie. I don’t want to, Lionel" (32). Lionel agrees to let
Lu Anne decrease her dose during the filming and instructs her to increase it if she
starts hallucinating, and to go back to her usual doses as soon as she finishes filming.
Thus, his absence imparts Lu Anne with heightened freedom, but also heightened
responsibility for her medical regime. Of course, Lionel illogically presumes that Lu
Anne will be able to make and implement wise judgments even as her schizophrenia
worsens—and Lionel’s careless presumption distantly, but certainly, indicts him in
her downfall and death.

In this way, the degree to which, on the one hand, Lionel "gives" Lu Anne
her freedom is directly proportionate to the degree to which he abandons her, and
his elective departure is repeatedly problematized as a form of abandonment,
including in his indirect thoughts—which resemble Vronsky’s about his latter
departures from Anna: "it struck him how joyful he was to be going away. . . . So
aroused was he that it took him some little time to understand that the true source of
his excitement--his happiness, in fact--was that he would be getting away from her.
From her closely reasoned madness, her nightmare undersea beauty and deluded
eyes" (50). But before Lionel departs, the cast makes several attempts to convince
him to stay on Lu Anne’s behalf, and Lionel further indicts himself in his
abandonment of her. Lionel begins this dialogue with Walter Drogue, Jr.:

'some performers put a tremendous emotional investment into their roles.
They can’t hold back. They pay a very high price for their work.’ ‘And
that’s Lu Anne, isn’t it, Lionel?’ . . . ‘yes.’. . . ‘And you think the price of
this performance might be a mite high for your wife in her sensitive
condition. The scenes we’re shooting from now on are some of the most
intense in the script. It’s a shame you can’t stay for them.’ ‘I’m sorry,’
Lionel said. ‘I thought I was performing yeoman’s service putting in so
much time down here. I was led to understand location shooting would be
over by now.’ ‘That was last year.’ ‘Yes. Well, last year is when I
arranged for the journey. Originally we thought we’d go together. My
parents have planned around it. The kids’ schoolwork has been arranged for.
Why are you treating me like a deserter?’ ‘Come on, Lionel,’ young Drogue
said. ‘I’m not doing that. Do you know who Gordon Walker is?’ (58-59)
Lionel knows Gordon "went out with Lu Anne," but he is offended because he
thinks Drogue is "implying something that’s none of [his] business." Drogue
responds "Not at all, Lionel. . . . You have to leave, so you'll leave" (59). Patty says, "We thought you'd stay. . . . We thought you'd decide Lee needed you and stay," and Lionel says he offered to stay, but "In spite of the difficulties. She agreed that [he] should go." The young Drogue defers to Lionel's doctoral rather than husbandly authority to accept his decision: "Well . . . you're the doctor." Lionel, either apparently feeling the heat or wanting to project a perhaps self-serving appearance of disinterest in superseding Lu Anne's wishes, or both, says Lu Anne said, "if she couldn't finish this one without me she was through." Drogue, Jr., says, "That settles it, then," and the cast party begins (60). But as Lionel leaves the party, he thinks about himself: "She had called him her knight and he was leaving her to them. He was numbed with his own betrayal. In their way, although they had it wrong, they were right to despise him. He loved her. But her madness was too much for him" (60-61). The cast members—who are made complicit through their own art-centered motives for wanting Lu Anne to feel and perform well—offer their direct indictment of Lionel: "See, her husband just took their kids off on a trip. We weren't expecting that. We thought—the guy's a shrink, he's her shrink. We put them all up on the budget. Then he leaves" (139).

Lu Anne, also concerned about Lionel's departure, "worked hard not to think about his leaving" (61), but she feels isolated even before he departs. The night before the trip, she starts hallucinating and remembers Lionel telling her to squeeze his hand and wake him should this happen, but even his sleep feels an abandonment to her: "he had gone to sleep again. . . . So she was alone in the darkness. In solitude. What a beautiful word, she thought. And beautiful in Spanish, soledad. It was the name of a prison. Still holding her husband's hands, she began to pray" (61-62). Lu Anne's solitude is ambivalently represented as a beautiful prison, suggesting already her conflicted desire, like Edna's, to be free but to have interrelational connection. As she waves goodbye to her family, she thinks:

Lionel and the sun-ripe children, happy-eyed. Were they also pleased to be quit of her? . . . Driving away, they had not turned to wave or to look back at her and it had made her feel hurt and afraid. Only their excitement, she had thought, walking back down the path. But it was as though their eyes were
fixed upon some wholesome future in which she had no part. (emphasis added 75)

Later, when her hallucinations become more frequent, Lu Anne grows increasingly afraid and alone: "My God, she prayed, be there for me. So there is something there for me. So I am not just out in this shit lonely, deluded, and lost. . . . Help me, Lu Anne prayed" (146).

Lionel’s absence also enables Lu Anne the opportunity to fill the aloneness created by it, which she does by seeking interrelational connection with Gordon: "I’m so fucked up, Gordon. I mean, I think I love you--it’s been so long. It was always someone and I think it was always you. I’m sick and I’m scared. I have to hide." Gordon, who has repeatedly characterized himself as being abandoned by his wife--who has officially left him and also gone to Europe--says to Lu Anne, "Hide with me" (157). But, even as Lu Anne becomes immersed in her relationship with Gordon and her role as Edna Pontellier, her family continues to matter to her: she says, "he’s going to leave me. He was aching to get away from me. It was horrible." Gordon tries to reassure her that "[h]e can’t take your kids from you," and she says, "with the right lawyer in the right state he could get me put to sleep" (175).

While Lu Anne’s euphemism lacks the impact of the murderous illusions made in reference to Lorck’s, Vronsky’s, and Daryl’s potentially fatal powers with their partners, finally, it is not Lionel’s lawyers, but his abandonment that is instrumental in putting Lu Anne "to sleep"--because the worsening effect created and enabled by his absence pushes her toward isolation, worsened schizophrenia, despair, and self-destruction, toward a psychotic episode that includes drugs, hallucinations, self-mutilation, rolling in animal feces, and, indeed, Lu Anne’s falling "Asleep in the deep" (240). During this episode, Lu Anne says to Walker she’d be "fallen in love, the way we nearly were just now" (240), and he says "Asleep in the deep." Lu Anne affirms Walker’s equating love with death: "Yeah. . . . Yeah, yeah" (240), but as the scene continues, Walker tries to prevent Lu Anne from swimming, but--exhausted, dehydrated, drunk, and drugged--he is at the mercy of her lack of control:
"For a minute or so she let him hold her" (244). When police appear. Lu Anne and Walker bribe them, buy more drugs, bathe, and board a taxi to the hotel. But Lu Anne, after making several comments to Walker indicating a death wish, stops the cab to walk in the ocean. Walker knows Lu Anne is "bone weary," that her image of an "easygoing tourist" is an "illusion," but--in the same way that Léonce and Karenin and Vronsky worry about how their partners' behaviors will publicly be perceived--Walker, considering it "unthinkable" to appear at the hotel in daylight, consents to the walk.

But as soon as Lu Anne and Walker leave the cab, Lu Anne's psychosis worsens, as does her ambivalence about several things: She says, "We can't be apart now. . . Of course, we could never be together" (249). Walker agrees and, hoping to get her some antiseptic and a tetanus shot, tries to convince her not to go swimming: "I don't want you going in. If you go in I have to and I would just hate it. I mean. I'm done for, babe" (250). Walker expresses both his concern for her and his own vulnerability, begs her not to enter the ocean and tries to catch her, but she dances into it while asking him to marry her and singing, "I'm half crazy, all for the love of you." She says, "Come with me, Gordon. This is best" (251)--which clearly registers as a double-voiced invitation for double-suicide by drowning. Walker, trying to trick her by responding to her marriage proposal, says "Yes"--but his answer immediately follows her suggestion that they swim--and likely die--together. She is pulled under a wave, resurfaces on a sand bar, and calls, "Come. Or else save me" (252). Lu Anne's words concisely betray the deathly, threatening effects of abandonment seen in other female suicide narratives. Walker tries to reach her but, battling sudden chest pain--there are no other indications that Walker has a cardiac condition--Walker loses his footing just before she is swept away. In a rare act of male self-blame, Walker immediately blames himself for saying the wrong thing to Lu Anne, for denying that there is mercy (but not for agreeing to the walk), and when a cast member jogs up on the beach, Walker says, "I lost her" (254).
Furthermore, while this text, unlike the others, does not suggest particularly dramatic moments of abandonment of the protagonist by her male partners, both abandonments—Lionel’s decision to leave for Europe and Walker’s to concede to the last walk—are pivotal in Lu Anne’s interrelational and suicidal progression. While Lu Anne clearly kills herself, her fate, urged on by her schizophrenia, is also facilitated by her doctor/husband’s departure, a departure that makes him complicit in it even from the other side of the ocean. Walker is unlike all of the other protagonists’ partners in my corpus because he is aware of Lu Anne’s psychological history and her state at the time of death (which is somewhat ironic, given that she’s so “batshit,” as he says, and other protagonists aren’t), because he senses Lu Anne’s self-destructive mode, tries to help her, is with her when she dies, and suffers from the consequences of his poor judgements. However, while Walker tries to keep Lu Anne out of the water, his image-minded consent to stop the cab and walk during a brief hiatus of her psychotic episode also indicts him in the actions leading to her death.

This is not to say that Lu Anne holds no responsibility for her own death. In the middle of the novel, Lu Anne says, "Poor Edna. Poor Edna gets a sight of herself, she explodes, crashes, burns. . . . Sees all that freedom, that great black immensity of righteous freedom and swoons, Oh My. And dies" (135). And while embracing her freedom, Lu Anne remains prisoner to her mental condition, at the whims of her hallucinated "Longshore Friends." Finally, as her schizophrenia worsens, she says what Edna certainly came to know, "Oh, baby, . . . there ain’t no free" (231). While Lu Anne strives, like Edna, for freedom, her outcome suggests that for her—as for several of the protagonists, including Thelma and Louise, Lucy Jordan, Susan Rawlings, and others—there is only a destructive freedom, one that unites her with her Longshore Friends, asleep in the deep.
Madame Bovary

Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) varies slightly from the prototypical master-narrative because, while Emma is interrelationally dissatisfied with Charles, his love for and fidelity to her do not diminish, and her financial debt—which is acquired in her attempt to find and glamorize interrelational connection—plays a major role in her suicide trajectory. Like other partners, Charles wants to marry Emma and—like Karenin, Pontellier, and Ring—is proud of her housekeeping and hosting skills, and he rises "in his own esteem for possessing such a wife" (30). Like others, Charles is dedicated to and distracted by his work—from which he regularly returns after ten o'clock—but, unlike others, he exhibits no interest in controlling Emma, nor in enjoying the social and sexual freedoms the other male partners enjoy. When Charles is not at work, he is at home, but when he is home, he is, like other partners, generally inattentive to his wife and his marriage. But unlike Daryl, Karenin, and others who, while inattentive to, also monitor their wives, Charles is doltishly oblivious to how Emma bides her time. Nevertheless, Emma tries to find interrelational connection with Charles: "she wanted to experience love with him. By moonlight in the garden she recited all the passionate rhymes she knew by heart, and, sighing, sang to him many melancholy adagios; but she found herself as calm after this as before, and Charles seemed neither more amorous, nor more moved" (31). While Charles and Emma clearly have different interrelational desires, his physical and emotional absences function as abandonments for her. Unable to kindle desire in Charles, she begins to imagine other men early in their marriage: "Why, for Heaven's sake, did I marry... She asked herself if by some other chance combination it would not have been possible to meet another man; and she tried to imagine what would have been these unrealised events, this different life, this unknown husband" (31). Like other protagonists, Emma acts out, throwing her wedding bouquet in the fire, but unlike the typical female suicide protagonist, Emma regularly behaves with gross impropriety, and she takes increasingly flagrant advantage of the freedoms accorded by Charles's absences and disinterested or muted presences to fulfil her interrelational needs extramaritally. She essentially
does whatever she wants to: for instance, she stays out all night without
forewarning, yet she tells Charles she "will never feel free... if the slightest delay
is going to make [him] lose [his] head" (201). While Emma longs for romantic
love, she, in this unhappy marriage in which she enjoys remarkably more social
freedoms than many of our protagonists, nevertheless characterizes marriage as a
binding state, bemoans the childhood freedoms and illusions she sheds in her
"succession" of "maidenhood, marriage and love" (124), and envies Rodolphe's
bachelor freedom (100). In her behavior and her disregard for Charles, Emma is
more like the masternarrative's male partner than its female one.

Emma's efforts to fulfill her interrelational needs lead her to an affair with
Rodolphe, whose crafty, manipulative, and manipulative disingenuousness equals the
degree to which Charles is uncontrolled, careless, and genuine. Early in their affair,
Rodolphe wonders "how to get rid of" Emma when he is no longer interested in her
(93), and he conducts the relationship "just as he had wanted" (123), "with the
superiority of critical insight of the person who holds back his emotions in any
engagement" until he holds Emma "fully in his power" (123). Even Rodolphe's
good-bye letter is a prop in his love-charade, filled with his false proclamations: for
instance, he writes, "Ah! the wretched creatures we are! We nearly lost our minds!"
(146), but, of course, Rodolphe never "nearly lost his mind." On the contrary, his
mind prevails, and his description suits the threat and effects that love and marriage
more regularly pose to the women in these texts than to the men.

In contrast to Rodolphe's directed affair, Emma "would have wished never to
leave Rodolphe. Something stronger than herself drew her to him" (118). In the
same way that Anna's fear of losing Vronsky is directly proportionate to her
dependence on him, Emma's need for Rodolphe and her fears of losing him increase
with her love: "now that he was indispensable to her life, she feared losing the
smallest part of his love or upsetting him in the least" (119). Soon after Emma
becomes dependent on Rodolphe, Rodolphe satisfies Lorck's characterization about
men's love and becomes indifferent toward Emma:
sure of her love, he no longer made an effort, and insensibly his manner changed. No longer, did he, as before, find words so tender that they made her cry, nor passionate caresses that drove her into ecstasy; their great love, in which she had lived immersed, seemed to run out beneath her, like the water of a river absorbed by its own bed; and she could see the bottom. She would not believe it; she redoubled in tenderness, and Rodolphe concealed his indifference less and less. (122-23)

He exploits the love, discards "all modesty as inconvenient," and treats Emma "without consideration" (138). In the same way that Lorck’s collection of love letters reveals his generic treatment of and response to his lovers, Rodolphe’s box of women-mementos reveals his treatment of women, including Emma, as if they are dispensable collectibles, generic experiences for him:

Following his memories, he examined the writing and the style of the letters. . . . there were some that asked for love, others that asked for money. A word recalled faces to him, certain gestures, the sound of a voice; sometimes, however, he remembered nothing at all. All these women, crowding into his consciousness, rather shrank in size, levelled down by the uniformity of his feeling. (145)

Like Rodolphe, Lorck, Meier, J.D (Thelma’s vagabond), and Alcée Arobin, Léon also plays a kind of love charade with Emma, implementing "tactics" that manipulate Charles’s blind devotion to Emma and that energize Emma’s quest for a mythic love. Léon’s machinations succeed: Emma’s romantic notions are exacerbated by the opera, Emma and Léon kiss, and two days later they have sex in their cab as it drives through Paris for hours. Emma, like Anna, enjoys a period of control over Léon, wherein she wants him to change his appearance and apartment, to tell her about his activities. He, like Vronsky, is uncomfortable with this unconventional power shift and thinks he is becoming her mistress, rather than she, his: "What had once charmed now frightened him a little. Furthermore, he revolted against the daily increased absorption of his personality into hers. He resented her, because of this constant victory. He even strove not to love her" (205). Emma’s feelings follow with remarkable similarity the progression of Anna’s feelings for Vronsky, and, like Anna, after the brief period in which Emma feels the psychological advantage over Léon, she becomes increasingly clingy, telling Léon to
"only think of us; love me." and, increasingly insecure with Léon, wishes she could "watch over his life" or have "him followed in the streets" (205).

Emma, caught within the limitations of her reality with Léon, wants it, but she also wants more. She fears losing him and longs for him when they are separated (206), she but maintains fantasy-laden hopes of attaining a mythic love: "suppose there existed somewhere some one strong and beautiful, a man of valor, passionate yet refined, the heart of a poet in the form of an angel, a bronze stringed lyre, playing elegiac epithalamia to the heavens, why might she not someday happen on him? What a vain thought!" (206). As Emma's desires grow more elegiac, Léon's become more prosaic ones that do not accommodate Emma: he wants to advance as a clerk and "settle down," and he also grows bored with Emma's love and indifferent to her (211).

And even as Emma is increasingly occupied by her "gala days" with Léon, she negotiates the tension between her longing for romance with her own weariness of him, inspired, perhaps, by her sense that Léon will abandon her as Rodolphe has: she says to Léon, "you too, you will leave me! You will marry! You will be like all the others. . . . like all men" (194). When she writes to Léon, she imagines a "phantom [man] fashioned out of her most ardent memories, of her favorite books, her strongest desires." And, although Emma knows her relationship with Léon is doomed, she pursues "it more desperately than ever," blames Léon "for her disappointed hopes, as if he had betrayed her," and, finally, longs "for some catastrophe that would bring about their separation, since she had not the courage to do it herself" (211).

While Emma's primary manipulations and abandonments are delivered by her lovers, she is being manipulated and betrayed by another man, one who wishes to be her lover: Lheureux. Throughout Emma's effort to fulfill dreams for glamour and romance, she spends money rampantly, encouraged by Lheureux, who uses her for his business gains, and, "At the height of Emma's illness," takes "advantage of the situation to increase his bill" by encouraging more purchases, over Charles's vain
protests (152). When Emma can't pay his bill, Lheureux's sexual motives emerge, and when Emma rejects his proposition, he abandons and discards her.

Although Emma's and Léon's relationship is deteriorating, it is still cohesive enough that Léon's rejection of her financial request becomes the first step of her fatal abandonment. Léon promises to try to get the money, knowing he will not: "I will bring it to you tomorrow," he added. . . . Did she suspect the lie? . . . 'However, if you don't see me by three o'clock, do not wait for me, my darling. I must leave now, forgive me. Good-bye!'" (217). When Léon doesn't arrive, Emma thinks, "Everything within herself and without, was abandoning her. She felt that she was lost, that she was wandering about at random within undefinable abysses" (217).

While this unusual form of financial abandonment occurs twice in Madame Bovary, its occurrence is melded with Emma's fear and anticipation of Léon's abandoning her for a potential wife and with her interrelational abandonment by Rodolphe. Years after Rodolphe and Emma have last seen each other, she "shuddered at the sudden thought of meeting Rodolphe, for it seemed to her that, although they were separated forever, she was not completely free from the power he held over her" (200). And after Emma discovers his letters while preparing the house for the property's possession, she recalls her love for him, goes to him after not seeing him for three years, and admits her love and need for him: "How did you think I could live without you? . . . I was desperate, I thought I was going to die! . . . But you, you fled from me!" (226). Of course, this is another articulation of the relationship between abandonment and death for the protagonists, of female's dependence on love for life and men's interpretation of that as something from which to flee. Rodolphe--whose genuineness is questionable--asks for forgiveness, says he was a "wicked fool," that he will always love her, but when Emma asks for money, his face becomes grave and pale. The narrator confirms that he doesn't have the money--"He did not lie"--but also that, had he had it, Rodolphe may not have given it to her: "If he had had it, he would probably have given the money" (emphasis added 227). Emma hears only Rodolphe's rejection of her financial
request, which inspires her furious reverie of his earlier rejection of her: "You made me believe you; for two years you held me in the most magnificent, the sweetest dreams! . . . Oh, your letter! your letter! it tore my heart! And then when I come back to him—to him, rich, happy, free—to implore the help . . . he repulses me because it could cost him three thousand francs!" (228). With "perfect calm," he says "I haven't got them" (228), and she leaves. However, while her financial concerns facilitate her suicidal path, "she did not remember the cause of her dreadful confusion, namely the money. She suffered only in her love, and felt her soul escaping from her in this memory," and shortly thereafter she drinks arsenic (emphasis added 228).

While Emma's debt lights and fuels her suicidal frenzy, for female suicide protagonists, love invigorates and kills; it is a "beatitude" which leaves Emma "numb," which "drowns" and "shrivels up" her soul (138). Indeed, she tells Rodolphe, "I love you! I love you so that I could not live without you" (137), and, when Rodolphe abruptly abandons Emma on the night before their scheduled elopement, love's threat is dramatized by her extended period of unconsciousness. Shortly into her relationship with Léon, "They couldn't bear the thought of parting. 'I'd rather die!'" says Emma—and, the next time he abandons her, she does (187).

Unmarried Protagonists: Lily Bart, Herminia Barton, and Zenobia

Madame Bovary is unusual because, while Emma's fatal abandonment is bound to her interrelational desire and rejections, it is manifest in refusals of her request for financial help. Indeed, although Rodolphe is fickle, manipulative, and unreliable, he seems at least momentarily prepared to renew a relationship with Emma—until she asks for money. The typical female suicide protagonist is financially secure and married, her financial security relying on her husband's income. Yet, even when protagonists are unmarried or financially insecure, their texts manage to honor many of the master-narrative's key interrelational steps toward suicide. Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth (1905), Nathaniel Hawthorne's The
Blithedale Romance (1852), and Grant Allen’s The Woman Who Did (1895) are somewhat divergent texts because their female protagonists are unmarried and because financial concerns enter the plot of two of the texts, most instrumentally in The House of Mirth.

While financial concerns are a major reason for Lily Bart’s suicide in The House of Mirth, they are inseparable from her interrelational failure—which is to say, her inability to find a husband to support her. Lily, who longs "to be to [Lawrence Selden] something more than a piece of sentient prettiness, a passing diversion to his eye and brain," also wants interrelational connection, but her desire for money prevails over her interrelational need (94-95). And Lily’s desire for money and love are thwarted because of the typical double-standard to which women—especially poor women—are held in these narratives. For instance, Rosedale’s reputation is un tarnished by his "assiduously frequenting" Mrs. Hatch’s home, but Lily is shunned because of her naive association with Mrs. Hatch. Lily’s reputation also suffers because of her naive, but innocent, friendship with Gus Trenor, but Mrs. Dorset’s financial, marital, and social status protect her from the repercussions that would otherwise be suffered by an adulterous woman. Most importantly, Lily is essentially excluded from her wealthy aunt’s inheritance when, during Lily’s attempt to maintain her inclusion in the society that will be her undoing, she acquires gambling and clothing debts that support her cousin’s exaggerated reports about Lily’s behavior to their Aunt Julia, reports that inspire Julia to will almost all of her inheritance to Lily’s gossiping cousin. Lacking the protection of parents, man or money, and lacking the personal chutzpah to correct unfounded rumors, Lily is hypersusceptible to rumors—which are then amplified because of her passive, poor, and unpartnered position. Finally, the amplified rumors interfere with her chances to find financial security as a single or a married woman: because of them, she is deprived of her expected inheritance, and Rosedale rejects her covert request for financial help through marriage.

Never having had a "partner," Lily does not experience the personal abandonment felt by Anna, Constance, or Herminia, and while Lily is never
abandoned by the two most valuable people in her life—Lawrence and Gerty—she is abandoned by the society and those people in it whom she most values, including Judy Trenor. Having no partner, Lily does not feel the same kind of abandonment that other protagonists feel, but her last hours are marked by an aloneness in which "she felt as though the house, the street, the world were all empty, and she alone left sentient in a lifeless universe" (321).

The Woman Who Dies’s Herminia Barton is also unmarried, but, unlike Lily, she is industrious, financially content, and electively single. Herminia maintains her integrity by honoring her revolutionary concept of women’s freedom: her face is, "above all things the face of a free woman" (9)—and even though Herminia and Alan are "free" to have other relationships, neither of them do. However, while Herminia diverges from the masternarrative in several ways, she also commits suicide after various kinds of interrelational abandonment. She is first abandoned by her and Alan’s families because the couple won’t marry. Before they go to Italy, Alan’s father charges him with defying morality and promises to refuse Alan’s visits to "guard [his] mother and sisters . . . from the contamination of [Herminia’s] opinions" (96). In Italy, Herminia suffers the unusual interrelational abandonment of her young lover’s death: as Alan dies, she begs him not to leave her, and after his death she feels "the utter loneliness of her position" (123), a grief and loneliness so severe that she "half [longs] for death" (128). After Alan’s death, which occurs just before Dolly is born, Herminia is roused out of her grief and aloneness by Dr. Merrick’s continued rejection of her when he immediately turns her out of Alan’s apartment and leaves her alone, pregnant, and poor in Italy. When Dolly is five, Dolly and Herminia hap upon her father preaching a service, after which he refuses her pleas for his hand and his blessing, commanding her to stay "far away from" him and her "untainted sisters" (149). To her own family, among whom Herminia’s and Dolly’s names are never spoken, she was "even as one dead"(146).

Herminia survives these abandonments by devoting her life to Dolly, but when Dolly learns at eighteen that she is illegitimate, she, too, abandons Herminia. She refuses to kiss Herminia ever again, telling her she is not "fit to receive a pure
girl's kisses" (213). Dolly implores her grandfather, Dr. Merrick, for protection from Herminia, and he, pleased with Dolly's rejection of her mother, adopts Dolly. invites her to live with him, take his name and "see nothing more of that wicked woman, her mother" (216). When Herminia says, "You don't know how I've loved you! I've given up my life for you. . . . It will kill me, my darling. I can't go on out-living it," Dolly says, "while you live, I could n't think of marrying [Walter]. I could n't think of burdening an honest man with a mother-in-law such as you are!" (218-219).

Fatally abandoned by her daughter, that night Herminia commits suicide. Although Herminia is never rejected by a man, her suicide is prompted by her desire not to impede Dolly's marriage and by her being rejected by the only practicing member of her family for almost two decades. However, before and in killing herself, Herminia founders under the social consensus against single women, especially single mothers. She writes two suicide notes: one that we never see "for the formal evidence"; and another to Dolly, in which she says she is killing herself to enable Dolly "perfect freedom of action" and that, while she still believes in her "cause of truth and righteousness," she commits suicide for "reparation." She implores Dolly's forgiveness for "all the mistakes [Herminia] may have made" and says, "I die for you gladly, knowing that by doing so I can easily relieve my own dear little girl of one trouble in life, and make her course lie henceforth through smoother waters" (220-221).

Of course, Herminia's suicide promotes more than freedom of action for Dolly. Despite Herminia's many arguments against and efforts to correct the social consensus promoted by the female suicide masternarrative, she finally supports and helps prove those myths, including the myth that marriage is the easiest alternative for women. Herminia's death garb underscores her final ambivalence regarding marriage: her death-bed clothing resembles the dress she wears when she first has sex. On that evening, "Some dim survival of ancestral ideas made Herminia Barton so array herself in the white garb of affiance for her bridal evening"--"a simple white gown, as pure and sweet as the soul it covered" and a "white rose nestled in
her glossy hair" (77). On that night of her suicide, she dons "a fresh white dress, as pure as her own soul, like the one she had worn on the night of her self-made bridal with Alan Merrick. In her bosom she fastened two innocent white roses from Walter Brydge's bouquet" (223). Herminia's outfits conjoin Herminia's metaphoric "bridal evening" with her death night, but, because Herminia is never legally married, it is impossible to ascertain whether Herminia's selection of clothing is the implied author's attempt to more fully indict unmarried sex or marriage. But Herminia's selection also suggests that she has not truly abandoned those "ancestral ideas" of marriage. While early in the novel Herminia rejects women's prescribed interrelational path so that "for woman's sake [she] would be a free woman" (41) and refuses to be a man's bride, by the end she, elects to be death's bride: she walks the suicide path so her daughter can walk the wedding isle. However, the text's last image problematizes Herminia's ideas by symbolically confirming them: Dolly finds tucked in Herminia's bodice the two crushed, white roses Herminia places there from the bouquet given to Dolly by her fiance.

Like Herminia Barton, Zenobia, of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, argues and lives "in behalf of woman's wider liberty" and rights (120). Herminia and Zenobia are also the only two protagonists whose ideas and desires are fatally pitted against other women, both younger relatives: Herminia's daughter and Zenobia's half-sister, to whom Zenobia also refers as "the poor child" (104). But Westervelt warns Zenobia that Priscilla will plague her "in more ways than one," and, after he whispers something to Zenobia—apparently that Priscilla is her half-sister—Zenobia responds "with horror and disgust," saying, "this miserable bond . . . will strangle me at last!" (104).

Although the text obliquely suggests why Hollingsworth rejects Zenobia for Priscilla, it is clear that he does so, after which Zenobia does essentially strangle herself with water. Zenobia says Hollingsworth had taken her into his "plan, as long as there was hope of [her] being available," but flung her aside when she was not (218). The text suggests that Zenobia may no longer be desirable to Hollingsworth because Moodie has redirected the family inheritance from Zenobia to Priscilla, but
also, through Coverdale’s report of early rumors, because Zenobia may have been married when very young (although there is no confirmation that she ever married or divorced)—which doubly preclude Zenobia’s serving as Hollingsworth’s wife or financier.

In any case, Priscilla is, as Zenobia says, "the victorious one" (219), but the victory is qualified: "'the fire which you have kindled may soon go out. . . . What will you do, Priscilla, when you find no spark among the ashes?' 'Die!' she answered. 'That was well said!' responded Zenobia, with an approving smile. 'There is all a woman in your little compass. . . . Meanwhile, go with him, and live!'" (220). And, when Hollingsworth and Priscilla are "no sooner departed--utterly departed," Zenobia slowly sinks down, "as if a great, invisible, irresistiblweight were pressing her to the earth" (221).

The weight, of course, is the weight of myths about women dying for love, the myths of female interrelational distress and suicide--a weight Zenobia associates with being "all a woman," a burden even the unconventional Priscilla and Zenobia are prepared to bear. As Priscilla and Zenobia agree to the potentially fatal transience of men’s romantic devotion, Zenobia, in the midst of suffering it, immediately feels dispensable and suicidal, referring to herself as "a broken bubble" (227), telling Coverdale "Blithedale must find another woman to superintend the laundry" and he another nurse, giving Coverdale her jewelled hairpiece, and asking him to "Bid [Priscilla] wear this for Zenobia’s sake" (226). Already referring to herself in the third person, Zenobia says she wants Hollingsworth to compare Priscilla’s face to hers in ten years "and then choose betwixt them" (226), suggesting that her current face will be the face Hollingsworth knows in ten years, that death may preserve her current image in his memory and, thereby, reduce the discrepancy between Priscilla’s youth and Zenobia’s maturity, at least in Hollingsworth’s mind.

Like Vronsky’s, Ring’s, Lorck’s, and Daryl’s, Hollingsworth’s deathly power is suggested throughout the texts. Coverdale’s discourse warns of Hollingsworth’s fatal powers when he imagines sending a bird to tell Priscilla "that if she has given [Hollingsworth] her love, it is like casting a flower into a sepulchre" (100), and
when Hollingsworth and Priscilla leave Zenobia, her face and brow "whitened . . . and for some time, retained this deathlike hue" (223). In an unusual act of the protagonist's asserting blame and anger, Zenobia tells Coverdale to "Tell [Hollingsworth] he has murdered me! Tell him that I'll haunt him!" (226). Years later, Coverdale discovers that Hollingsworth has not used the "wealth at his disposal" to build the reformatory, but that he is retired in a cabin with "the victorious one," who exudes a "deep, submissive, unquestioning reverence, and also a veiled happiness." During the visit, in an equally unusual act of male self-blame in these narratives, Hollingsworth says, "Ever since we parted, I have been busy with a single murderer!" (242).

*The Virgin Suicides, The Blithedale Romance* and *Madame Bovary* are the only texts in this corpus that narrate any lasting effect of the protagonists' suicides, but even as *The Blithedale Romance*--with a textual voice that is complicated by its reliance on Coverdale's first person narrator's perspective--indicts Hollingsworth's behavior, it uses Hollingsworth's self-blame to invite compassion for him and criticism for Zenobia. After Hollingsworth labels himself a murderer, Coverdale cries and forgives him because Coverdale "remembered the wild energy, the passionate shriek, with which Zenobia had spoken those words--'Tell him he has murdered me! Tell him that I'll haunt him!'--and [he] knew what murderer [Hollingsworth] meant, and whose vindictive shadow dogged the side where Priscilla was not" (243). But, finally, the text distributes responsibility for Zenobia's suicide to several forces: Zenobia's will; Hollingsworth's abandonment of her; the mythic and textual production of interrelational and suicide "truths" about women; and the compulsory, "destined" death of women who diverge from traditional female roles or who experience interrelational rupture. Even Coverdale thinks destiny served Zenobia through her suicide: "Destiny itself . . . in its kindliest mood, could do no better for Zenobia, in the way of quick relief, than to cause the impending rock to impend a little further, and fall upon her head" (223).

Of course, Zenobia's destiny is death by suicide, rather than by quirk of nature, but a suicide promoted so effectively that it is interpreted as truth and
destiny—at the same time that Zenobia’s own words reveal the human and artistic role in purveying this destiny for women.⁶ Even as Zenobia critiques in her last words the forces and morals endorsed by the female suicide master narrative, she perpetuates them in her actions:

But it is a woman’s doom, and I have deserved it like a woman; so let there be no pity, as, on my part, there shall be no complaint. It is all right now, or will shortly be so. But, Mr. Coverdale, by all means, write this ballad, and put your soul’s ache into it, and turn your sympathy to good account, as other poets do, and as poets must. . . . As for the moral, it shall be distilled into the final stanza, in a drop of bitter honey. . . . Oh, a very old one will serve the purpose. . . . There are no new truths. . . . A moral? Why, this: that, in the battlefield of life, the downright stroke, that would fall only a man’s steel head-piece, is sure to light on a woman’s heart, over which she wears no breastplate, and whose wisdom it is, therefore, to keep out of the conflict. Or this: —that the whole universe, her own sex and yours, and Providence, or Destiny . . . make common cause against the woman who swerves one hair’s breadth out of the beaten track. Yes; and add, (for I may as well own it now,) that, with one hair’s breadth, she goes all astray, and never sees the world in its true aspect afterwards! (223-24)

Conclusion

Given Western culture’s prescription that women be "committed to, dependent upon, and identified with men" (Canetto AAS, citing Bleier), it is not surprising that the protagonists want to get married, that they often marry hoping to develop an interrelational connection that is frequently mythicized within the texts, but rarely realized. Given these same interrelational prescriptions, it is also not surprising that the protagonists react with grave distress to interrelational rupture and abandonment. Indeed, even the sociologists who question the interpretations and descriptions of suicidal women describe them in ways that echo in female suicide narratives, especially in relation to the role interrelational concerns play in the protagonists’ psychological conditions. Indeed, although some sociologists are making corrective efforts in the interpretive treatment and contexts of suicidal women, the fictional texts seem to express fairly common assumptions about suicidal women and interrelational distress. In this way, the texts appear to be at least partly
reliable characterizations of suicidal women. However, as Chapter 6 will show, female suicide texts also diverge from real and fictional suicide trends in ways that increase the lethality of the protagonists’ efforts and that facilitate the protagonists’ deaths. In these manipulations and associations, the texts increase not only the lethality of the protagonists’ attempts, but also the general sense of lethality produced by interrelational distress on suicidal characters--who are almost always, of course, female. Thus, the potentiated interrelational lethality proffered by the master narrative’s characterization and plot helps advance its larger thematic code that women who are interrelationally abandoned, who diverge from traditional female roles, or who seek interrelational and sexual gratification beyond the boundaries of those roles, die.

However, amidst the sociological literature’s various descriptions of women, most real women prioritize interrelational endeavors and contend with interrelational distress without committing suicide. While the texts do not allege to represent anything other than one suicidal female protagonist at a time, and while they may partly, individually represent some realistic factors that contribute to suicidal conditions for women, because most suicide texts feature women committing suicide in response to interrelational distress, the fictional texts also collectively exaggerate the lethal sense of fictional and historical female interrelational distress. As noted earlier in the chapter, although the protagonists offer qualitatively accurate representations of the role of interrelational distress on the minority of real women who do commit suicide, the collective of suicide narratives is quantitatively grossly unreliable when considered within the total context of suicide because it does not at all reflect a realistic proportion of female suicide. Thus, the texts’ gross unreliability about suicide, women, and women and marriage is founded in the texts’ partial, qualitative reliability about a minority of women. Like Canetto’s phrase—"Women die for love, men for glory"--the texts both reflect and deflect reality. In the same way that sociological observations and "truths" regarding the influences and dynamics of female suicide are founded in a slanted convergence of sociological representations and theories about women, the “truthfulness” or mimetic
approximation of female suicide—real and fictional—that is offered by fictional suicide narratives lies not solely in the collective of narratives or in individual ones, but in some convergence of both—and only after the distorting myths have been culled from that collective.

Furthermore, sociological and artistic texts that contend with or represent female suicide enjoy a symbiotic relationship with each other: they support each other’s trajectories of female suicide. That is, the apparently circular methodology, but also double-edged rhetoric in sociological research that Jack, Leenaars, Kaplan and Klein, and others criticize also supports the circular methodology and double-edged rhetoric—or production—of female suicide narratives, and vice versa. The indications of this mutually-supportive rhetorical relationship between sociological and narrative texts of female suicide will emerge throughout the remaining chapters of this dissertation. In general, the convergence of a fictional, professional, and lay masternarrative of female suicide abets the mutually-supporting, but somewhat convoluted, myths and mechanisms of female suicide. Even as some sociological texts challenge many of the quantifiably unbalanced understandings and assumptions about women and marriage, other sociological texts—with the help of fictional texts—support and promote skewed, larger understandings about women, marriage, and suicide—understandings that, as they move between the subsets of married women and suicidal women and between larger myths about marriage and suicide, inform conceptions about most women. Sometimes the texts explicitly reiterate the masternarrative’s interrelational premise and its reliance on narrative to articulate that premise, even as they seem to critique it, as they do in Zenobia’s interrelational proclamation and in Constance’s and Lorck’s dialogue. But, the masternarrative also shows how narrative and myth can be inversely and mutually-informed: because the protagonists’ idealized, but hoped-for constructions of marriage are based on the frequently mythicized but rarely realized experiences of few—if any—couples in the narratives, and the protagonists’ suicide fates are founded in the minority of women and of suicides who do not survive interrelational rupture, the masternarrative is
further constructed and abetted by vital-androcentric and patho-gynocentric myths and perspectives.

And these myths reveal their strength and increase their momentum through a powerful masternarrative whose own self-fulfilling thematic strength is both obtained by and illustrated in its narrative dynamics, including its relations with historical women. The masternarrative thrives on and gains momentum from the larger understandings, myths, dynamics and representations—both accurate and misleading—about marriage’s protective force against suicide and the association of female interrelational distress with suicide. The power of its individual narratives, its collective, and of the masternarrative itself is obtained by the individual texts’ congruence with some individual conditions of real female suicide, and it is narratively illustrated, obtained, and perpetuated in the masternarrative’s structural, thematic, and character similarities and repetitions that are discussed throughout this dissertation. In particular, its thematic stamina is reflected in and perpetuated by the texts’ general, inter- and extratextual reflexivity as discussed in Chapter 3, in their re-writing of texts to incorporate female suicide in them as it does in *The Last of the Mohicans*, and in their co-option and revision of extratextual historical events into intertextual, fictional ones.

For instance, while Hawthorne appropriates a historical woman’s death for his description of Zenobia’s interrelationally-induced death in *The Blithedale Romance*, according to Annette Kolodny, Hawthorne did not attribute the original suicide to heterosexual distress:

Hawthorne perceived the nineteen-year-old Concord, Massachusetts, schoolmistress’s frustrations at the limitations imposed upon her by her class and sex. 'She died for want of sympathy,' he explained in his journal, 'her family being an affectionate one, but uncultivated, and incapable of responding to her demands.' (xxviii)

However, in the novel, this extratextual model’s death is reinterpreted on behalf of Coverdale’s interpretation of Zenobia’s death as "the distraction of a woman’s unrequited love for a man"; to corporealize the masternarrative’s interrelational specter for women; and to embody the same myth articulated and embraced by
Zenobia—the myth to which neither of Zenobia’s own historical models, Margaret Fuller and the schoolmistress, succumb.

The masternarrative’s thematic strength is also manifested by its continued textual "success" or continuation even in the presence of a variety of textual diversities among the texts and in the blatant textual absence of several elements that are associated with real suicide and with real female suicide. While in Chapter 6 I will discuss how the masternarrative diverges from and converges with historic suicide, let me now, in keeping with this chapter’s focus on interrelational concerns, offer two examples of how the masternarrative’s divergence from historic suicide betrays its enormous reliance on the interrelational elements of female suicide and thereby exaggerates the effects of those interrelational elements. For instance, Sainsbury lists the following suicide risk factors: male, over forty; widowed, divorced, or separated; immigrant; lives alone, unoccupied or unemployed; lives in socially disorganized rural areas or resort towns; family history of affective disorder, suicide, alcoholism; previous history of affective disorder and alcoholism; history of previous suicide attempts; life stresses include bereavements, separations, job loss, moving; an impulsive, violent, capricious, or delinquent personality; excessive drinking and drug dependency; and a history of depression (Sainsbury 83-84; cited Roy). However, only two or three of these several risk factors regularly pertain to the protagonists. Similarly, although Maltsberger identifies ten common conditions associated with suicide—physical illness, a history of previous attempts, the recent loss of an important relationship, divorce or separation, never having married, the suicide of a close relative, being abused as a child, homosexuality, living alone, and retirement (52-53)—the female suicide protagonists satisfy an average of two: the loss of an important relationship, and divorce or separation. Clearly, even in the absence of several other factors associated with suicide, the masternarrative’s interrelational dynamics prevail.

Finally, while the protagonists in this study partly resemble the interrelational descriptions of real women who commit suicide—descriptions that are problematized even within the field of sociology—as will become clearer in Chapter 6, the
protagonists' conditions and deaths are also somewhat contrived, narratively constructed and aided. Through these textual, suicide-compelling repetitions and manipulations, their deaths become the predictable result of an individually- and collectively-advanced compulsorizing of interrelational prioritizing, distress, and suicide of women. As such, in the same way that, according to Jack, medical practices and gender-socialized cognitive styles are complicit in normalizing women's attempted suicide and their grave responses to interrelational distress, the masternarrative is complicit in the medicalizing and pathologizing of women's interrelational problems: within its own boundaries and without them, it also prescribes, so to speak, female suicide.17

Again, we see a mutually-supporting dynamic of parallel psychopathologizing of women, in both sociological and fictional texts. That is, within the context of a powerful masternarrative of female suicide, the protagonists' fatal suicide attempts are both psychopathological and normative for fictional women experiencing interrelational disruption. And, by repeatedly attributing some credible interrelational characteristics to the protagonists, their pathologies and their suicides are collectively imposed even in the texts' absence of other pathologizing factors, then normalized in the repetitions sustained by the masternarrative. Thus, the protagonists' suicides are encouraged, but tabooed acts: once again, the protagonists are bound by a double-edge sword; once again, they have to lose in order to win. However, the relationship between fictional and real female suicide and interrelational distress is further complicated because the narratives both advance and challenge prevalent myths and understandings about women and suicide. Congruent with the ambiguities and ambivalences of the masternarrative, the fictional injunctions of female suicide narratives bolster both the competing, but also overlapping patriarchal protection theories and the gynocentric, interrelational theories of sociology and psychology.

The masternarrative supports more recent, gynocentric theories about women's development and interrelational responses because the protagonists, even the single ones, commit suicide after major relational impasses with men or in
relation to their marital status, or both. In this way, the characters' impetus to commit suicide is anchored in female roles that concur with what suicidologists observe in suicidal women: even though the characters have strong interrelational needs, their inability to satisfy them and to find interrelational connection drives them to interrelational severance, isolation and suicide. Once they perceive that these needs will never be met, they are overcome by intolerable feelings of isolation, which, as Kaplan and Klein say, "tip the scales toward death" (275)—scales that the majority of divorced and widowed real women tip toward life.

While these texts add weight to the scales of female suicide even as they represent that which tips them toward death, they also explicitly—although rarely—problematize the very myths they purvey. Herminia delivers more a more extended critique of the myths, and Coverdale says:

> It was a woeful thought that a woman of Zenobia's diversified capacity should have fancied herself irretrievably defeated on the broad battle-field of life, and with no refuge, save to fall on her own sword, merely because Love had gone against her. It is nonsense, and a miserable wrong—the result, like so many others, of masculine egotism—that the success or failure of woman's existence should be made to depend wholly on the affections, and on one species of affection; while man has such a multitude of other chances, that this seems but an incident. For its own sake, if it will do no more, the world should throw open all its avenues to the passport of a woman's bleeding heart. (241)

More frequently, the narratives illustrate the ways in which marriage is difficult for women because the protagonists often commit suicide in response to the disabling, multi-dimensional oppressiveness of their female roles, regardless of their marital status or their husbands' character.

Similarly, the protagonists often are not served by patriarchal protection, whether or not they violate their female roles, regardless of when and under what conditions they might violate them. Most dramatically, consider Reiko. While there are major cultural differences that distinguish "Patriotism" from the Western texts of this corpus, of these protagonists, Reiko most upholds her traditional wifely role; indeed, Reiko's entire perspective is limited to that which occurs within her marital apartment. Her suicide, committed in honor of and loyalty to her husband's will,
conflicts so drastically with her strong life force—a force that, by its strength, further distinguishes her from the other protagonists—and is so compulsory that it becomes a culturally-condoned self-murder. And Reiko so abides by her familial gender roles that in her suicide note she apologizes to her parents for neglecting her filial duty in lieu of her wifely one—likely a pro forma gesture of respect, since her parents would probably also condone her suicide under these conditions. As Canetto and others might say, so much for patriarchal protection.

However, even as they describe and critique the female conditions of marriage, even as they challenge patriarchal protection and evoke sympathy for the marital, social, intellectual, and economic limitations of women, the texts are finally subsumed by the master narrative’s promotion of interrelational myths about women, marriage, sex, and suicide. Finally, the female suicide master narrative more adamantly protects rather than critiques the patriarchal protection theories—or, to more aptly apply the phrase, theories that protect patriarchy—because several of the protagonists commit suicide when they deviate from traditional family life and female roles, when they literally leave their husbands’ homes and deny their traditional women’s "need" to care for others. Others commit suicide after embracing freedoms from female roles—freedoms typically embraced without consequence by their male partners. And, in several ways, the texts undermine the protagonists’ exertion of both their own interrelational needs and their own general wills—to travel, to spend money, and, mostly, to revolt against marriage, to leave the marriage, to live. Indeed, Lu Anne says, "Poor Edna gets a sight of herself, she explodes, crashes, burns. . . . Sees all that freedom, that great black immensity of righteous freedom and swoons, Oh My. And dies" (135). And, as Lu Anne says and illustrates, at least for the master narrative’s female protagonists, "Oh, baby, . . . there ain’t no free" (231). Even Herminia, who succumbs to the gender roles she strove to resist, says, "If she ventures to have a heart or a will of her own, woe betide her!" (177).

Perhaps fictional female suicide under these combinations of interrelational situations abounds—regardless of real women’s clear life-forces and the lack of many
other suicide-promoting factors in the texts—because the myths promoted by these narratives support the patriarchal consensus of women’s most useful roles in society. That is, if heterosexual men consistently decline after interrelational loss, it behooves a patriarchal, heterodominant culture to promote myths that will prevent male interrelational loss as much as possible, that will advocate marriage and discourage women from leaving their marriages—and what better way to do this than by covertly inculcating women with images of interrelationally-induced death. Thus, the mainstream narrative promotes deadly myths about women, marriage, and suicide in artistic texts, texts that are far more widely distributed to the general population than are the select sociological texts that challenge the assumptions about women that are presented in other sociological literature and in much artistic literature and narrative. Finally, both kinds of texts advance a cultural agenda of marriage that urges women to consent to institutions that foster mental distress in women, that may make them more suicidal than they would have become had they remained or returned to being single: in other words, the combined rhetoric of patho-gynocentricity and vital-androcentricity ultimately advances a lifestyle that increases the pathological states of women, while it decreases the pathological state of men.

Again, sociological and artistic emphases of women’s suicide derive from men who do not commit suicide and women who do. So, in the same way that the sociological discussional default is vectored in opposite ways for men and women because discussions about marriage are predominated by the vital-androcentricity of its protective effects, discussions about and representations of suicide are predominated by the patho-gynocentric behavior of attempted suicide. Because sociological literature underemphasizes the psychodynamics of men’s suicide and overemphasizes the psychodynamics of women’s suicide, it parallels the sex-associated deflections of fictional suicide from real suicide, deflections that are also vectored in opposite directions for men and women because suicide narratives proportionately underrepresent male suicide and overrepresent female suicide. In this way, both fictional and sociological texts advocate male disengagement from interrelational concerns and protect male life, but they advocate female engagement
with interrelational concerns, female devastation and death. Furthermore, this
dynamic reveals, again, that professional and lay discussions about female suicide
are informed by their own mastenarrative of female suicide, one compatible with and
supported by fiction’s masternarrative.

However, as Coverdale singularly suggests, there are non-fatal ways to revolt
against the constraints of female roles, especially in regard to marriage. In his
introduction to Allen’s *The Woman Who Did*, Ernest Boyd reports that the novel was
charged with providing a dangerous impetus for nature to imitate art. A few years
after its publication, "the headlines blazoned forth the adventures of no less than two
English women who 'went the way of *The Woman Who Did*.'” Both women
refused to marry, and one was "locked up in an asylum, only to be released when
the authorities discovered that revolt against marriage is not a proof of insanity" (xi).
Like Herminia, these women resisted marriage, but instead of going the fatal, entire
way of *The Woman Who Did*, they resisted the more explicit social consensus that
the only good woman is a married one, and the more covert consensus that the only
good independent woman is a dead one. Unlike Herminia, they lived.

However, while norms against suicide clearly exist (Akers; Stack 1992 256),
so does a powerful masternarrative and the myths behind it, which simultaneously
urge and undermine suicide as the supreme act of independent will. Indeed, the
protagonists’ individual suicides are pegs in a collective, mechanized cultural
response that finally betray the protagonists’ self-subversion to another mastering
construction, the masternarrative itself—the final act of which, while presumably an
act of independent will, simply sweeps another protagonist off the edge of its path.
Ultimately, those who most revolt against cultural embraces and condonings of
female suicide are those women who, after experiencing interrelational rupture or
after making nontraditional decisions, resist those efforts of a remarkably virulent
female suicide masternarrative and live. Given the strength of an insidious cultural
consensus for female suicide following interrelational rupture or the abandonment of
gendered interrelational mores, the self-determination of all women to survive and
thrive after interrelational loss is pre-curiously undermined by the statistically minor
but culturally major over-determination of the female suicide path. In the opposite way that the male suicide songs are remarkable for their expressions of male interrelational distress and suicidal ideation, women who thrive after interrelational loss or after deviating from traditional female roles are doubly remarkable because they have confronted, resisted, and survived the omnipresent cultural overdetermination of women's paths and two omnipresent, potent—but not omnipotent—messages of the hegemonic culture: that women must sacrifice everything short of life in their quest for heterosexual success and that, should they not succeed so, life is not worth living.

Part of the impetus behind this project is my desire to explore, expose, and resist the cultural forces—especially the narratively-purveyed ones—that promote suicide as a response to female interrelational loss, that deliver conflicting, destructive prescriptions to women and men about interrelational upheaval, prescriptions that, while they appear to minimize the importance of such upheaval for men and exaggerate it for women, clearly affect both sexes. Before continuing with my current effort to better understand and resist the mechanisms that scribe and circumscribe women's lives, grief, and deaths to interrelational loss, let me note that the necessary affiliate to this effort is to support and celebrate the forces—fictional and non-fictional—that promote women's success after interrelational loss.

Consider, for instance, Jenny Spangler, whose stride is described as "quicksilver" and "God given" and who is re-entering track competition after a decade during which she was plagued by recurring stress fractures and a troubled marriage that ended in divorce. Spangler says, "I felt guilty on two fronts. . . . I wasn't getting dinner on the table, and my running was going nowhere." Although Betsy Carpenter's article makes no reference to and I make no assumptions about Spangler's response to her divorce, Spangler's outcome contrasts remarkably with the outcomes of our protagonists and with a too-large minority of real women. Instead of prompting her to suicidal behavior, "the collapse of [Spangler's] marriage brought an odd liberation from the old pressure to do it right. 'Something inside me said, 'Screw it, things can't be worse, I've got nothing to lose.'" Of course,
Spangler, indeed, still had everything to lose. Instead, she contacted her coach and became a promising contender for the 1996 Olympics (Carpenter 65).
NOTES

1. Droge's *Necktie Second* also includes "Fourth of July," in which Droge "laments" the suicide of one of his friends with this chorus: "When you're sick of the trying/And you're tired of the crying/Then the Fourth of July/Is a good day to die./They'll celebrate each year/Your independence from here."

2. According to Jack, gunshot is one of the more lethal methods of attempting suicide, used primarily by men and seldom producing nonfatal results (276).

3. Lewis cites some social theorists, including Rita Liljestrom (see Carlsson) and Barbara Ehrenreich, who postulate that the increasing numbers of fatherless families suggest that marriage is becoming less satisfying for men.

4. Among others, Carl I. Wold and Robert E. Litman have observed male resistance to psychological help and treatment. In their study of people who had contacted suicide prevention centers before committing suicide, the suicides tended to be male, older, not in crisis when they first called, and treatment rejecting (cited in Litman 1989 146).

5. Others also suggest that a general disregard exists for the role of interrelational development in men. Robert A. Lewis debunks a typical male stereotype: "Although there is still a popular stereotype that most men are more work oriented than family oriented, there is growing evidence that the contrary case is more often true" (14; cites Adamek and Goudy; Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers; and Rosenberg). Lewis notes Pleck's and Lang's 1978 analysis of the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey, during which they "discovered that men's psychological involvement with marriage and family is greater than with their work" and that "94% of the men in that study report that the most important things that happened to them were in their married and family life, compared with 55% who had similar statements about their jobs" (14). Furthermore, Lewis notes that "most of the more current descriptions of men's sex roles are... either not empirically derived or not particularly related to family life" (17).

6. Sanborn, discussing men's propensity to commit suicide, also notes the lack of healthy role models for men: "There are no explicit role models for men in any of the current areas of change, such as marriage (equal partnerships), work (competition with women . . . ), or relationships (expressing feelings, showing affection, being allowed to cry)" (149).

7. Allowing for age, married individuals have the lowest suicide rate, followed by, in increasing order, single, widowed, divorced, and separated individuals (Sainsbury 1986 24; also see Neuringer and Lettieri 1982 13). Kerkhof and Clark say divorced suicide rates are "invariably higher than the rates of widowed, married, or unmarried people" (50).
8. Following Durkheim's theories, several theorists speculate that the association of divorce and suicide is indicative of the decreasing social integration that accompanies decreased family integration after divorce. Noting that suicide rates among the divorced in the Netherlands are decreasing, Kerkhof and Clark postulate that as divorce becomes more common, it may cause less social disintegration, which will result in lower suicide rates among the divorced (50). Bock and Webber attributed widows' lower suicide rates to the higher degree of role continuity they experienced following their husbands' deaths.

9. See Kaplan and Klein 268 for an overview of this topic and Chapter 6 for more attention to occupational issues.

10. Noting the unreliability of surviving informants, Lester says "most of the information on the interpersonal relationships of suicidal individuals has been collected from studies of those who attempt suicide, and many suicidologists have argued that the study of attempted suicide can tell us little that is relevant to completed suicides" (Lester 1988 13, 1972).

11. While some of these theories have been criticized for being essentialist, I refer to them because they have made important contributions to the cultural context of female suicide in the past thirty years, contributions that continue to inform today's contexts of female suicide. My effort is not to promote essentialism, but to describe and interpret a fairly wide context of discussions about non-fictional suicide and representations of fictional suicide, and essentialist rhetoric is, as I hope my dissertation makes clear, an important element of that context. Further, many useful descriptions about gender differences do not suggest that there is something genetic in the differences; indeed, many of the people I cite repeatedly describe gender differences in relation to cultural and behavioral influences, including socialization and gender roles.

12. Although Kitty is not the suicidal female protagonist in Anna Karenina, she becomes Anna's alter-ego, and Kitty and Levin are an important complement to the novel's other couples. They represent marriage in a relatively balanced way that validates a range of changing responses, but that, nevertheless, finally makes marriage appealing.

13. Thelma's impulsive, careless extramarital experience with the vagabond is atypical for herself and for other protagonists; it more typically resembles male experiences in these narratives, such as those sought by the vagabond, the truck driver, and even the rapist, the latter two of whom are married.

14. Concurrent with the distinctions between male and female development described above, perhaps it is not surprising that men and women have been found to experience danger differently. In 1982 S. Pollack and C. Gilligan asked college students to respond to images of violence in stories and found that women experience danger in isolation, alienation, separation, and deprivation of intimacy, while men describe danger in terms of intimacy, smothering relationships, and entrapment, experiencing it more in intimate situations than in achievement struggles. Pollack and Gilligan concluded that men experience danger in connection, women in separation. Sanborn, discussing the Pollack and Gilligan study in light of Chodorow, agrees:
masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is threatened by separation. Thus, males tend to have difficulty with relationships, while females tend to have problems with individuation. (153)

15. Although, in another context, the same lyrics might mean that the woman does not want to live with her lover without being married to him.

16. See Chapter 3 for a comment on Zenobia’s intertextuality.

17. While this psychopathologizing makes its way into female suicide narratives via the actual suicide and some instances of madness, the medicalization effect does not. While I will address this more fully in Chapter 6, let me note that these texts do not fully medicalize individual protagonists’ problems or deaths. On the contrary, the protagonists endure their problems in relative isolation—including isolation from medical help: even the three women who have some contact with doctors—Emma, Lu Anne, and Edna—are not helped by them. However, while we have no indication that they receive medical or psychiatric attention, Anna and Lily both become addicted to opium-based drugs, and Anna, Lily, and Lu Anne are self-drugged when they die. Herminia uses prussic acid her "scientific friend" gave her to use "in case of extreme emergency" (223), and Emma uses arsenic stolen from the pharmacy.

18. This is not to dismiss the economic changes that women and children often suffer after divorce and that also surely discourage women from staying single.

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CHAPTER 6

Facilitating Female Suicide
Through Circumstance and Character, Structure and Culture

*I feel that I am flying headlong over some precipice but must not even try to save myself. And I can’t.*

*Anna Karenina*

Introduction

As Chapter 5 notes, the protagonists in this dissertation’s textual corpus satisfy many of the interrelational descriptions that have been observed in or applied to female suicide. However, the protagonists do not satisfy many of John T. Maltzberger’s, Peter Sainsbury’s, and others’ descriptions of individuals at high risk for suicide. The protagonists are not white, middle-aged, isolated men, but they also diverge in other ways from the typical suicide paths of historical women. For instance, they do not participate in many typical pre-suicide activities: they engage in no preparatory acts of procuring suicide means, they make no concerted efforts to put their affairs in order before committing suicide; and they rarely write suicide notes or give clear warnings about their intentions (Sainsbury 1986 84). Indeed, most of the protagonists are strong, creative women who have survived oppressive situations and whose chutzpah suggests they would try to solve their problems, and live, rather than commit suicide.

And, yet, the protagonists are narratively compelled toward suicide—-and sometimes this compulsion is suggested in the narratives themselves. For instance, Anna tells Oblonsky "I feel that I am flying headlong over some precipice but must
not even try to save myself. And I can’t” (389). When Constance is considering whether or not to have a relationship with Meier, she "would shudder as if she had seen an abyss yawning at her feet" (273). And, when Selden sees Lily on the cruise ship, the narrator says, Lily "was on the edge of something—that was the impression left with him. He seemed to see her poised on the brink of a chasm, with one graceful foot advanced to assert her unconsciousness that the ground was failing her" (192). Susan also feels a foreboding sense that she will sink downward: she feels like the world is "one huge mire" and she may move "all the way to the bottom" (130). Finally, although none of these protagonists dies by leaping, they all commit chasmal, prescripted acts of suicide.

Of course, the absence of the protagonists’ preparatory activities for suicide suggests an authorial attempt to construct surprising narrative endings. But, even as the protagonists diverge from many mimetic trends of suicidal behavior, the masternarrative must compel them to commit suicide and must convince readers to accept the individual suicides, as well as the feminization of suicide in art. The masternarrative maintains this tension between expectation and surprise, between narrative credibility and implausibility, by merging mimetic and non-mimetic qualities into the narratives, and by consistently discarding some historical trends in suicide and consistently integrating others—trends that become essential rhetorical tools in the masternarrative’s myth-making emphasis on the mortal effect of interrelational loss on women. And, through the consistency and breadth of its manipulations, the masternarrative further reveals the strength of its formal and ideological force on fictional narrative.

Further, because the masternarrative’s relative consistency develops a stronger, but also flexible, collective model of suicidal women, it may offer particularly pernicious invitations for suicidal behavior modeling—including from readers who, like the protagonists, may not appear to satisfy many of the typical characteristics of female suicide. Because, as I will discuss later in the chapter, its narrative structures and rhetoric invite a particularly compelling reading through its narrative strategies—that is, because it keeps us, in one way, "dying for the end" of
the narratives, it simultaneously strengthens and masks the covert and more dire ways in which it may also keep some readers literally dying for the end."

According to Ronald L. Akers, the essential features of the suicidal process include "learning and applying definitions of suicide" (308). Chapters three, four, and five discuss the narratives' sociological, theoretical, and thematic role in teaching women's "definitions of suicide," and this chapter will explore how these narratives "teach" or facilitate suicide for their characters and for real women. As I continue my exploration of the reciprocal relationship between art and life in these particular texts, I will describe the masternarrative's routine manipulations of circumstance and character, structure and culture, to show how it naturalizes, romanticizes, and deploys suicide deaths for women. Although structure and character are interwoven facets of narrative, I discuss them separately to provide some logistical mapping for the chapter. First, I discuss the character and situational factors that are typically associated with real suicide, but that are absent in these narratives; then I discuss factors that, in both their absences and presences, promote real and fictional female suicide; then, the structural trends and effects of the masternarrative; and, finally, I consider the masternarrative's subversive role in positively defining Western female suicide. Although the masternarrative's dictates are not as publicized or blatant or causally-clear as some other cultures' dictates for female suicide, given the masternarrative's strength and the role of behavior modeling in social learning, it seems clear that Western fictional suicide narratives are part of a cultural mechanism that insidiously normalizes and advances female suicide behavior under particular interrelational conditions, even as other elements of Western culture discourage suicide. Perhaps the power, usefulness, and threat of suicide narratives is located somewhere between the historical criticisms leveled at the destructive effects of novels and the contemporary, often unqualified acceptance of art for art's sake. Finally, fictional suicide narratives may promote compassion for women suffering interrelational loss, and while they may even partly help expose and corrode some of the sex-role restrictions imposed on women, they also may well be part of the sociohistorical forces that promote suicidal behavior.
Mitigating Factors of Absence

The female suicide protagonists do not experience several factors, characteristics, and circumstances that are typically associated with suicide, and these striking and repeated deflections from real suicide trends illustrate just how powerfully the masternarrative can compel characters to commit suicide and, perhaps, how much female suicide and the masternarrative are supported by the larger culture, even in the midst of the masternarrative’s strong mimetic challenges. For instance, in addition to diverging from the sex and age categories for those highest at risk for suicide, the protagonists diverge from widespread trends regarding illness and suicide. Maltsberger reports that "most of the patients who commit suicide are physically sick; many have serious illness" (70), and other reports say that illness is present in twenty-five to ninety percent of those who commit suicide—usually in greater than fifty percent of those who do.2 However, none of the protagonists in this dissertation’s corpus are physically ill at or long before their deaths, and most of them do not visit doctors for several months before their deaths—which also conflicts with Robins’ report that seventy-three to one-hundred percent of suicides in his study sought medical care within the last year of life (132).3 Further, while a family history of suicide "significantly increases" the risk for suicide attempts and has been found in twenty-five percent of severely suicidal patients, but the protagonists have no apparent family history of suicide (Maltsberger 102; Moss).

Similarly, a preoccupation with death—often including suicide fantasies—is closely associated with suicide (Sainsbury 1986 84; Litman 1989 144). Maltsberger says that suicidal individuals are "likely to entertain a number of illusions and delusions concerning the nature of death" (46) and to think that death is the gateway to dreamless sleep and nothingness, that it will effect a reunion, provide escape, destroy an enemy, provide passage to a better world, and exact revenge (85, 87). However, in contrast to what is found in suicidal people, most of the protagonists rarely or never think about death. Although we have little insight into the Lisbons’ thoughts, their repeated attempts may suggest a preoccupation with death—or
repeated attempts for interrelational connection. Lu Anne occasionally thinks about
death, especially in relation to nothingness. Constance considers suicide after Ring’s
death, but never reconsiders it, even after she falls out of love with Lorck. Emma
and Anna both think about death when they are ill, but infrequently or not at all
throughout most of the texts. Anna, the only protagonist to fantasize about death,
does so only hours before she dies; however, while she thinks suicide will make
Vronsky "suffer, repent, and love her memory when it was too late," she
immediately thinks, "'Death!' and "such terror came upon her": "No--anything, only
to live!" (680). Emma tells Rodolphe and Léon that she would die without them,
and once she wishes she had died during her illness so she would not later suffer
because of Léon (169)--but Emma’s thoughts of death are rare. Edna also has days
when "it did not seem worth while to be . . . alive or dead"--but also when she is
"happy to be alive and breathing, when her whole being seemed to be one with the
sunlight," and she rarely thinks about death (553). Even if we consider Lu Anne’s
occasional ponderings about death, contrary to findings that highly suicidal women
have a "daily craving for death" (Neuringer and Lettieri 87), we have no indications
that any of these protagonists daily crave or wish for death, or even that they think
about it more than infrequently.

Facilitating Factors of Absence

Expressions of Pain and Intent

However, even in the significant absence of these factors that are strongly
associated with historical suicide, the masternarrative embraces other deletions and
additions in order to facilitate its protagonists' deaths. For instance, David Lester
found that seriously suicidal women communicate more to their partners than low
risk people do (1988 7; also cites Lester 1972), and Charles Neuringer and Dan
Lettieri believe women commit suicide less often than men because they have "more
resources than men for confessing their emotional difficulties" and because they
have "covert approval to declare and display their perturbations" (22). Others also
report that females express greater negative emotions than men (Lester 1988:58; cites Cohen and Fiedler, Lester and Reeve).

In relation to expressiveness, Anna differs from other protagonists because, by the end of the novel, she regularly communicates her unhappiness, verbally and non-verbally. However, Annushku dismisses her concerns, and Dolly sees that Anna is distressed, but does nothing to help her. Vronsky also sees Anna's strained and nervous expression (492) and knows she takes too much morphine (605), but, while he sometimes tries to reassure Anna, as her loneliness, boredom, and jealousy increase, he continues to lead an active life from which she is excluded—and continues to express confusion about her unhappiness. Oblonsky, the only person who tries to help Anna, persists in his efforts to convince Karenin to divorce her.

But, for the most part, in contrast to historical women, the protagonists are not expressive and rarely seek help: when it is offered, they decline it, when they seek it, it is refused. For instance, Edna Pontellier "is not a woman given to confidences" (518); she rarely (and never fully) expresses her dissatisfaction; and she never asks for help. Edna says she has "got into a habit of expressing" herself (591), but she suggests her unhappiness only a few times, including her muted comment to Arobin, "I feel as if I had been wound up to a certain pitch—too tight—and something inside of me had snapped" (580). When Dr. Mandelet invites her confidence and offers support, Edna replies, "Some way I don't feel moved to speak of things that trouble me. Don't think I am ungrateful or that I don't appreciate your sympathy. There are periods of despondency and suffering which take possession of me" (595).

Emma Bovary is also not given to confidences: when she is young, "Perhaps she would have liked to confide all these things to some one. . . . Words failed her and, by the same token, the opportunity, the courage" (29). Emma rarely asks for help, others rarely offer it, and, when they do, she rejects it. Rodolphe notices, but ignores her crying and "melancholy sighs" (125), and Charles does not notice when Emma turns "scarlet" about Rodolphe's leaving. Charles, seeing Emma's pallor when she returns from her visit to Léon's, inquires about her health, but she denies
feeling ill. And when Emma asks for help, she is dismissed by the priest and coldly refused by Lheureux, Léon, and Rodolphe. Of course, she never asks Charles for help, who, it becomes increasingly clear, has generally been unaware of Emma's distress, asking on her deathbed, "Weren't you happy?" (232).

Lily Bart also withholds "the full extent of her anxiety" and her "urgent and immediate need of money" from her friends and family members (267). Maintaining her deadly air of decorum, she refuses help from Gerty and Selden, reminding Selden "that his good offices were unsought" (278). Although she finally tells Rosedale about Trenor's behavior, Rosedale expresses disinterest in helping Lily as long as her reputation is tarnished. Louise's and Thelma's trip is, according to Louise, "the first chance [Thelma has] ever really had to express" herself, but they confide in no one, and they decline offers of help from Hal Slocum and Jimmy. Reiko's distress about the impending suicides is clear, for instance, in her silent tears, but she does not discuss it. And, during Constance's first marriage problems, she communicates her distress to others, who respond unsupportively, so she silences herself with Ring and, again, with Lorck. Finally, Lu Anne reserves her expressiveness and tries to appear normal with everyone except Gordon. While Neuringer and Lettieri propose that women kill themselves less than men because they have more sufficient expressive outlets, they also observe that, once women become seriously suicidal, they lose "contact with the world," have almost nonexistent public emotional expression, are "no longer concerned about the feelings and reactions of others," and do not "[manipulate] an environment which now has no importance" to them (91-92). It seems, however, that the protagonists' historical inexpressiveness may lead them to—rather than reflect—their suicidal states.

Furthermore, "the great majority of suicidal persons communicate their self-destructive intentions to those around them, including their physicians," before they commit suicide (Roy 1986 vii, 1989 1424). This is consistently supported by the social science literature, which reports that fifty and to eighty-three percent of those who complete suicide give "clear indications" or "some warning of" intent before doing so.\(^4\) Signs of suicidal feelings, intent, or risk include: saying statements such
as, "I can't endure it," "you won't be seeing me again," and "I am going away": putting affairs in order; making suicide threats; giving away possessions; behaving differently; exhibiting odd mannerisms, such as plucking at others' clothes and wringing one's hands; and having tense, panicky, withdrawn, suspicious, or anguished facial expressions (Schneidman 1986 11; Maltsberger 80). Consistent with the protagonists' tendency toward inexpressiveness, most of the protagonists give no indications of suicidal feelings or intent, including: Lily, Thelma, Louise, Constance, Lucy, Susan, Peg, Reiko, and Edna. Indeed, several suggest they intend to live, perhaps reflecting the impulsiveness of their acts (discussed below) or efforts to ensure their attempts will be unthwarted: Thelma and Louise get money, Peg says she will be right back, and Edna expresses a dinner preference just before she goes for her fatal swim.

Of course, the protagonists' general tendency toward inexpressiveness creates a greater surprise for the characters and the readers. However, when the protagonists do give some indication of their potentially suicidal feelings, rather than giving "clear indications" of them (Roy 1986 viii), they give indirect clues, similar to the examples cited by Edwin Schneidman and John T. Maltsberger. Consider Zenobia, Herminia, and Anna. Zenobia tells Coverdale she doesn't think she and Hollingsworth will see each other again, that she "shall depart without seeing Hollingsworth. . . . Tell him he has murdered me! Tell him that I'll haunt him!" In giving her jewelled hairpiece to Coverdale and asking him to "Bid [Priscilla] wear this for Zenobia's sake" (226). Zenobia--referring to herself in the third person--distributes a prized possession. Of her cold hands, she says, "The extremities die first, they say . . . Lip of man will never touch my hand again. I intend to become a Catholic, for the sake of going into a nunnery. When you next hear of Zenobia, her face will be behind the black-veil; so look now--for it is all over!" (227-28). Coverdale obtusely overlooks the incredulity of Zenobia's joining a nunnery, her third person self-reference, and her double entendre for "depart." Given that Zenobia's comments are isolated ones that occur within a long history of maintaining public personas, of survival, histrionics, and spunk, Coverdale may have
assumed Zenobia was being dramatic; nevertheless, he lets her wander off into the woods at night, alone and uncharacteristically distraught.

Herminia also gives some indication that she plans to commit suicide. She tells Dolly, "Your life has been for years the one thing I had to live for," and "this last blow is too terrible. It will kill me. . . . I can't go on out-living it" (208). Dolly responds: "You will. . . . You're strong enough and wiry enough to outlive anything. But I . . . told him I would wait for him if I waited for ever. For, of course, while you live, I couldn't think of marrying (218-19). Dolly's response partly suggests that she can't imagine that Herminia will commit suicide, but it also invites Herminia to kill herself.

When Anna gives her first clue that she might consider suicide and says, "If you knew how near I am to a catastrophe at such moments. . . how afraid I am. Afraid of myself!" (638-39), Vronsky expresses confusion about her grief and tries to reassure her that he is devoted to her. Later, after arguing about Vronsky's going to Moscow without Anna, Vronsky is alarmed by Anna's despairing look and her suggestive words, "You will repent of this." Irritated by what Vronsky perceives as the "unbecoming and indefinite threat," he decides "to pay no attention" to her (681). After he leaves, Anna, who is in terror at the thought of death, sends him a note saying, "For God's sake come. I am frightened" (682) and a telegram saying, "I must speak to you, come at once" (684). He responds to her telegram, saying, "I cannot return before ten--Vronsky" (688); and to her note with, "Very sorry the note did not catch me. I shall be back at ten" (694). It is unclear how Vronsky could have received Anna's note and immediately sent a response back to her with Michael, but been too late to return himself, and Anna perceives Vronsky's responses as rejections of her clear "cries for help" and kills herself immediately after receiving them.

When the protagonists do explicitly ask for help or indicate their suicidal intent, they are met with denial or neglect. Consider Emma, Lu Anne, and the Lisbons—all who implement their suicides in the presence of others. *Children of Light*’s Gordon Walker, notorious for his detrimental behavior with Lu Anne, re-
introduces her to illegal drugs and, although seeing her "grief and rage" (197), that she is "off her head" (153), and that she is behaving dangerously, agrees to accompany her back to the ocean for a walk. Although he stops trying to reach Lu Anne because he experiences sudden pain, she last says to him, "Come, or else save me" (252); he doesn't, and Lu Anne drowns. When Emma Bovary says to Lheureux, "You'll drive me to do something desperate!" he says, "Don't make me laugh!" and shuts the door (214). Further, Emma eats the arsenic in front of Justin, who knows it is poison, but doesn't warn others; and she admits to eating it in her letter, which Charles agrees not to open. Finally, the five Lisbon sisters orchestrate their suicide attempts in the presence or vicinity, or both, of several people.

Akers says that an essential feature in the suicidal process is the reactions of others to a suicidal person's expressions or attempts to get help (308), and Maltsberger says suicide threats and attempts, "so-called '[cries] for help,' . . . often represent and can be understood as bids to obtain . . . a substitute resource; in almost all cases, it is another person who is sought" (27). Arthur Kobler and Ezra Stotland go on to report that "suicide results less from a crisis or loss of hope as such than from an inadequate response of others to the person's pleas for help" (in Akers 295), and Akers agrees: whether someone attempts and commits suicide "depends on the reactions of others. If . . . the definition [of suicide] is not counteracted and no hope for solution is communicated back to the person, he or she will attempt suicide" (299, 309). Similarly, A. Alvarez reports estimates that seventy-five percent of "successful and would-be suicides give clear warning of their intentions beforehand, and are often driven to act because their warnings are ignored and brushed aside or . . . treated as mere bravado" (76). Clearly, the minority of protagonists who give some, even indirect, indications of their possible suicidal intent are not discouraged from committing suicide by the perceptive, caring responses of others.

Further, although Emma, Lu Anne, and the Lisbons implement their suicides in the presence of others, and Zenobia, Herminia, and Anna give more indirect clues of their suicidal urges, the remaining protagonists offer no expressions of intent or requests for help. Indeed, because so many of the protagonists deviate from the
standard pre-suicidal behavior of indicating their suicidal intentions and seeking help, it seems more incongruous that they would go on to complete suicide. However, their suicides are facilitated by their general abandonment of complete and honest expression and by their deviation from routine suicidal behavior; this behavior, then, exacerbates their interpersonal isolation, reduces the opportunity for intervention, and increases the lethalness of their attempts.

**Religiousness**

The protagonists’ suicides are also enabled by the protagonists’ abandonment of religion. Alec Roy reports that suicide rates are lower among Jews and Catholics than Protestants (1415), and, because of the lower suicide rates in predominantly Catholic countries, several sociologists propose a correlation between religiousness—especially Catholic devotion—and suicide risk (Sainsbury 1986 25). More specifically, Stack found that religiousness was correlated to lower female suicide rates, but not to lower male rates, which he and Davis speculate is because women have stronger religious commitments than men (Lester 1988 20 cites Stack 1983; Neuringer and Lettieri 20 cite J. C. Davis). However, while several of the texts in this corpus incorporate religious symbols in the text and in characterizations of their protagonists, and several of the protagonists express some religious interest or influence, the protagonists almost always abandon religious interest or faith preceding death.

The Lisbons and Lu Anne are the most "religious" of these protagonists—albeit unconventionally so. The Lisbons are practicing Catholics, especially Mrs. Lisbon, Cecilia, and Bonnie—the first two daughters to kill themselves. Mrs. Lisbon plays church hymns at home, and Bonnie—named after St. Bonaventure—says the rosary each morning where Cecilia impaled herself on the yard fence. However, the narrators describe Cecilia’s diary and behavior as paganish and report that Ms. Perl says they are "attracted to the pagan aspect of the Catholic Church" (177). When Cecilia’s corpse is found with a card about the Virgin Mary’s reappearance, Mr. Lisbon says, "We baptized her, we confirmed her, and now she believes this crap"
(14), and Mr. Buell says Cecilia killed herself because "They didn’t have a relationship with God" (18). When the narrators remind Mr. Buell about the picture of Mary, he says, "Jesus is the one she should have had a picture of" (18).

Lu Anne Verger also is unusually religious: she speaks to "Sweet Jesus" (123), prays for God to be there for her so she won’t be alone in her terror (124), and says, "Help me. . . . You who are more real than I am. My only One, my Reality" (144-45). But Lu Anne’s relationship with religion is also ominous. Walker says it is a bad sign when she decides to go to church--and, indeed, she goes when her hallucinations worsen (139). She tells Drogue, "Sometimes I think I’ve ceased to be God’s child" (219), and she goes with Gordon to Monte Carmel "Because there’s a shrine there. . . . And [she requires] its blessedness" (226). She prays at the villa (233), and she tells Gordon she was his "sister Eve" (234). She associates truth with holy places (235) and calls for "Baptism! Renewal! Rebirth!" (240). She does this all while she is having increasingly severe hallucinations, and, covered in pig feces and blood, she says, "adjuring thee, Son of the Most High God" and talks about how the "unclean spirit" cannot be taken "out of a woman" (244).

As a Catholic teenager, Constance Ring’s devotion frightens her parents, who find her "lying in bed, praying and singing hymns to herself," but sobbing "like a child, in despair . . . because she didn’t feel close to God" (61). During Lorck’s and Meier’s diatribe against religion, Constance says, "For shame, Lorck" and, "How can you talk like that, Meier" (41-42), but shortly after this--and as her marriage to Ring becomes insufferable--her mother says, "she sat there with Lorck the other day, making wisecracks about Job--they said Satan had made a bet with God for his soul, like Mephistopheles and Faust. Why, that’s blasphemous" (61). After this, Constance is silent, even evasive, during discussions about religion. Marie notices that "something was not quite right about her faith" and thinks Constance has "been infected by this skepticism that’s so fashionable" (84).

Indeed, Constance becomes suspicious of the hypocrisy of religion tenets regarding women and marriage. When Constance discovers Ring’s affair:
Against her will, she began praying to the God she wasn’t sure existed, reproaching herself for her ingratitude and pride. She was being punished now, and she should bow her head under His admonishing hand. There was only one thing she would not put up with—to live with Ring after this; surely neither God nor man could ask that. (90)

But, of course, this is exactly what Reverend Huhn and others—in the name of God—ask of Constance. Reverend Huhn says to her, "A Christian woman never abandons her husband" and accuses her of mocking God with "sinful talk" (111). When Constance talks with an impoverished woman about the woman’s unfaithful husband, Constance is nauseated when the woman says, "How could I expect help from either God or man if I did an unchristian thing like [like leave my husband]" (145). Constance thinks, "Didn’t religion seem to turn people into dumb animals who didn’t think beyond the food on which they gorged themselves at the moment" (146) and asks her aunt, "Why do you all pretend to believe all that idiotic talk about . . . the power of religion—that marriage is sacred and made by God. Sacred!" (149). But, in part because of the religiously-grounded expectations to which Constance is held regarding marriage, and because of the general hypocrisy she associates with religion and marriage mores, Constance flatly rejects religion—years before she commits suicide.

Emma also has fairly religious stages. At thirteen, she begins living in a convent, where she is entranced by the more romantic elements of religion and convent life, her soul stirred by "The comparisons of betrothed, husband, celestial lover, and eternal marriage, that [recurred] in sermons" (25). By fifteen, she becomes rebellious and is removed from the convent. When Emma thinks she is going to die, she requests communion, feels "some power passing over her that freed her from her pains," thinks "another life was beginning" and that "her being, mounting toward God, would be annihilated in that love," and faints "with celestial joy as she advanced her lips to accept the body of the Saviour" (154). After she recovers, Emma is struck by religious fervor, wants to become a saint, buys rosaries, and wears holy medals. During her reading of religious material, she is "seized with the finest Catholic melancholy ever conceived by an ethereal soul" (155). "The
priest was delighted with her new state of mind, although he couldn’t help worrying that Emma’s excessive fervor might lead to heresy, to extravagance" (154). But, shortly thereafter she begins going "to church less assiduously" (156), and Emma essentially abandons religion for most of the book. When she is dying, she receives last rites, during which she seems "filled with joy. . . . She was doubtlessly reminded, in this moment of sudden serenity, of the lost bliss of her first mystical flights, mingling with the visions of eternal beatitude that were beginning" (237), and she kisses the crucifix with "the fullest kiss of love that she had ever given" (237).

Anna also has some religious interests, but, like Emma, they are intermittent and wane long before her death to re-emerge just as she is dying. While Anna advises Oblonsky to pray to a merciful God (5), she regularly notes the hypocrisy of Lydia Ivanovna’s and Karenin’s religion. When she is distraught, she repeats:

Oh, my God! My God! . . . but neither the word God or my had any meaning for her. The thought of seeking comfort in religion, though she had never doubted the truth of the religion in which she had been brought up, was as foreign to her as asking Karenin for help would have been. She knew that she could find no help in religion; unless she was prepared to give up that which alone gave a meaning to her life. (263)

And Anna does abandon religious interests, until her suicide, when she makes the sign of the cross and says, "God forgive me everything" (695).

Edna also abandons religion before her suicide—but she doesn’t re-embrace it in the moments before death. Edna remembers "running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by my father that chills me yet to think of," but when Madame Ratignolle asks Edna if she has been running away from prayers ever since, Edna says "No! oh, no! . . . . I was a little unthinking child in those days. . . . On the contrary, during one period of my life religion took a firm hold upon me; after I was twelve and until--until--why, I suppose until now, though I never thought much about it--just driven along by habit" (520). Edna marries a Catholic, to the "violent opposition" of her father and sister, and attends Catholic mass, but a "feeling of oppression and drowsiness" overcomes her during the service.
Later, "Edna was glad to be rid of her father . . . with his . . . Bible reading" (564), and she has no additional religious thoughts.

Herminia Barton, whose father is a respected preacher for the Church of England, is raised in a very religious family. Herminia occasionally uses religious phrases and analogies, but she embraces a free thinking that estranges her from the Church, and, for the most part she rejects religion, thinking, "if only there had been anybody or anything to pray to" (160). But Herminia consistently identifies herself with the Virgin Mary: she thinks of her baby as possibly "the world's true savior," as one who is "destined to regenerate humanity" (133), and she sees in an autotype of "the Madonna bending in worship over her divine child" "no mere emblem of a dying creed, but a type of the eternal religion of maternity. The Mother adoring the Child! 'Twas herself and Dolly" (217). Of course, this devotion, grounded in Catholicism, compels Herminia to die for the object of her worship, and in so doing, she becomes even more affiliated with "Christine," the model female suicide protagonist. Although Susan does not go to church or express a denominational interest, Doris Lessing infuses "To Room 19" with religious imagery. And, while Lily's religious background is not clear, she plans to attend--and then skips--a Protestant service. And Zenobia tells Coverdale, "I intend to become a Catholic, for the sake of going into a nunnery. When you next hear of Zenobia, her face will be behind the black-veil; so look now" (227-28).

Although religion is alleged to have a protective effect against suicide, particularly for women, it clearly has no protective effect for the protagonists: Reiko practices Eastern religion; Lily is of unknown denomination, but appears not to be Catholic; Susan is informed by Christian teachings; Anna is of unknown denomination, but may be Catholic; Edna rejects her Presbyterianism for Catholicism; Herminia abandons her Anglican associations and embraces Catholic tenets; Zenobia says she plans to become a Catholic; and Peg, the five Lisbons, Emma, Lu Anne, and Constance are Catholic. At least fifteen of the female suicide characters in this corpus--approximately two thirds--have some religious association, and at least thirteen, possibly fourteen, of them are influenced by Catholicism--
which allegedly has one of the most protective effects against suicide of the religions. The protagonists' suicides may be facilitated by their abandonment of religion, but they clearly are not mitigated by their religious associations. It appears that with the masternarrative, rather than protecting the protagonists from suicide, some presence of religion—especially Catholicism—is far more closely aligned with fictional female suicide than it is with historical female suicide. Perhaps authors associate the suicide protagonists with Catholic influences in an attempt to emphasize their individual rebellions and transgressions. That is, because suicide is a mortal sin in Catholicism, by committing suicides as Catholics, the protagonists appear to be more rebellious and transgressive than they might had they been agnostic. However, this attempt to increase the rebellious character of individual protagonists is undermined by its repetition in the corpus. In other words, if female suicide protagonists are primarily associated with Catholicism, then, within their corpus, their association does not assume particularly outstanding or rebellious qualities. Finally, the repetition of religion in the texts collectively sabotages the total effect of any individual protagonist's alleged rebellion. Rather than emphasizing its protagonists' rebelliousness from a religion that classifies suicide as a sin, the masternarrative's wide use of religion in its texts has created, as Dr. Hornicker writes of the Lisbons, lemmings--Catholic lemmings.

**Interpersonal Duty**

Women are also presumed to be protected from suicide by their overriding concern for others. Akers says, "the low suicide rate of married people with children is explained by the constraint based on the greater number of interpersonal relationships implied in that status" (291); Sainsbury reports that male suicides had fewer children than the population sample (Barraclough and Nelson 24); and M. Halbwachs reports "that the suicide rates of parents progressively falls as each child is added to the family--but only up to six" (Sainsbury 1986 24). According to Alexandra G. Kaplan and Rona B. Klein, a woman's
decision to kill herself and to therefore abandon and destroy all relatedness (Maltsberger and Buie, 1974) stands in direct opposition to the values most central to her core identity as a relational being. . . . the sense of self in women is closely tied to a sense of morality based on principles of interdependence, mutuality of caretaking, and responsibility for the well-being of others. Women experience and define themselves in terms of a moral imperative to avoid hurting others. . . . Thus, the nature of women's most basic ethics, needs, and aims would tend to direct them away from the choice of ending their lives. (260)

Kaplan and Klein go on to say, "lack of empathy with the probable impact of suicide on others is . . . not typically found in suicidal women" and that a seriously suicidal woman is often "torn by an anguished struggle between a sense of responsibility to herself—to alleviate her own unbearable pain—and her sense of responsibility to avoid hurting" others (261). Kaplan and Klein speculate that this empathic restraining effect for women may account for the sex differentials in suicide.

While the protagonists have little or no sense of religious duty, they also are not protected from suicide by a sense of duty to family or society. Herminia and Reiko, with their deadly devotions, are exceptional. Reiko's marital harmony follows the "education Rescript's injunction that 'husband and wife should be harmonious'" (1111), and Shinji lectures and "schools" Reiko about her role—which Reiko illustrates her willingness to accept by showing him the "most prized of her new possessions, the dagger her mother had given her" (1111). Reiko lives and dies for Shinji, but, when she asks "permission to accompany" him in suicide, Shinji is pleased—even though he is "not so romantic or conceited as to imagine that the words were spoken spontaneously, out of love for her husband" (1114). Herminia also lives a devoted, only partly nontraditional life, asking "What else have I thought about in any serious way, save this one great question of a woman's duty to herself, and her sex, and her unborn children?" (38), and she is "happy in her life; as far as a certain tranquil sense of duty done could make her" (151). Although Herminia abides by her sense of duty to her social concerns, she feels a greater sense of duty to Dolly, such that, while she alleges to be self-defined and independent, to discard
traditional interrelational constructs, she—like the protagonists in more traditional relationships—kills herself for love: for her love of Dolly, and for Dolly’s love of Walter.

However, most often, at first the protagonists show varying—usually quite limited—amounts of concern for and responsibility toward their family and friends, and they abandon their sense of "otherness" before they commit suicide. During the first half of the novel, Anna regularly considers what others think and feel: for instance, she resists being intimate with Vronsky for a year because she does not want to ruin her relationship with Serezha, from whom she has been inseparable since birth (264). But, by the second half of the novel, Karenin and then Vronsky regularly accuse Anna of abandoning her duties, including children. Dolly is astonished that Anna does not know about Annie’s two newest teeth, and, "Try as she might [Anna] could not love that child and she could not make a pretence of love" (603). Anna is emotionally and physically estranged from Serezha, whom she has left with Karenin—even though Anna knows he does not like Serezha. Although Anna says she suffers for having left her son, the narrator says, "But sincerely as Anna desired to suffer, she was not suffering" (421). Anna says shortly before killing herself, "I thought I loved [Serezha]. . . . Yet I live without him and exchanged his love for another’s, and did not complain of the change as long as the other love satisfied me" (691). During the several hours before her death, she considers its possible vengeance-producing effects on Vronsky, but not of its effects on others.

Edna is also reproached for being an inattentive, neglectful wife, mother, and sister. Léonce complains that Edna neglects her duties to "the comfort of her family" (552), and Edna—who refuses to have sex with Léonce, oversee the house, abide by her social traditions, and attend her sister’s wedding—feels "an overwhelming sense of irresponsibility" when she and Arobin kiss (573). Léonce’s view may be unreliably harsh, and he is surely not an exemplary father. However, the narrator also says, "Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman" (513). The children are raised by their nurse, and Edna—who is "fond" of them, but "in an
uneven, impulsive way"—does not miss them, and sometimes even forgets them (522). When Edna visits her children at their grandmother's, she leaves "with a wrench and a pang. . . . But by the time she had regained the city the song no longer echoed in her soul. She was again alone" (582). Edna, who does not want the children to live with her in her new house, is relieved by their absence, which frees her of "a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her" (522).

Adèle seems to recognize this and urges Edna to "Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!" (594). Echoing Adèle, almost wishfully, Edna says to Dr. Mandelet, "One has to think of the children some time or other; the sooner the better" (595), but Edna says, "I don't want anything but my own way. That is wanting a good deal, of course, when you have to trample upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others—but no matter—still, I shouldn't want to trample upon the little lives" (595). Edna even suggests that it is better for her to die than to "trample" on the children, and, as she walks to the beach, "The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her, who had overpowered her and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them. She was not thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach" (598).

Although Lu Anne worries she will lose her children because of her schizophrenia: she thinks, "Only let me keep my children" (34, 175), and, "Lu Anne was a lousy mother, certified and certifiable. Who the hell did she think she was, Edna? Too good for her own kids? But then she thought: It comes to the same thing, her way and mine. You want more, you want to be Queen" (99). She says her children "don't care about" her, that they consider her "a biological function of their lives," and she asks, "Would I let them destroy me? No. . . . She will die for them, sure, but she won't live for them" (196). The last time Lu Anne thinks about her children is when, becoming increasingly frenzied, Gordon asks, "What about your kids?" (240), in an apparent attempt to contain her suicidal suggestions; Lu Anne says, "Mine, they've never seen me crazy. They never would. They'd
remember me as something very ornate and mysterious. They’d always love me. I’d be fallen in love” (254). Like Edna, Lu Anne convinces herself that her children will be better off without her.

Emma, who is unusually self-interested, is also unusually disinterested in, even cruel toward, others, especially Berthe and Charles. When she unexpectedly does not return home one night, Charles loses “his head with anxiety,” Berthe sobs and refuses “to go to bed without her mamma,” and Justin and Homais search for Emma (200). Emma has moments of tenderness and cruelty toward Berthe, but mostly disinterest. When Emma begs Rodolphe to take her away, he reminds her of “Your little girl!” (140), but when making plans to elope, “there was never any allusion to the child” (142). When Berthe reaches out to her ill mother, Emma turns away and says, “No, no . . . I want no one!” (150), and after visiting Léon, Emma “scarcely kissed the child” (194). Of course, Emma does not educate Berthe or consider the effects her spending will have on Berthe’s or Charles’s future. However, unlike any other protagonist except Reiko, Emma associates her suicide with duty: after running toward the pharmacy and eating the arsenic “in an ecstasy of heroism, that made her almost joyous,” she goes home, “suddenly calmed, with something of the serenity of one that has done his duty” (229). Indeed, Emma has done her duty to the master-narrative—which has little room for indifferent mothers, and when Emma is dying, she asks not for “my child,” but for “the child” (233). After Berthe is terrified by Emma’s appearance and rushed away, there is no indication that Emma thinks of Berthe again.

The protagonists without husbands or children also exhibit an eventual lack of concern for the effects of their suicides on others. Constance Ring honors a tremendously oppressive sense of duty to Ring, Lorck, and her mother—until the end of the novel. Early in the text she says that “immoral women” like Emma Bovary don’t concern themselves with “duty and respectability” (40), but soon Constance wants to tell her family members and friends “that she didn’t feel, would never feel, it was her duty and her calling to make this fat, self-satisfied man happy” (70). Constance is repeatedly urged to “do what’s right!” (114-32), and, although she
agrees to remain married, she remains celibate, ignoring the "wife's duty to love her husband and let him keep her" (167) "as if it had been no concern of hers, excusing herself by saying she couldn't help it. She had gone into her marriage as if it were a party, thinking of only one thing: her own satisfaction; valuing only one person: herself" (171). Even after she has fallen out of love with and lost respect for Lorck, Constance strives to remain faithful, abandoning her fidelity vows only to seek revenge for Lorck's infidelity. Disgusted with Lorck, Meier, and herself, Constance commits suicide thinking only of her deceased parents. Thelma seems to feel a strong sense of duty to Daryl until she goes on vacation with Louise, and her devotion vanishes during the trip. And the narrators of The Virgin Suicides say the Lisbons "became too powerful to live among us, too self-concerned, too visionary, too blind. What lingered after them was . . . the outrageousness of a human being thinking only of herself. . . . Every other loved one receding as though across a vast ice floe" (248).

While the protagonists sometimes think about their families and friends, it is never with concern for the effects of the suicide on their loved ones, and they lack a sense of responsibility to their friends and family that might allay their suicidal feelings. Perhaps the protagonists do not consider the effects their suicides will have on others because they spend little time feeling suicidal—as I discuss below. However, a phrase or a narrative moment suggesting concern would take only a textual link of time or space. Further, although Neuringer and Lettieri say that, once the decision is made to commit suicide, women are unconcerned about "the feelings and reactions of others," that this "isolation and alienation allow [them] to act in socially non-sanctioned ways," and that the "loss of social restraint makes the decision to escape from life easy (91-92), the protagonists' lack of duty or concern for others long precedes their suicidal inclinations. It appears, then—much like the characters' inexpressiveness—that their lack of concern for others is a master-narrative condition that facilitates and justifies their suicide paths long before the characters become suicidal. In this way, it functions rhetorically to minimize the sense of loss
for the protagonists and to heighten feelings of blame or judgment toward them in their survivors and, perhaps, in their readers.

Fearing Death, Valuing Life

Suicidal people fear death less than non-suicidal individuals, sometimes find death attractive, and, just prior to participating in suicidal behavior, their attention is diverted "from the behavior’s potentially dread-inducing negative qualities" (Spiegel and Neuringer 1979; cited in Neuringer and Lettieri 29, 32). Indeed, the protagonists’ suicidal risk is increased by their chronic or more acute fearlessness of death. Anna is, again, exceptional because she is terrified by the idea of death the day before she dies and regrets her suicide just as she is hit by the train: "she was horror-struck at what she was doing. 'Where am I? What am I doing? Why? She wished to rise, to throw herself back, but something huge and relentless struck her on the head and dragged her down" (695). Edna also considers swimming back to shore, but feels too exhausted to try. Herminia "cried a few minutes very softly to herself; for no one can die without some little regret, some consciousness of the unique solemnity of the occasion" (222). And Lucy bows and curses the man who leads her off the roof top.

However, only Anna regrets her suicide attempt. Lu Anne seems to have gladly anticipated the "nothingness" of death, and Edna’s notion that one can retain the self in death, while consoling, also presumably facilitates her death. Even after Emma eats the arsenic, she thinks, "Ah! it is but a little thing, death! . . . I shall fall asleep and it will be over" (230), and she expresses no regrets for implementing the suicide attempt through several days of painful, gruesome dying. Lu Anne never imagines what will happen to the film of her favorite novel and suggests it is good that she dies before her children see her mad (further, Shelley says Lionel is relieved that Lu Anne is dead). Edna also suggests her children will benefit from her death because she will not "trample" the little ones.

Perhaps the protagonists do not fear death or regret their suicide attempts because they don’t particularly value their lives. Many of the protagonists have
especially strong regrets about their marriages: Constance and Anna consider their marriages "A dreadful mistake!" (389), and Emma asks herself, "Why, for Heaven's sake, did I marry" (31), wonders why she didn't "resist and implore" when doing so (163). Emma expresses some regret for not having "yielded to the notary" when he sexually propositions her (222), but she tells Rodolphe she will "Never!" regret being with him--and she never seems to (143). Although, unlike seriously suicidal women, the protagonists do not consistently have negative attitudes toward life, devalue it, or find it unattractive, some do, and others are indifferent toward or simply tired of living (Neuringer and Lettieri 32, 91; Neuringer 1967, 1968, 1979). Finally, in contrast to the male persona in John Entwistle's song, "Thinking It Over," female suicide protagonists never imagine what they will lose by committing suicide, never think death is "too high a price to pay" for an unfaithful partner or a dissatisfying relationship.

Facilitating Factors of Presence

Although the masternarrative eliminates many of the mimetically plausible risk-increasing factors of real suicide, such as illness, family history of suicide, and suicidal preoccupation, it also facilitates the protagonists' suicides by eliminating or minimizing characteristics in them and their situations that would deter suicide, for instance: expressions of duress and warning, requests for help, a sense of duty toward or concern for others, religious devotion, regrets for their own loss of life, and fear of death. Moreover, even as these deaths spring from the narratives and conflict with some of the larger understandings about and trends in female suicide, the masternarrative includes several suicide-enhancing factors that promote both the protagonists' deaths and our acceptance of them--such as the presence of negative social relations, isolation, self-blame, constricted feeling and thinking patterns, and ego fragmentation.
Negative Social Relations

Chapter 5 details the protagonists' negative heterosexual relations, which occur within larger contexts of negative social relations—of isolation, aloneness, loss and dissatisfaction, much like the interrelational contexts of real suicidal women. Not surprisingly, researchers note that social isolation increases suicide risk because, according to Neuringer and Lettieri, the seriously suicidal woman "has lost contact with the world. She is alone. . . . no longer concerned about the feelings and reactions of others. Such an isolation and alienation allow her to act in socially non-sanctioned ways. . . . This loss of social restraint makes the decision to escape from life easy" (91-92). Maltsberger reports that "those in the grips of such reactions [of aloneness] will often say that they feel they are dying" (8), and Ronald W. Maris finds that suicide completers have no close friends and are interpersonally isolated (102). However, "a young woman, freshly disappointed in love, but surrounded by a caring family and good friends may make a suicide threat. In the absence of other factors, it is not statistically indicative of great danger" (Maltsberger 53). But, if the individual experiences the loss or the threat of loss of people on whom he or she has depended or wished to depend, the suicidal risk increases, especially in the absence of other supportive resources (Maltsberger 31). Further, according to Motto, the loss of an important person or stabilizing element in a person's life is a risk factor for suicide (1989 132), and Maltsberger says that most suicidal crises are triggered by interpersonal loss (98, 65).

Although the protagonists' most common interpersonal loss is heterosexual loss, their primary losses occur in a context of other losses that deprive the protagonists of a range of sustaining interpersonal resources. Many of the protagonists' larger interrelational contexts are defined by parental, especially maternal, loss, and parental absence or emotional distance has been associated with suicidal individuals. Sainsbury reports that bereavement is "a prominent stress which preceded suicide" (Sainsbury 37 cites Bunch et al.), and Maris and others found that both nonfatal attempters and fatal completers were less close to their parents, especially their fathers, than were those who died natural deaths (1989 108).
Joyce B. Stephens reports that parental absence was one of the five major characteristics of the parent-child relationships of her subjects: nearly one third of the women in her study were raised in homes with one parent absent, either through death or divorce (75-76). Maltsberger also notes the association between earlier parental death and attempted suicide, reporting that in one study, ninety-five percent of severely suicidal patients had experienced a loss or death of parents, siblings, or mates, and seventy-five percent of the patients experienced the loss by the end of adolescence (102). He says, "Parental loss in childhood sensitizes some patients so that in adulthood later losses become intolerably painful and may precipitate suicide attempts" (102; cites Birtchnell 1970, Lester and Beck 1976).

While familial loss is not foregrounded in the female suicide master narrative, it contributes to the protagonists' general contexts of aloneness and isolation. Both of Lily Bart's parents, many Lisbon sisters, both Herminia's father and her lover, Constance's first husband, and Reiko's husband die during the narratives' time of action. More strikingly, the protagonists' mothers are consistently absent from their lives during and often long before the time of action: Anna's, Emma's, Zenobia's, Edna's, and Lily's mothers die when the protagonists are children or teenagers, and, except for Mrs. Bart, they are absent during the time of action. Herminia's mother is estranged from her for her entire adult life, and Lucy's, Susan's, Lu Anne's, Thelma's, and Louise's mothers are never mentioned. The protagonists' fathers are more present than their mothers. However, while Lucy's, Edna's, Emma's, Constance's, and Reiko's fathers are acknowledged in the narratives, the father-daughter relationships are limited: Herminia's, Lily's, Anna's, Thelma's and Louise's, and Lu Anne's fathers are either dead or not mentioned, and Zenobia's father, Fauntleroy, abandons his family, is assumed dead, and is later revealed to be Moody.

In addition to being alone and feeling isolated, suicidal women also have been found to have negative relationships: "All of the women in this study had interpersonal histories of relentlessly negative relationship with the most important people in their lives," their parents, peers, spouses, and lovers (Stephens 84). This
is consistent with Lester's findings that "suicidal people are less active socially and have poorer relationships with peers and superiors (1988 6), and that "Seriously suicidal individuals have been found to have . . . a lifelong inability to maintain warm and mutually interdependent relationships and to be interpersonally isolated and disengaged (even if married)" (Lester 1988 7; cited Lester 1972). Maris challenges the isolation-involvement of suicide: he says that, while most early studies about the social relations of suicide argue that constraining, external social forces reduce social disorganization, isolation, and suicide, the negative quality of relationships among self-destructive individuals--rather than their relative isolation--is at the heart of their suicidal careers (Maris 121 cites several others). Citing several researchers, he says people who commit suicide not only lack involvement or regulation, but that they, and especially nonfatal attempters, are often angry about being rejected by significant others and attempt suicide in an effort to seek revenge for this rejection (Maris 105-6).

These descriptions of the social relations of suicidal people also describe the protagonists' social relations. The effects of their interrelational abandonment are exacerbated because the abandonment and loss occur within a larger context of physical and emotional isolation and aloneness--which is also a result of several prescribed events and sex-roles in the protagonists' lives. Sometimes this isolation and aloneness is a function of their normative roles as mothers and wives--as it is with Susan, Thelma, and Reiko--and often it is a result of the protagonists' clashing value systems, behaviors, and desires that do not suit standard concepts of feminine-appropriate existence. It is a often function of their dissatisfying heterosexual relationships, which leads to the protagonists' rejection by others and sometimes to their adultery, which further alienates them from their societies: consider, for instance, Anna, who is "thrown over" by her friends because of her affair (562). While the protagonists primarily have negative relationships with their partners, their relationships with others, although perhaps not "relentlessly negative," are often nonexistent or dissatisfying, often unifocal relationships that do not provide intimacy and support. Again, these protagonists are "bound to lose": whether they abide by
or reject traditional concepts of womanhood, they are socially and interpersonally marginalized and constrained, which promotes a spiritual isolation from others and limits the restraining effect of anti-suicide mores.

Self-Reproach

Perhaps one of the characteristics most consistently shared by the protagonists is their eventual assumption of some degree of self-blame, similar in type, but not in degree, to the self-blame regularly assumed by suicidal women. Maltsberger says suicidal people have aggressive superegos that are "implacably critical," making them self-contemptuous and giving them unrelenting and severe consciences that demand they pay for every misdeed (12). Neuringer and Lettieri found that nonsuicidal women have outer-directed anger, but they did not find that highly suicidal women direct their anger inward (79). However, Alan Berman and Silvia Sara Canetto report that many young adult women direct their hostility inward and are very self-critical; although they complain of feeling misunderstood by their husbands, they do not blame their husbands for their unhappiness or their relationship problems, and they avoid directly expressing dissatisfaction toward their spouses (Berman and Canetto 273). Indeed, they often praise and idealize their husbands. Suicidologists believe that this tendency in younger women may be a reason why their attempts are more lethal than those of older women—who more readily direct hostility and criticism outward, who more readily blame their husbands, and whose suicide attempts are marked by low levels of lethality, suggesting that this externally-directed blame dynamic may be part of a self-preserving disposition for women (Berman et al. 273). This dynamic of self-blame is also accordant with Raymond Jack’s description of the attribution dynamics of suicidal women, who turn blame inward and praise outward (69; also see Kaplan and Klein 270). Furthermore, concurrent with young wives’ tendency not to blame their husbands is the tendency among dyads for the non-suicidal member to characterize the suicidal partner (usually, the wife) "sick," defective, and the cause of all the couple’s problems (Berman et al. 272), to describe them as sick,
demanding, neglectful, troublesome, and so forth (among several, Canetto, Feldman, and Lupei). Thus, within the dyadic dynamic of suicidal women, husbands’ faults are minimized, while wives’ are emphasized.

While the protagonists do not feel relentless, extreme self-blame, contempt, and criticism throughout the texts, toward the end of their lives many of them experience self-remonstrance and shame that gradually figures, sometimes quietly, in their suicidal paths. Further, although most do not reproach their partners, those who do—Emma, Anna, Herminia and Constance—redirect this blame inward before they commit suicide, and these dynamics are illustrated in the protagonists’ suicide notes, in which the protagonists absolve everyone from blame, blame no one, or blame themselves for their deaths.

For instance, throughout her "not uncommon" moments of misery, oppression, and dissatisfaction, Edna blames her husband for nothing: "She did not sit there upbraiding her husband, lamenting at Fate, which had directed her footsteps to the path which they had taken. She was just having a good cry to herself" (512). Indeed, Edna regularly considers "the abundance of her husband’s kindness" and his "uniform devotion" (512), and "the ladies . . . all declared that Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world. Mrs. Pontellier was forced to admit that she knew of none better" (513). This indirect discourse is double-voiced, of course, but Edna also privately appreciates Léonce: as he prepares to depart with the children, she "grew melting and affectionate, remembering his many acts of consideration and his repeated expressions of an ardent attachment. She was solicitous about his health and his welfare. . . . She cried when he went away, calling him her dear, good friend, and she was quite certain she would grow lonely before very long and go to join him in New York" (564).

However, Léonce repeatedly reproaches Edna, telling her she "fails in her duty toward the children" (513), she improperly supervises the cook, that she is struck by the "utmost folly" (552), responding to her letter about the house with "unqualified disapproval and remonstrance" (581). After Edna and Alcée kiss, she remembers "Robert’s reproach" and Léonce’s "looking at her from external
existence”—but, after the kiss, Edna feels "neither shame nor remorse" (574). However, on the night before she kills herself, she says to Dr. Mandelet, "Don’t blame me for anything," and he says, "I don’t want you to blame yourself, whatever comes" (595). But Edna’s last moments include an imagining of reprimand from a new source: she thinks of "How Mademoiselle Reisz would have laughed, perhaps sneered, if she knew" that Edna had given up, that she was not courageous enough to dare and defy (598).

More than any other protagonist, Anna consistently contends with feelings of blame for herself and others, vacillating between defending herself and denying or not feeling blame, blaming Karenin, and blaming Vronsky—but, more regularly thinking herself "a bad woman" and abundantly feeling self-blame and shame. And, until she begins to feel the agitation that precedes her suicidal crisis, Anna is confused about how much blame she deserves. She writes to Vronsky, "I was to blame. Come home" (682) and then thinks, "I have confessed that I am to blame? Why? Can I not live without him?" (684). Anna seems to think she must assume blame if she is to be with Vronsky: she wants to tell Dolly, "I am unhappy, I deserve it; I am guilty, but all the same I am unhappy" (685). Finally, just as the train hits her, Anna says, "God forgive me everything" (695).

Unlike most of the protagonists, when Constance is married to Ring, she explicitly and repeatedly blames him, their marriage, marriage, and their incompatibility for her unhappiness—and, although depressed during her marriage to Ring, she is never suicidal. However, during her second marriage, when Constance starts feeling attracted to Meier, she starts judging herself harshly: "Adulteress—whore. Oh, those words were unspeakable!" (271), and she imagines the "cruel humiliation" she will inflict on Lorck if she sleeps with Meier (273). Of course, when Lorck has sex with Kristine, he quickly discards the "annoying" event, blaming it on his "kind heart" (288), and Meier even more quickly forgives himself for being "an incredible moron!" (283) after he accidentally drops his photo of Emma. In contrast to Lorck’s and Meier’s easy self-forgiveness, after Constance sleeps with Meier, she is "sickened by herself... disgusted with her husband, with
Meier. with life—but above all, with herself" (285). Further, although her suicide is driven by her discovery of Lorck's infidelity and Meier's promiscuity, her note blames no one: "You shouldn't grieve for me. I was so tired of life. I couldn't stand it any longer. Constance" (286). When she sees her reflection in the mirror, she screams, claps her hands to her face, and despises herself—and, just before she takes the morphine, she recalls her father telling her shortly before her confirmation, "'disapprovingly," "You are a terrible egotist. . . . and egotism is mortal sin." Internalizing this message, Constance thinks, "Yes it was true. . . . At that moment she saw it so clearly. It was the great sin of her life"—and then she swallows the bottle of morphine "in one gulp" (287).

Like Anna and Constance, Emma blames her unhappiness on her marriage. She also blames "Léon for her disappointed hopes, as if he had betrayed her" (211), and Rodolphe for her unhappy life: "But for you . . . I might have lived happily" (228). She expresses very little self blame; even when her financial problems worsen, "she had never felt so much esteem for herself nor so much contempt for others" (222). However, as she becomes more frenzied and just before she eats the arsenic, she thinks, "he will forgive me, the man I could never forgive for having known me" (222), suggesting, of course, her sense of her own wrong-doing. As she's dying, Emma says to Charles, "you're good, not like the others" (232), and Emma's note says, "Let no one be blamed" (231).

Zenobia also finally succumbs to self-blame, but not until she has blamed Hollingsworth, and then expunged his blame. Just after Hollingsworth chooses Priscilla, Zenobia calls him a "monster! A cold, heartless . . . piece of mechanism!" But then she speaks at length about her own faults and the faults of women:

At least, I am a woman—with every fault, it may be, that a woman ever had, weak, vain, unprincipled (like most of my sisters; for our virtues, when we have any, are merely impulsive and intuitive,) passionate, too, and pursuing my foolish and unattainable ends, by direct and cunning though absurdly chosen means, as an hereditary bond-slave must—false, moreover, to the whole circle of good, in my reckless truth to the little good I saw before me. (217-18)
Finally, Zenobia says she has deserved her "woman's doom" (224) and tells Coverdale:

Do him no wrong! . . . It was my fault, all along, and none of his. I see it now! He never sought me. Why should he seek me? What had I to offer him? A miserable, bruised, and battered heart, spoilt long before he met me! A life, too, hopelessly entangled with a villain's! He did well to cast me off. God be praised, he did it! (225)

Lily accepts—with irritating passiveness—the gossip about her life, never trying to clarify untruths and never holding accountable those who are partly responsible for events that cast doubt on her character. Although she spends her last hours "sorting her papers and writing" (321), Lily leaves no implicating notes, and she burns the letters that would have cleared her reputation, but tarnished Selden's. However, while, for much of the novel, Lily is blind to her own responsibility for others' assumptions, she begins to internalize a general sense of "badness": she equates herself with "bad girls" who "go from bad to worse" and says, "I am bad through and through" (165). Although Lily regularly attributes her situation to fate, her later attributions suggest that she feels inherently flawed: "Why, the beginning . . . in the way I was brought up, and the things I was taught to care for. Or no--I won't blame anybody for my faults: I'll say it was in my blood, that I got it from some wicked pleasure-loving ancestress" (226).

With as demeaning as Daryl is to Thelma in *Thelma and Louise*, she does not insult or blame him until after he orders her to return home, when she says to J.D., "He is an asshole. Most of the time I just let it slide" and when she says to the police officer as she locks him in the trunk, "three days ago neither one of us would've ever pulled a stunt like this, but if you's ever to meet my husband, you'd understand why. . . . My husband wasn't sweet to me. Look how I turned out."

However, Thelma and Louise agree that they cannot justify shooting Harlan in self-defense and that "There's no such thing as justifiable robbery." But, shortly before they kill themselves, Thelma says, "I know this whole thing was my fault," and Louise—who never denies her responsibility for the events—says, "Thelma, if there's one thing you should know by now, this wasn't your fault."
Even Herminia expresses self-blame in her suicide note, asking Dolly to "Accept this death as reparation. For all the wrong I may have done, all the mistakes I may have made, I sincerely and earnestly implore your forgiveness" (221). Herminia also spares Dolly from incrimination by writing two suicide notes, one "for the formal evidence" "giving reasons for my act on other grounds, to be put in, if need be, at the coroner's inquest" (222). Lu Anne—who is self-critical—never admonishes others for her condition, including Lionel and Gordon, whom others criticize for using poor judgment regarding Lu Anne. Finally, even Reiko, who expresses no censure toward Shinji for his decision regarding their lives, leaves a suicide note that includes perhaps some formulaic, conventional "apologies for her unfilial conduct in thus preceding her parents to the grave" (1110).

**Purposelessness, Worthlessness, Dependence, and Dispensability**

Given that many of the protagonists feel some self-censure, it is not surprising that they also suffer from a sense of purposeless and worthlessness. Their feelings are exacerbated by their extreme interrelational and financial dependency. Charlotte Sanborn says, "traditional roles have prevented both sexes from realizing their full human potential. Women have been cut off from the outer world and deprived of the working self, while men have been cut off from the inner world and deprived of the feeling self" (153). Indeed, all of the protagonists except Lu Anne and Herminia experience deadly occupational voids that promote their financial and interrelational dependency, as well as their general sense of purposeless, dispensability, and even worthlessness. While Emma and Lily have critical monetary concerns, the other protagonists—many of whom are "privileged"—are not in financial distress; however, the protagonists' financial security is—except for Herminia and Lu Anne—dependent upon their husbands. As Lily says, "a girl must [marry]" (12), and finding a spouse is her "vocation" (9), "business" (12), and "career" (48), such that "to acquit herself of that odious debt she might even have faced a marriage with Rosedale" (196). When Constance, having "trouble adjusting" to her second marriage, is physically unresponsive to Lorck, she feels "sad and half-
ashamed," and "She could hardly bring herself to ask for money" (200). Constance's experience reiterates Herminia's sexual slavery arguments.

In regard to class, Sainsbury reports that "whether assessed by income, occupation, or educational attainment," the higher the social class, the greater the suicide risk (although a fall in social status also increases risk) (1986 25-6; Roy 1989 1415; Neuringer and Lettieri 12-13 note Henry and Short). Although many of the protagonists are from higher classes, the Lisbons, Maria, Zenobia, Lu Anne, Thelma, and Louise are not. Thus, the master-narrative transcends class and money concerns—which enables it to emphasize its inter-relational thematics of death.

Although the protagonists are usually financially secure and their suicides are compelled by inter-relational concerns, the issues of occupation and work become pivotal factors in their suicides. There are mixed findings about whether work outside the home lowers the risk of suicide. The patriarchal protection theories noted in Chapter 5 argue that, as women join the labor force, suicide rates will rise, and Neuringer and Lettieri propose that women may kill themselves less than men because "The socially defined female role probably allows disturbed women to escape from" the demands of work, money, and sexual prowess (22). They perceive, again, a double-edged sword for women, speculating that the disadvantages of power, influence, achievement may bring with them "the darker aspects associated with the male role" (23). Steven Stack reports on studies of states and countries in which suicide rates increase with female employment rates, but studies generally concur with Roy, who says, "Work protects against suicide. The unemployed have higher suicide rates, probably owing to an interaction of socioeconomic circumstances, psychological vulnerability, and stressful life events" (1415).

More specifically, several have found that employment reduces women's suicide rates. While Canetto points out that women may be suicidal more often because of dysfunctional relationships than they are because of diminished access to employment, the latter is also a factor in women's suicide. E. C. Cumming found that employed married women in British Columbia had lower suicide rates than unemployed married women (in Lester 1988 13). Augmenting Canetto's comments
cited in Chapter 5, Jack notes an epidemic increase in women’s self-poisoning after World War II, when women returned to the domestic front (76), and R. C. Kessler and J. A. McRae “found similar trends in America between 1940 and 1980” (1983 in Jack 78-79). They suggest the lowered suicide rates for women are a result of “women having increased access to non-traditional roles outside the home, in part facilitated by deferred childbearing, smaller families and more employment being available,” and they describe other research that shows that employed women “demonstrate lower rates of psychological distress than do women in more traditional roles” (Jack 242).10

Not surprisingly, sociologists confirm that the absence of gainful employment promotes interrelational dependence. D. Buie and John T. Maltsberger assess suicidal risk based on, among other factors, an individual’s degree of autonomy and dependency on external sources of emotional support (Buie and Maltsberger 1983 in Motto 1989 136). Jack says:

Lacking the alternative sources of self-concept and social identity which educational and professional opportunity provides for males and those of middle class origin, young, working class women are crucially dependent for the development and maintenance of their self-concept and social identity on those roles and relationships traditionally identified as appropriately female in the sex role system. (194)

Furthermore, lack of employment facilitates a sense of worthlessness and aloneness in individuals, which compounds the suicide-promoting characteristics of female roles. Because the protagonists are in dissatisfying relationships, because they are interrelationally alone, and because they do not work, they suffer from their own and others’ feelings that they are dispensable. Maltsberger says suicidal worthlessness is related to the experience of aloneness and cannot be entirely separated from it because both threaten, or even announce, irrevocable abandonment. In the grips of aloneness the patient is convinced he will be forever cut off from the possibility of human connectedness; in suicidal worthlessness, the patient is convinced he can never merit the caring notice of anyone, including himself, again. . . . to be beyond love is to be hopeless alone. (9)
Further, he says, "being beyond love is one kind of suicidal worthlessness: the other is intense and relentless self-contempt" (Maltsberger 9). Like suicidal women, the protagonists' suicides are also facilitated by their general sense of worthlessness and dispensability and by the sex roles that promote these characteristics. Excluding Herminia and Lu Anne, the protagonists are deprived of the "sustaining resource" offered by work (Maltsberger 24), and their feelings of worthlessness and dispensability are revealed through their only source of validation—their interrelational conditions.

In addition to being heterosexually dispensed with and abandoned, the protagonists' dispensability and worthlessness are also revealed through their maternal roles. As mothers, they often are dissatisfied and dispensable. Arrangements are made so Lu Anne will not have to take care of her children on the set, but Lionel takes the children before the nanny is needed. While Lu Anne does not appear to be particularly close to her children, she correctly senses that Lionel is relieved to be away from Lu Anne, and when he and the children drive away, she thinks, "it was as though their eyes were fixed upon some wholesome future in which she had no part" (75) and later fears that Lionel will arrange to "take the children" from her.

As her family drives away, Lu Anne also thinks, "At least there was work" (76)—and she is valued by the film crew: they try to convince Lionel to stay during the filming, overlook her odd behavior, and accommodate her wishes during the nude scene. However, the staff seems more invested in maintaining Lu Anne for the film's sake than for her own: they occasionally comment on the quality of her work, but never on how she's feeling or behaving in general. In order to do her best work, Lu Anne stops taking her schizophrenia medication, and when she is photographed taking drugs and being intimate with Gordon, others speculate that Lu Anne's career and marriage may be threatened. Lu Anne fears she will lose custody of her children, but she also does not want them to see her insane. Within two days of the photograph's discovery, Lu Anne tells Gordon she doesn't want to return to work.
the next day and drowns, presumably expecting her double, Joy, to complete the film—and, after Lu Anne dies, they recut the film with scenes of Joy.

Anna explicitly suffers from a lack of occupation and from a sense of diminished worth, maternal and otherwise: "She dared not let [Vronsky] see her consciousness of her own inferiority. To her it seemed that if he knew of it he would the sooner cease to love her, and there was nothing she feared more" (422). Anna thinks Vronsky finds her "repulsive" (677), and she is sorely dissatisfied in life. She reads, and she helps plan for the new hospital, but "her chief preoccupation was still herself" (583). Anna tells Levin that "she so needs an occupation" (633), and she finds some pleasure and fulfillment in her teaching relationship with Hannah. But Anna complains that she does not live, but only waits for a continually-deferred decision on the divorce: "I can’t do anything, begin anything. . . . I . . . wait, invent occupations for myself—the English family, writing, reading, but all that is only deception, it is all a kind of morphia" (637). Moreover, Vronsky demeans Anna’s strongest occupational interest: her education and her teaching, laughing at the idea of high school for girls, speaking "disrespectfully of the education of women in general," and saying "that Hannah, [Anna’s] little English protégée, did not at all need to know physics" (670).

Anna is also dissatisfied, unnecessary, and perhaps inadequate in her maternal capacity. Serezha has at least one governess, one teacher, and one nurse; Annie has a wet nurse and a head nurse. After not seeing Anna for a year, Serezha makes new friends and:

The dreams and memories of his mother which, after their interview, had made him ill, no longer occupied him. When they rose in his memory he took pains to drive them away, considering them shameful and fit only for girls. . . . He knew that it was his fate to remain with his father, and he tried to accustom himself to that thought. (657)

Edna, although bored and often dissatisfied, does not long for an occupation as much as Anna does. Edna has a cook and a nanny, no pressing obligations, no consistently meaningful diversions—and Léonce insults Edna’s most enjoyable diversion, painting. Edna also feels fond of her children and has some loving
moments with them, but she and her children do not seem to need each other: when the children visit their grandmother, Edna feels "secure regarding their happiness and welfare" (522), and when their adoring grandmother takes them for another visit—under "the promise and pretext [that she will] keep the children indefinitely" (582)—Edna knows they are and will remain in caring, loving hands no matter what happens to her.

Emma is also dispensable to several people—but not to the two she abandons. At the beginning of his affair with Emma, Rodolphe wonders "how to get rid of her afterwards" (93). He misses three successive dates with her (125) and stores her love mementos in a box with those of several other women who, "crowding into his consciousness, rather shrank in size, leveled down by the uniformity of his feeling" (145), such that any pleasures that entered his heart "did not even . . . leave a name carved upon the wall" (145). Berthe has a wet nurse, and she is regularly cared for by Félicité. After Emma’s funeral, while Charles "lay awake, never ceasing to think of her" (248), Rodolphe is "quietly asleep in his château," Léon asleep "in the city," neither having attended the funeral (248). And shortly after Emma’s death, Léon is engaged to be married; Félicité—like Mrs. Parkes, who wears Susan’s dresses—begins wearing Emma’s dresses and steals what is left of Emma’s wardrobe when she quits the job; and, although Berthe mentions Emma "several times," she "finally forgot her. The child’s gaiety broke Bovary’s heart" (249). These details recursively validate the narrator’s early statement, "Since the events about to be narrated, nothing in fact has changed at Yonville" (51). Indeed, Flaubert also seems to underestimate Emma’s worth: he writes, "what I should like to write, is book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style" (1/16/1852; 309).

Of course, while Berthe suffers horribly after Emma’s suicide, Emma, Anna, Susan, Edna, and Lucy kill themselves under situations that suggest that their children will be cared for—and, as Lu Anne and Edna suggest, even better off—after they are dead. The characters without children also become aware of how dispensable they are. Daryl is consistently demeaning and dismissive of Thelma,
beginning with his remarks about her dinner preparation— one of her primary activities as a housewife. Lily says, "I can't bear to see myself in my own thoughts—I hate ugliness, you know" (164) when she is in the midst of being seamlessly erased from her society world. Lily—who is referred to as a "sacrifice" (261)—asks if people are "going to cut" her, and they do, ignoring her on the street, casting her aside when she no longer suits their needs. Lily tries to find employment, but the narrator says—with scathing irony:

Having been accustomed to take herself at the popular valuation, as a person of energy and resource, naturally fitted to dominate any situation in which she found herself, she vaguely imagined that such grist would be of value to seekers after social guidance' but there was unfortunately no specific head under which the art of saying and doing the right thing could be offered in the market. (268)

Lily fails as a milliner, unable to make hats, and unable to sell them because "the ladies on whose approval she depended" have socially rejected her. Lily's lack of skill and her high absence rate—probably related to her drug addiction—cause her to be fired, and Lily is reminded of the "aimlessness" of her life: "She had nothing to do for the rest of the day, nor for the days to come; for the season was over in millinery as well as in society," (297). She spends her days "in the streets" (301), "alone [and] stranded in a great waste of disoccupation" (302).

Like Lily, Constance does not seem to feel she has valuable skills. She marries Lorck because she needs his money, and, as discussed in Chapter 5, she becomes acutely aware of how dispensable women and children are to men, distraught that men "cast off" and "cast aside" women and children after they have "had their fill" (219). Further, Lorck's generic relationship to his love mementos resembles Rodolphe's relationship to his. And, when Constance sleeps with Meier after seeing Lorck with Kristine, she is "disgusted with her husband, with Meier, with life—but above all, with herself," and, shortly, thereafter, she literally dispenses with herself (285).

While Zenobia never experiences the chronic aimlessness and occupational or maternal ennui suffered by many of the protagonists, just before she commits
suicide, she also feels cast aside and dispensable. When Hollingsworth chooses to be with Priscilla, who has acquired the inheritance Zenobia had anticipated receiving, Zenobia says, "you took me, too, into your plan, as long as there was hope of my being available, and now fling me aside again, a broken tool!" (218). And Zenobia suggests that she is as easily replaced as a Blithedale Farm participant: she tells Coverdale, "Blithedale must find another woman to superintend the laundry, and you . . . another nurse to make your gruel, the next time you fall ill. . . . nor will it avail us to shed tears over a broken bubble" (227). Finally, while "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan" does not indicate whether or not Lucy Jordan has a nanny for her children, it includes no indication that Lucy is actually responsible for them. and Lucy also suffers from a larger lack of purpose and listlessness: when her husband is at work and her children at school, Lucy rearranges flowers and "lay there 'neath the covers . . . 'til the world turned to orange and the room went spinning round."

Constricted Thinking Patterns, Helplessness and Hopelessness

Although one might expect the more financially secure protagonists to perhaps seek access to some meaningful diversions, they rarely do. Their sex roles appear to limit—or eliminate—their independence in several realms, and their limited options are exacerbated by their restrictive cognitive approaches. Schneidman first observed that suicidal individuals tend to have dichotomous thinking, to think in bipolar opposites, rather than in continuities (1957, 1961; Neuringer 43 cites Schneidman 1957 in Lester 1988), and researchers have consistently described suicidal thinking patterns as rigid, polarized, and fixed thinking that narrows their sense or consideration of available options. In particular, highly suicidal women "consistently showed the greatest amount of dichotomous thinking" (Neuringer 1988 48).13

Jack also considers the patterns and sources of suicide-promoting thinking patterns, locating them in gendered attributional styles. According to Jack, people respond to failure and success using combinations of learned, sex-related attribution
styles that promote continued success or failure. Jack describes patterns of coping using three corollaries: internality/externality, or whether the sources of failures or success are perceived to be within or external to the person; stability/instability, or whether failures or successes are perceived as lasting or transient; and globalness/specificity, or whether the failures or successes have global or more specific effects. Adaptive individuals feel pride and self-esteem after personal successes and have internal, stable, and global attributions in situations of success: they attribute their success to their own efforts, perceive the successes as lasting ones, and believe in the global effects of their successes. Adaptive individuals attribute the causes of failure to external, unstable, and specific sources, which allows them to maintain a sense of control and hopefulness in unsuccessful situations. However, those with dysfunctional attributional styles attribute personal successes to external, unstable, and specific causes; thus, their successes do not produce self-esteem, the expectation for future success, or a sense of contingency between one’s actions and outcome. Those with maladaptive styles, however, attribute failure to internal, stable, and global sources; this results in their feeling shame and guilt for failure, and the expectation of continued failure.

According to Jack, women are socialized to assume maladaptive attributional styles that promote their own helplessness: women are more likely to account for success with external, unstable, and specific attributions, more likely to account for failure with internal, stable, and global ones. Thus, they feel less pride with success, more shame with failure. Jack reports that young working class women, the predominant group of self-poisoners, are especially likely to have helpless attributional styles, as well as a lack of diversity to role alternatives, powerlessness in their social and economic positions, and lack of successful female models in public domain:

This offers few opportunities for control over their environment and for the development of a sense of contingency between their actions and outcomes. Even within the sex-appropriate domestic domain, success is heavily dependent on the achievement and maintenance of mutuality with others—usually another male adult—and reinforcement is thus not necessarily
dependent upon one's own efforts, which, again, fosters a sense of non-contingency and uncontrollability. (193)

Further, Jack says, "When confronted with problems in family and relational spheres, women in traditional roles rely on other people for emotional support and do not know how to garner help when this is not available" (77). Jack found that because self-poisoners attribute negative events to internal, stable, and global sources, they believe their control over them is limited and feel incompetent to solve problems independently (227). And Akers and others identify hopelessness and helplessness as "essential features of the suicidal process," reporting that they are often more causally related to suicide than depression is (Akers 308). Finally, despair involves an intolerable, suffering affective state (such as aloneness, self-contempt, and murderous rage), that also includes no hope for improvement, and resignation, "an unconscious, precognitive operation in which the self is abandoned as being unworthy of further concern" (Maltsberger 1-3).

Like suicidal women, the protagonists are characterized by dichotomous thinking and maladaptive attributions that combine to produce feelings of helplessness, limited options, hopelessness, and fatalism. But, although many of the protagonists have no hope that their interrelational, occupational, and financial problems will be resolved (such as Anna, Emma, Lily, Lu Anne, and Edna), many also commit suicide immediately after experiencing loss, without ever considering future options (for instance, Constance and Zenobia). Further, Lester found that seriously suicidal women made more effort to change their roles before attempting suicide, but the protagonists consider few or no role changes before killing themselves (1972). For instance, few of them ever consider divorce--perhaps because so many financial and social contingencies in their lives urge them to stay married. Those characters who try to implement role changes--including Thelma, Edna, and Susan--are met with some resistance.

Of course, the protagonists' sense of diminished worth is often founded in their normative roles as women, roles that limit their access to viable alternatives for self-actualization and problem-solving. Indeed this is perhaps one of the most
compelling social critiques offered by some of the individual texts. And when the characters' routine paucity of viable options is exacerbated by their dichotomous thinking, they often become hopeless and fatalistic—such that they succumb to a master-narratively-prescripted and sex-role-supported fate that embraces their helpless sex-role socialization and that culminates in suicide.

Edna Pontellier, however, is unlike most of the protagonists because she tries to change her life before she kills herself: she abandons household duties, explores other activities and relationships, and moves away from her family. However, Edna dismisses the possibility of divorce and remarriage, and, once she concludes she will never be interrelationally happy, she relinquishes all self-control to hopelessness and fate. Indeed, early in the novella, she laments "at Fate, which had directed her footsteps to the path which they had taken" (512), considers her marriage one "which [masquerades] as the decrees of Fate" (521), and thinks "Fate had not fitted her" to be a mother (522). Her world becomes an "alien," "antagonistic" (549) one in which Edna sees "an appalling and hopeless ennui" (551). After she and Robert kiss, she abandoned "herself to Fate, and awaited the consequences with indifference" (589). Finally, even Edna, with her unusually assertive efforts, succumbs to the sex roles that deprive her of hope for diversity and enrichment and to the master-narrative's fate: "Despondency had come upon her there in the wakeful night, and had never lifted. There was no one thing in the world that she desired" (598).

After falling in love with Vronsky, Anna vacillates between being hopeful and hopeless. She feels "quite hopeless" about her future (262), and her hopes "of clearing up and defining her position were destroyed forever" (267), but Karenin, Anna, or Vronsky could not "have stood it for a single day but for the hope that it would change and that the whole matter was only a temporary, though painful trial. . . Anna . . . not only expected, but felt sure, that very soon everything would be settled and cleared up" (322). Although Anna is also an unusual protagonist because she considers divorce, she is indecisive about pursuing it, and she never considers leaving Vronsky or living with or even visiting her brother, aunts, or friends. Before
she kills herself, she thinks, "it was all useless" and says, "I have no hope, and don’t even desire" a divorce because of the shame associated with being a divorced woman (680, 686). Just before killing herself, she thinks, "Is any kind—not of happiness even but of freedom from torture—possible? No! No! . . . It is impossible!" (691).

Emma also experiences marital hopelessness, but hers occurs early in the novel: "what hope! . . . It was all gone now" (124). However, for a long while Emma also tries to find happiness by altering interrelational roles, by experimenting with various relationships as wife, mother, and lover. But she attributes her dissatisfaction to fate, imagining the love and "life that could have been hers if fate had willed it" (163), and she never considers work, volunteerism, or other occupational or financial options. She explicitly articulates constricted thinking: when Charles asks why she poisoned herself, she says, "There was no other way!" (232).

Constance’s death is also the result of dichotomous, fatalistic thinking. After Constance learns about Lorck’s treatment of Kristine and the baby, she tells him, "The joy I felt in your love is gone. It’s faded and it will never bloom again" (234), thinking "the good things that should have come to her. . . . had all come to nothing," thinking of her relationship with Lorck as "a bubble that had to end by bursting" when it hit the ground (239). When Constance considers whether or not to have an adulterous relationship with Meier, she "would shudder as if she had seen an abyss yawning at her feet" (273). After she finds Lorck with Kristine, unlike other protagonists, Constance considers divorce, but she decides against it because she "couldn’t be bothered" with pursuing it. Instead, Constance considers suicide—and falls into the master-narrative’s fated, fatal abyss.

_Thelma and Louise_ questions notion of choice through one song’s lyrics: "which way should we go?"—and Thelma and Louise are exceptional because they make and implement several decisions that violate their traditional roles and characters. Although Thelma is not particularly fatalistic, she says, "I can’t go back. I mean, I just couldn’t live," perceiving the binary nature of her options. She can go
forward or backward, and the establishment promotes the binarism: "they say that we gotta figure out if we wanna come in dead or alive."

More than any other character, Herminia successfully considers, takes, and survives her alternative options. She works, has friends, raises her daughter alone, and writes a novel—but, when Dolly suddenly articulates her death-wish for and to her mother, Herminia immediately accepts the invitation, without considering survivable options. Even though Herminia is not particularly fatalistic, after she is dead, the narrator suggests her death was driven by fate: "Not for nothing does blind fate vouchsafe such martyrs to humanity. From their graves shall spring glorious the church of the future" (223)—and describes, albeit inadvertently—the masternarrative’s instructive effects on female suicide.

Like Edna, Lily is unusual because, even as she hopes to realize traditional roles, she tries various options: she remains single, finds employment, and moves into her own room. But she never tries to redeem her reputation, and she is consistently informed by a self-defeating fatalism about the source of her needs and the sources of their satisfaction. Unable to satisfy the expectations fate has wrought for her, she becomes weary and hopeless, feels "that she could walk no farther" (310), and overdoses.

Finally, when Coverdale tells Zenobia women are generally happier than men, Zenobia says what some social scientists know: "A man has his choice of innumerable events," but "How can [a woman] be happy, after discovering that fate has assigned her but one single event, which she must contrive to make the substance of her whole life" (60). When Hollingsworth rejects Zenobia, she feels no hope for future romance and assumes a dichotomous thinking style: that is, because her hopes for a romantic future with Hollingsworth are shattered, she says she will go to a nunnery (perhaps fully intending to do so; perhaps saying so to disguise her plans to commit suicide). Instead of thinking about the several other kinds of work and occupations that—far more than most protagonists—Zenobia may have, she submits to fate: "it is a woman’s doom, and . . . on my part, there shall be no complaint":

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that, in the battlefield of life, the downright stroke, that would fall only on a man's steel head-piece, is sure to light on a woman's heart, over which she wears no breastplate, and whose wisdom it is, therefore, to keep out of the conflict. Or this: —that the whole universe, her own sex and yours, and Providence, or Destiny . . . make common cause against the woman who swerves one hair's breadth out of the beaten track. (224)

**Depression, Substance Abuse, and Schizophrenia**

The authors of these narratives are not clinical psychologists, and it is, of course, unreasonable to expect them to be familiar with clinical parameters for mental illness. And, since these are suicide narratives, it would be unreasonable to expect the protagonists to be free from signs of emotional and mental distress; of course, the absence of distress in a suicide narrative might invalidate all mimetic plausibility for the text's informing act—the suicide—which would, then, undermine the narrative's rhetorical effect and the masternarrative's myth-making power. And some of the protagonists suffer from some fairly chronic concerns and conditions that we would expect to contribute to their deteriorating mental conditions. However, although the authors presumably do not aim for strictly clinical or entirely mimetic representations of suicidal distress, it is also telling that many of the protagonists simply don't satisfy clinical parameters for depression. The protagonists may be troubled, but are they really troubled enough to commit suicide? Although this is a complicated narrative issue, the masternarrative's power is revealed in its very ability to promote suicide in female characters whom we might just as readily--or even more readily--expect not to attempt suicide than to commit it. Although the question of clinical parameters is less indeterminate in regard to the protagonists' drug abuse and schizophrenia, let me address all three of these conditions—the three leading mental health conditions associated with real suicide.

Murphy reports that ninety percent of suicides have psychiatric illness which, in descending order of frequency, include affective disorders, alcoholism, and schizophrenia (Murphy 171). Robins also reports that "the psychiatric illnesses that most frequently lead to completed suicide" are affective disorder and alcoholism.
in three studies that included at least one hundred suicides each, ninety-nine to one hundred percent of the deceased suffered from mental illness, with depression and alcoholism accounting for fifty-four to eighty-five percent of psychiatric diagnoses in all three studies (Robins 123, 132; cites Barraclough et al. 1974; Dorpat and Ripley; and Robins et al.; Sainsbury 73; Lester 1988 10.; and Seager 112-13). More specifically, reports say that from thirty to eighty percent of those who commit suicide are affected by depression. Furthermore, mental disorders strike women more than men (Lester 1988 5), and suicidal women tend to be diagnosed with neurosis or affective disorders more often than with schizophrenia or psychosis (Lester 1988 8 cites F. B. Davis). Additionally, seriously suicidal women "find their worlds empty, devoid of interest and joyless. They cannot be aroused by stimuli; they are angry and dissatisfied by what they are and what they do; they feel inadequate, dislike themselves, are profoundly depressed (Neuringer and Lettieri 89).

Diagnostic criteria for depression requires:

- a depressed mood nearly every day, markedly diminished interest or pleasure in most or all activities, and three or more of the following: poor appetite, weight loss or gain; insomnia or hypersomnia; psychomotor agitation or retardation; feelings of hopelessness; loss of energy; feelings of worthlessness, self-reproach, excessive or inappropriate guilt; diminished ability to think or concentrate; recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal ideation, wishes to be dead, or suicide attempts. (C. Thomas 520)

Given the high fatality rate of their suicide attempts, one would expect the protagonists to have a high rate of depression before they commit suicide—and depression is characterized by feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, which, as discussed above, many of the protagonists feel just before they die. And Lily Bart, more than any other protagonist, seems to satisfy many the definitions for clinical depression. She experiences changes in appetite, weight loss, sleep patterns, fatigue, and feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness—all symptoms that could be related to her drug use. And, from the first two criteria for clinical depression, she experiences a consistently depressed mood: "For weeks past she had been too listless and indifferent to set her possessions in order, but now she began to examine systematically the contents of her drawers and cupboard" (317). However, Lily’s
mood is consistently depressed only for two weeks, and, while she no longer enjoys her routine activities, it is not because they are no longer enjoyable to her, but because she is excluded from them. Finally, while Lily may or may not suffer from depression that is related to her change in social status and her drug addiction, if she does, its onset occurs shortly before she kills herself.

Anna also may be on the cusp of depression. She, too, has many of the second-tier symptoms of depression, including: psychomotor agitation (the "screwing up" her eyes); feelings of hopelessness; feelings of worthlessness, self-reproach, and guilt; the diminished ability to think or concentrate; slowed or indecisive thinking; and recurrent thoughts of death. However, while her mood is occasionally depressed, she is more often excitable, even agitated, and, although she also enjoys few activities at the time of her death, it is because, like Lily, she is involuntarily excluded from the activities she typically enjoys. Nevertheless, Anna finds great enjoyment in some new activities, including tutoring Hannah and spending time with her "English family."

Anna and Lily are, of course, mentally disturbed, and we may be expected to assume they are depressed, even if it is not definite that they are. But, the other protagonists, while they may suffer from some of the symptoms of depression, do not appear depressed. Our information about the Lisbons is quite limited, but, although the sisters act oddly at times and grief-stricken at others, they do not appear to be clinically depressed: for instance, they enjoy their group date very much. Even after Mary survives her first suicide attempt, she is found to have "no evidence of psychiatric illness such as schizophrenia or manic-depression" (232). And Lu Anne, who feels self-reproach and has some recurrent thoughts of death, does not meet the definitions for depression. Constance experiences some depression--suffered during her marriage to Ring, and, briefly, after she first learns about Lorck's relationship with Kristine--but it is resolved long before the end of the novel, even after she falls out of love with Lorck. Although it is not clear that Susan and Edna ever experienced interest or pleasure in their domestic activities,
they do not feel pleasure in them during the time of action. Further, Emma's ability to think appears to be diminished just before she commits suicide.

However, these characters do not meet the diagnostic criteria for depression—and Zenobia, Herminia, Thelma, Louise, Peg, and Reiko appear to satisfy none of the criteria. Finally, while these protagonists often experience some self-blame, low self esteem, hopelessness, and boredom, they are usually not relentlessly self-contemptuous or self-reproachful. Nor do they experience enough criteria to characterize them as clinically depressed. Indeed, while these protagonists are consistently hopeless when they die, they usually become so shortly before they commit suicide. Finally, if we were to relax the diagnostic parameters for depression, we might be able to classify Lily and Anna as depressed, but most of the protagonists—and certainly not fifty-four to eighty-five percent of them—do not suffer from alcoholism and depression.

As noted earlier, drug and alcohol dependency are regularly cited as suicide risk factors, and alcoholism is present in twenty to thirty percent of suicides—but none of the protagonists are alcoholics. However, according to Maltsberger, "Suicide prone patients are likely to become addicted to all such substances, and it is easier to act suicidally when under the influence of any of the sedatives" (75). However, while Constance, Emma, Herminia, Therese, and Mary die by self-poisoning, they, like most of the protagonists, commit suicide with no history of substance abuse. Anna, Lily, and Lu Anne are drug abusers—and, while they do not appear to be particularly "suicide-prone," their deaths are facilitated by their drugged conditions. Thus, only sixteen percent of the suicidal characters are affected by substance abuse—much less than the incidence found in historical people.

Although schizophrenia is sometimes listed as the third mental illness associated with suicide, this is a very distant third; indeed, the link of psychoses and schizophrenia to suicide is not strong. Citing several studies, Roy says that suicidal hallucinations are probably "an infrequent cause of suicide" (1986 105), and Neuringer and Lettieri say "it is difficult to link suicide to psychosis in any definitive way" (5). Despite its reputation for being closely associated with suicide,
it was found in only two to eleven percent of the samples in three studies (Robins 123-24; Litman 1989 145).

However, Lu Anne, Lucy, Susan, Lily, and Peg experience hallucinations, which are one sign of schizophrenia and psychosis. Lucy—whose hallucinations of the man on the roof accompany a complete break with reality—is likely psychotic. Lu Anne—the only protagonist with a history of mental illness—maintains contact with reality and is diagnosed with schizophrenia. And Susan and Peg, who also maintain contact with reality and perform daily functions, appear to become schizophrenic in the days, weeks, or months before they commit suicide. Although the protagonists’ hallucinations do not seem associated with psychosis, five of at least nineteen characters hallucinate, and hallucinations are directly related to Lucy’s suicide, indirectly related to Susan’s, and a facilitating factor in Lily’s. Excluding Lily, who hallucinates as she loses consciousness when she’s dying, thirty percent of the protagonists are affected by hallucinations; clearly, hallucinations, secondary to schizophrenia or psychosis, are over-represented in the protagonists.

Combining the risk factors of schizophrenia and substance abuse, six of the protagonists are affected by either one or the other: Lily, Lu Anne, Lucy, Susan, and Peg—for an incidence of thirty-two percent. However, the three risk factors associated with mental illness are concentrated in Anna (who is or is almost depressed and takes drugs), Lu Anne (who takes drugs and is schizophrenic), and Lily (who is almost depressed and takes drugs). Finally, then, only three of the protagonists are considerably influenced by mental health factors, including the three conditions that predominate in suicidal individuals. Furthermore, while Robins reports that zero to seven percent of suicides had no diagnosed mental illness (132), most of the protagonists have none of these risk factors for suicide, including: Edna, Emma, Zenobia, Constance, Herminia, Thelma, Louise, Reiko, and the Lisbon sisters (132). Similarly, in contrast to Robins’s findings that at least half of those who completed suicides consulted a physician within a month or less of their death with psychiatric complaints (Murphy 171 cites Robins et al.), Edna and Lu Anne are the only protagonists to see physicians, and Lu Anne is the only one to discuss her
condition with her doctor, who is also her husband. (Matthew recommends that Susan see a doctor, but she does not.) Thus, although the presence of drug abuse and schizophrenia aid the suicidal mimesis for some of the protagonists, most of them are strikingly marked by the absence of these conditions. The relative paucity—and, more often, lack—of substance abuse, depression, and schizophrenia makes the majority of these suicides strikingly divergent from historical suicide—and even more striking narrative acts. Further, because its protagonists generally commit suicide in the absence of mental illness or drug abuse, the masternarrative emphasizes the alleged self-determination suggested by the suicides of other protagonists. At the same time, however, the trend also betrays the masternarrative's informing influence on individual character development.

Splitting

Given this section's subtitle—"Facilitating Factors of Presence"—the above discussion of the role of depression, drug abuse, and schizophrenia more appropriately belongs in "Facilitating Factors of Absence." However, I included it after the discussion about worthlessness and hopelessness to emphasize that, while the protagonists often experience a variety of the conditions that are sometimes associated with suicide, and although some of them are under obvious distress, they do not experience them to the degree to which we might expect them to. Further, this enabled me to adjoin the discussion about hallucinations with another perhaps less clinical or clichéd, but much more regular condition that facilitates the protagonists' suicidal careers and that often occurs in conjunction with or is evidenced by their inexpressiveness and hallucinations—their "splitting."

Splitting is consistent with the conditions of suicidal people, and, although most of the protagonists are not "mad," many of them experience fragmentation of their personalities, existences, and egos. This splitting is associated with a range of activities—from the splitting that accompanies the protagonists' more "normative" female role-playing, to their reliance on lies, to their more clinical ego dissociations suggested by their hallucinations. Litman's suicide model focuses on several factors
already discussed--such as the loss of coping patterns, feeling helpless, hopeless, and abandoned--as well as the fragmentation of the personality under stress (1975; cited in Motto 1989 135). And, working with Freud's concept of splitting, Maltsberger reports that depersonalization is often associated with aloneness, that other people, and even one's own body, seem unreal, that "Patients threatened with heightened feelings of aloneness may only with difficulty restrain themselves from running howling through the streets" (81). Further, Maltsberger says that self-contempt often results in "some subjective sense of inner splitting"; that suicidal individuals lose their capacity to tell whether or not their body is part of the self, "to discern where the self leaves off and other people begin"; and that they "frequently do not experience mind and body as connected, and subjectively they feel that they are two or more selves" (82, 89, 32).

Thelma, Louise, Herminia, and possibly the Lisbon sisters do not seem to experience splitting in its typical manifestations. However, as the other protagonists dissociate from their societies--and often from their only sources of connectedness and ego-identity, their interrelational situations--they frequently dissociate from themselves. Sometimes they do so intentionally, by lying to others about themselves, but they also often "split" unintentionally. The protagonists' splitting--including Anna's, Constance's, Lu Anne's, Emma's, and Lily's--is regularly manifested by their perceptions and interpretations of their mirror reflections. Frequently, a lifetime of "splitting" or intentional role-playing precedes a penultimate fragmentation that then becomes the final, fatal fragmentation of suicide. This penultimate splitting is especially effective in facilitating their suicides because it usually accompanies the protagonists' diminishing of direct, honest expressions--which, of course, augments their increasing isolation and further decreases the chance that others will intervene in their attempts.

Throughout her life, Edna intentionally embraces a dualistic way of being: "At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life--that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (518). And, as an adult, when Edna abandons her Tuesday hostess routine, Léonce wonders if she is
becoming "unbalanced mentally," and sees "plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world" (552). But, before Edna, in a sense, becomes herself (that is, as much "herself" as the master-narrative will allow her to be), before she is able to literally cast her clothing aside and kill the self from which she wants to dissociate, she continues to split. For instance, at the same time that others think Edna looks "ravishing," "Always handsome! always healthy! always contented," her soul secretly dismantles (555-56). But Edna's split, which she first embraced, becomes a fatal split that enables her to commit suicide. It is after she and Robert kiss, when "all senses of reality had gone out of her life"--that she decides to kill herself (589). That is, by partly abandoning the "self" she plays as Mrs. Pontellier, and in kissing Robert, she is more readily willing and able to entirely split from "reality," from her role as wife and mother, through suicide.

Anna also regularly hides her inner self from the world--beginning with Karenin. When he appears, Anna thinks "How unfortunate!" but she greets him "with a bright beaming face," feeling "the already familiar spirit of lies and deceit," and begins to speak "without knowing what she was going to say" (186). Later, when Vronsky tries to speak with Anna about Karenin, "the real Anna, withdrew into herself and another woman appeared who was strange and alien to him" (172). Although Anna wants to end her deception, her splitting worsens (262): after telling Karenin about Vronsky, "She felt as if everything was being doubled in her soul, just as objects appear doubled to weary eyes. Sometimes she could not tell what she feared and what she desired. Whether she feared and desired what had been, or what would be, and what it was she desired she did not know" (263), and she feels "that duality in her soul" (265). While "falsehood--so alien to her by nature--had now become so simple and natural in Society that it even gave her pleasure" (269), she grows increasingly uncomfortable with her duality. After Annie's birth, Anna says to Karenin, "I am still the same... But there is another in me as well, and I am afraid of her. She fell in love with that other one, and I wished to hate you but
could not forget her who was before. That other is not I. Now I am the real one. all of me. I am dying now "(375). And, just before she commits suicide. Anna gazes "in the mirror at the feverish, frightened face with the strangely brilliant eyes looking at her" and thinks, "Who is that?" then recognizes herself (683).

Like Anna, Edna, and Emma, Constance regularly and self-consciously represents herself. To avoid difficult conversations with her mother, "she would be sure to look happy, all right--it would just take a bit of pretending" (21). Constance tells Meier people "hide themselves" "all the time--not on purpose, exactly" (36). And, like Anna, Constance tries to conceal her true feelings: when Ring kisses her, she "closed her eyes so that she could continue the dream of the happy wife, but a gnawing disgust ripped her. She would not let it show--it would be a pity when Ring was so happy--of course he would never understand--and there was her mother to consider" (49-50). Although at one point Constance wonders if she is "going mad" (82) or "out of [her] mind" (121), she recovers from these feelings and finds happiness for some time with Lorck. But, when Constance sees Lorck with Kristine, "The blood burned in her veins and she felt as if she were crying 'fire,' continually and with all her might--she couldn’t imagine why nobody came running to put out the blaze" (279). Like Edna, whose appearance is admired while she splits internally, although Constance feels on fire, Marie thinks she looks "so extraordinarily handsome--it was really uncanny--there was something sparkling about her whole figure" (280). And, after Constance sleeps with Meier to retaliate against Lorck, she is lost and wonders, "What should she do now? How should she behave? . . . Then her glance fell on her reflection in the mirror. With a scream, she clapped her hands to her face and threw herself back on the pillows" (285). Within hours of being frightened by her mirror reflection, Constance kills herself.

Like Edna, Emma intentionally embraces fragmentation in her life, but she hopes her dreams will suffuse her reality. In an effort to facilitate this, Emma lies about her activities, expenditures, and affairs: after lying to Charles about her music lessons, "From that moment on, her existence was one long tissue of lies, in which she wrapped her love as under a veil in order to hide it" (196). But, unlike most of
the protagonists, Emma never totally dissociates from her own ego: even as her life falls apart because of her constructed splittings, her ego retains its coherence. Nevertheless, Emma, too, looks in the mirror just before she dies, "until big tears fell from her eyes" (237).

Zenobia, who seems most coherent of all the protagonists, also constructs a public image of herself. Even Coverdale sense her "acted" living and wishes Zenobia would give him "something true . . . no matter whether right or wrong, provided it were real" (165). She does so when she shows Coverdale her affection for Hollingsworth, and when Hollingsworth rejects her, Coverdale watches Zenobia act a strong role before Hollingsworth, but fall apart after Hollingsworth leaves.

For the majority of *House of Mirth*, Lily self-consciously splits by living several lies: she lies about going to Selden's and to church, about smoking, gambling, and her debts. But, she also loses control of her splitting as her situation worsens: after Trenor has been sexually aggressive with her, "the frightened self in her was dragging the other down. . . . and she heard herself, in a voice that was her own yet outside herself, bidding him ring for the servant" (147). Lily, imagining a mirror scene, says to Gerty: "Can you imagine looking into your glass some morning and seeing a disfigurement--some hideous change that has come to you while you slept? Well, I seem to myself like that--I can't bear to see myself in my own thoughts--I hate ugliness, you know--I've always turned from it--but I can't explain to you--you wouldn't understand" (164). And, like other protagonists, Lily refers to herself in the third person shortly before her death. She says to Selden:

[W]e are sure to see each other again--but the Lily Bart you knew. I have kept her with me all this time, but now we are going to part, and I have brought her back to you--I am going to leave her here. When I go out presently she will not go with me. I shall like to think that she has stayed with you--and she'll be no trouble, she'll take up no room. . . . Will you let her stay with you? (309)

Later, she reaches "the verge of delirium," hangs "so near the dizzy brink of the unreal" (321). Finally, as Lily starts losing consciousness before she dies, she hallucinates that she is holding a baby in her arms; and this split vision, occurring as
she dies, emphasizes the causal relationship between her earlier splitting and lies and one reason for her deathly undoing—her inability to become wife and mother.

Lu Anne Verger, a diagnosed schizophrenic whose Long Friends whisper to her, is the most fragmented of all of the protagonists. She thinks, "Perhaps away from the shadows of the Long Friends it was all acting. There was no Lee Verger after all" (31), exchanges secret smiles with Rosalind in the mirror (32), hears herself speak to Lowndes, and watches "herself stare at him" (78). Eventually, she is "no longer confident about the reality of what she was seeing" (118). Most of the protagonists drift further from reality just before they die, but, before Lu Anne’s death, her worlds threaten to merge: "Never in her life had she seen the Long Friends so unafraid of sound or light, almost ready, it seemed, to join her in her greater world and make the two worlds one" (206).

Of the sane protagonists, Reiko most violently concedes to her own splitting—physically and psychologically. While she has a driving life force, she concedes to death—so that, even though she honors her promise to Shinji, she must convince herself to do so. After Shinji tells her they will die, her words are "delivered in such level, domestic tones that the lieutenant came near to thinking, for the fraction of a second, that everything had been a hallucination" (1115). And she hides her emotions from Shinji: while her hands don’t tremble and she manages "even more efficiently and smoothly than usual. From time to time, it is true, there was a strange throbbing deep within her breast. Like distant lightning, it had a moment of sharp intensity and then vanished without trace" (1115). Shortly, however, "Her breast was in violent commotion, as if sadness, joy, and the potent sake were mingling and reacting within her" (1116). He kisses her "unthinkingly. And suddenly. though there was not the slightest distortion of the face into the unsightliness of sobbing, he noticed that tears were welling slowly from beneath the long lashes of the closed eyes and brimming over into a glistening stream" (1116).
Lethal Effects

Again, while the protagonists sometimes experience some signs of depression, and some of them seem quite disturbed, most of them are not "profoundly depressed" (Neuringer and Lettieri 89). Further, while Schneidman says the common stimulus for suicide is intolerable psychological pain (1986 5), this is not so for Thelma, Louise, Edna, Reiko, Susan, Peg, Lily, Herminia, or Lu Anne. Indeed, for most of these protagonists, suicide becomes—rather than a considered decision to kill themselves because of "intolerable psychological pain"—the product of the convergence of several forces, including forces of culture and of narrative progression, such that, as Anna describes in this chapter's epigraph, the characters, indeed, seem to be hurdled "headlong over" the masternarrative's precipice of female suicide, unable to save themselves. Although some of the masternarrative's "hurling force" is obtained by the protagonists' characteristics, much of it is obtained by their situations, which are exacerbated in a variety of ways that increase the lethality of their attempts.

Several factors mitigate or increase suicidal risk or lethality, including: the strength of one's intention to die; the nature of the suicide motive and prompt; the context in which the attempt is implemented (Maltsberger 63); the specificity of suicide plan (Motto 1989 132; first noted by Litman 1974); and the method employed. While these narratives present suicide situations that should present a range of lethal risk, the narratives also ensure that the protagonists will die. Often the protagonists implement their attempts in the presence of several variables that should have strong mitigating effects, but one or two other variables become particularly lethal ones, and the attempt results in a completed suicide. Further, although several of the protagonists' attempts are characterized by factors that should diminish their risk of fatality, many of their suicides are facilitated by some narrative quirk or contrivance—some highly efficient lethal effect that overpowers the presence of less lethal ones, that diverges from the characters' historic mimesis and often from the mimesis established within the texts themselves to enable the protagonists to die on their first attempts.
Method

Men kill themselves more than women do, and, as Lester points out, "within any method men die more than women" (Lester 1988 9). Nevertheless, sociologists explain the sex-differential in suicide in relation to, among other things, method, hypothesizing that sex differences for completed suicide may exist because women have access to, know how to use, and use less lethal methods than men do. Men use more lethal, "active" methods, such as shooting, hanging, and jumping—which are seldom used in uncompleted suicide; while women use less fatal, more "passive" techniques, such as wrist-cutting, poisons, and drugs—methods that are associated with uncompleted attempts. More specifically, the lethality of methods has been described as follows, from the most to the least lethal methods, with parenthetical indications of which protagonists used which methods: firearms and explosives (Maria); jumping from high places (Cecilia, Lucy, Thelma, and Louise); cutting and piercing vital organs (Anna); hanging (Bonnie); jumping into deep water when one can’t swim (although Zenobia doesn’t jump and she may be able to swim, she drowns); ingesting poisonous substances (Emma, Herminia); cutting and piercing non-vital organs (Reiko); jumping into water when one can swim (loosely, Edna and Lu Anne, because they swim, rather than jump, into the ocean); inhaling gas (Susan, Lux); ingesting analgesics and sedatives (Lily, Constance, Therese, Mary) (cited in Maltsberger 64; Tabachnick; and Beck 1975). Although the protagonists' methods vary widely, most of them use the less lethal methods: depending on whether or not Zenobia can swim, seven or eight of the protagonists use the top five lethal methods, and eleven or twelve die using the least lethal five methods.

Motive

Suicidal behavior is attributed to a variety of motives, including the desire to honor their sense of duty (which is a motive for Reiko and Emma), to punish another (which is a motive for Anna), and to offer reparation (which is Herminia’s primary motive). However, although protesting "against separation" and inviting "mutual connection" are considered primary reasons for female suicide behavior, one
of the most frequently-cited motives for general suicide is the desire to seek relief from pain and to find escape from intolerable situations. Women's attempts are thought to be mitigated by their desire to escape from pain—rather than actually to die—but Neuringer and Lettieri also report that seriously suicidal women perceive suicide as a liberation from their lives (Neuringer and Lettieri 81, 86).

These two views toward death—the risk-mitigating motive of seeking relief and the risk-exacerbating motive of seeking escape—equally inform the protagonists' conditions. Indeed, although, as discussed in Chapter 5, the protagonists often express strong interrelational need and desire, their predominant motive is the desire to escape from their lives. Those whose predominantly want to escape through suicide include Edna, who wants to find solitude and "elude" her children and future abandonment; Anna, who seeks escape from "torture" (694) and "from everybody and from myself" (680); Lucy, trying to escape from hysterical laughter; Emma, who wants to escape from everything that is unbearable to her, "to take wind like a bird, and fly off far away to become young again in the realms of immaculate purity" (212); and Thelma and Louise, who kill themselves so they won't "get caught."

Furthermore, suicide is "the only thing [Constance] could think of, the only way she could find rest" (285); Lily desperately wants to find sleep (321); and Zenobia says it doesn't matter where she is going, but that she is "weary of this place, and sick to death of playing at philanthropy and progress" (226). However, finally, except for a minority of the protagonists—such as Susan, who is discussed in Chapter 7—the protagonists' suicide motives and intents, including those for escape, are also impulsively-defined.

**Intent**

Maltsberger says that it is difficult to assess intention because patients may not be fully aware of what they want to do (63); but, according to Schneidman, ambivalence is a common internal attitude in suicidal behavior (1986 7), and Akers says, "Probably only a minority of suicides are firmly resolved to die up to the very last" (274). Indeed, although the protagonists' motives consistently involve escape
and rest, they also often seek interrelational connection—and these somewhat competing desires are evident in the protagonists’ often unclear, ambivalent, or changing degrees of suicidal intent. The protagonists with strong intent generally do not ask for help or express their suicidal thoughts, and they often ensure the lethality of their methods. For instance, Thelma and Louise give no indication that they plan to or will commit suicide. Indeed, their concern with money suggests that they fully intend to live—even as outlaws. However, once they decide that they’d rather come in "dead than alive," they use the most lethal method used by the protagonists.

Constance also gives no clues about her impending suicide and uses a method that she knows will be fatal: she ingests a bottle of morphine left behind by Lorck, which he says contains enough morphine to kill three people. Constance’s "thoughts revolved around one idea—to die without delay," and she takes the morphine within an hour of deciding to kill herself, in a locked room, and when she expects Lorck to be at work for several hours (286). Reiko is also committed to dying: her situation precludes discovery, she spends hours preparing to commit suicide, and, although she hesitates during the process, she never considers discontinuing it.

However, most of the protagonists have mixed or weak degrees of suicidal intent. Shortly before her suicide, Anna thinks of death with "terror" and says, "Death! . . . No--anything, only to live!" (694). She repeatedly solicits help and attention from Vronsky, and she plans to go to Dolly’s to ask for help, to find Vronsky and tell him again how she feels. Although Anna uses a highly lethal method, she also bends on her knees seconds before the train arrives, waits there after one train has passed, in a crowded, daylighted train station. Just before the train hits her, she remembers the "bright past joys" of life and is "horror-struck" at what she is doing. "She wished to rise, to throw herself back," but the train hits her, and she feels "the impossibility of struggling" (695). Had Anna waited, or had a method not been so readily available, she probably would not have implemented her attempt when she does.

While Edna’s intent seems clear and unwavering during the hours before her death, she implements her attempt using the less lethal method of a swimmer's
drowning. Rather than killing herself at night and not after seeing anyone, she goes to an inhabited location, speaks with others, strips on the beach, and kills herself in broad daylight. Her ambivalence is also manifest in her waning intent, when she thinks, "Perhaps Doctor Mandelet would have understood if she had seen him—but it was too late." She dies, finally, because "Exhaustion was pressing upon and overpowering her," the shore "was far behind her, and her strength was gone" (598). Herminia also uses one of the less fatal methods—self poisoning—and she implements her attempt after giving Dolly clues that she will, after writing two lengthy suicide notes, and when Dolly is home. In the note, Herminia leaves an explanation for her death should Dolly discover her—an explanation that might compel and enable Dolly to try save Herminia's life, had she found Herminia in time to do so. Zenobia's intent also appears to be ambivalent: she gives several clues to Coverdale that she is distraught, and, depending on whether or not she can swim, she may use one of the less lethal methods.

Moreover, many of the protagonists have clearly weak intents. For instance, although Lu Anne thinks about death and the nature of death throughout the novel, her suicide motive and intent are unclear. Lu Anne is devoted to her work and the film, and shortly before she dies, she talks about returning to the bungalow before dark. She also anchors her skirt on the beach, suggesting either that she expects to need it when she is finished swimming—or that she smartly disguises her suicide as an accidental death. However, her last words, "Come, or else save me," are antithetical to typical clues of suicide, and she implements her attempt—if it indeed is one—in Walker's presence, clearly not expecting him to be suddenly incapacitated by pain (252). Although two of the Lisbons die on their second attempts, the Lisbons also seem to have mixed suicide motives and intentions. They, too, use less fatal methods—two use sedatives, two use gas poisoning—and they also implement their attempts in the presence or close vicinity of several others. Emma also uses poison, a less lethal method, which she ingests knowing that sees her, and she writes a note, which, had it been read, would have inspired the reader to begin life-saving measures.
Finally, Lily and Lucy have questionable—or perhaps absent—suicidal intent. Lily may be depressed, but she explores her life options more than most of the protagonists. And, although she prepares her room and transactions before she dies, she does not consciously wish for death, but for "sleep." This may be a metaphor for death, but nothing in her focalization suggests that she intends to kill herself: she remembers the pharmacist's warning about increasing the dose, but wants to "shut . . . out for a few hours," and "take a brief bath of oblivion" from the "days that were to follow" (322). She increases her dose, considering it a "slight risk," willing to find "darkness . . . at any cost" (322). But even after Lily takes the chloral hydrate, she thinks about "tomorrow," "sure that she would have the strength to meet it"; about "something she must tell Selden . . . [to] make life clear between them"; fears not remembering the words "when she woke"; and, as the chloral takes effects, feels "sleep" enfolding her (323). It would seem that her drug-induced state of relaxation would allow her fears and death wishes, had they been present, to emerge. Further, her hallucinations—in which she cradles a baby—betray the extent to which she does not think she is dying: her perspective, although completely detached from reality, never suggests that she knows she is dying, let alone that she wants to die. Finally, her hallucinations—the result of her sleep deprivation and her drugging—may facilitate her death by provoking her to imagine that her life will continue, by sparing her from death terrors, and by avoiding the provocation for her to seek help. Similarly, Lucy's hallucinations enable her suicide. She clearly has mixed—or perhaps no—suicidal intent: she jumps off the roof into, she imagines, the hands of a driver who will escort her to a long white limousine to drive her to Paris: her hallucinations both enable her suicide and undermine her intent to commit it. While, as Maltsberger says, the protagonists' absence of expressed suicidal intent is unusual and might suggests a highly lethal intent (64), perhaps the protagonists do not explicitly share their intentions to commit suicide because their suicidal intents are ambivalent—or absent.

Because so many protagonists undermine the lethal intents and the lethal effects of their suicides, there is some disturbing disparity between the presence of
several suicide-mitigating factors and the protagonists' nearly one-hundred percent.
first-time completion rate. Indeed, Maltsberger reports that seventy-five percent of
those who commit suicide will have made an earlier suicide attempt (199). Even the
protagonists' fairly less lethal methods are used in ways that maximize their
lethality. However, one final, facilitating factor always neutralizes the effects of the
less lethal ones and ensures that the protagonists' attempts will be fatal. Sometimes
this final facilitator involves method, sometimes character attributes or behavior--
such as the characters' lack of warning, their impulsive behavior, their secret
hallucinations and drug addictions, or others' responses to them.

The most consistent character-related facilitator of the protagonists' attempts
is the impulsiveness with which they are motivated to, decide to, and execute their
efforts. Further, the lethal result of this impulsive thinking and behavior is
exacerbated by the protagonists' general reticence discussed earlier. Together, these
qualities magnify the possibility that life-saving intervention will not occur--and
diverge from real suicide, which Eli Robins says is preventable because it is not
unpremeditated and because the majority of people communicate suicidal intent
(132). Perhaps the protagonists do not communicate their suicidal intent because of
the impulsiveness of their suicides. However, as with their paucity of expressed
intent, the impulsiveness with which the protagonists implement their attempts could
suggest that the protagonists have highly lethal intentions--or that they have not fully
considered suicide and have unsustained, low intent.

In any case, regardless of the motivation for or meaning of their
impulsiveness, it clearly helps preclude intervention and facilitate death. But this
impulsiveness reflects and diverges from trends in historical suicide. Litman reports
that often suicidal women have "a long-term disposition toward impatient action, an
all or nothing approach to problems, and the characterological attitude, 'my way or
no way'" (1989 144). Neuringer and Lettieri also found highly suicidal women had
"individual impulse expression" (81). Recalling that Robins says suicide is not
unpremeditated (1986 132), Litman similarly says that, "While nonlethal suicide
attempts are often impulsive and unplanned, that is not true of most highly lethal
suicide attempts and completed suicides. . . A method is chosen, a means is identified and rehearsed in imagination and behavior" (emphasis added 1989 144). Motto also says that high risk behaviors include termination behaviors, such as making or updating wills, insurance policies, distributing possessions (1989 132).19

But these characters do not have histories of highly impulsive, life-altering behavior: indeed, while, like Edna, they may toss their wedding rings on the floor, they usually enter into love affairs and life changes quite cautiously and slowly. However, in contrast to their general trend not to be impulsive, their final acts are extremely impulsive: they are never rehearsed, rarely planned, and rarely accompanied by termination behavior. Several of the protagonists commit suicide quite suddenly: they exhibit no suicidal inclination in the years or months before they die, and they die within hours, even minutes, sometimes seconds, of deciding to do so. Further, often the impulsiveness of their suicidal thoughts and their suicides is underscored by other activities--noted above--that suggest they intend to live.

The Lisbons are extreme exceptions in regard to impulsiveness because they clearly orchestrate multiple suicides--which is also, of course, part of The Virgin Suicides's larger subversion of the master narrative. But Zenobia--who lacks any suicidal impulse, who is historically an "organizer," and who has much life potential--kills herself only hours after she is suddenly rejected by Hollingsworth. Reiko begins to prepare for suicide on her wedding day, but she reveals no suicidal wishes and kills herself a few hours after Shinji tells her they will commit suicide.

Other protagonists commit suicide or initiate their attempts within minutes--even seconds--of deciding to. After suddenly deciding to kill herself, Constance "had to act quickly--if she waited even an hour longer than necessary, she might not have the courage. . . . Her thoughts revolved around one idea--to die without delay" (286). Although the narrator offers some indication that Emma may be suicidal, Emma gives no indications of this herself--yet literally runs to the pharmacy to poison herself immediately after deciding to do so. And Herminia drinks the prussic acid minutes after deciding to. Similarly, Anna kills herself just after deciding to do so: indeed, she is at the train station on her way to find Vronsky when she
"Suddenly [she remembers] the man who had been run over the day she first met Vronsky, [and] she realized what she had to do" (694), and immediately kills herself. Finally, as the police force closes in on Thelma and Louise, Thelma says, "Let's not get caught... Let's keep goin'.... Go." Louise, with surprise and some pleasure in her voice, asks, "You sure?" "Yeah, yeah," and the two hug, kiss, and speed into the canyon.

The protagonists are not particularly impulsive characters before they commit suicide, yet they commit suicide quite impulsively—which may be another why they do not express suicidal intent, but which decreases their opportunity to share their intents with others. This combination—together with their lack of preparation—suggests that the protagonists do not plan for or even anticipate their suicides. While some of the narratives suggest some of the characters may have been considering the "benefits" of death—for instance, Emma, Anna, and Lu Anne—many of the protagonists seem simply caught up in a suicidal move compelled more by the text than by their own lasting desires for death. These protagonists just kill themselves; and sometimes they simply let death happen, as do Edna, Lu Anne, and Lily. This "springing" of suicide is, of course, a narrative ploy meant to increase readerly tension and surprise, to increase the impact of the narratives' end. In other words, again, the protagonists' suicides are compelled less by their own self-will and their own existence as coherent, unique characters than by the narrative energy of their individual texts and the female suicide master narrative.

Although Anna and Edna explicitly express last-moment regrets, most of the protagonists express their ambivalent feelings about death in other ways and earlier in the narratives. But, once the sudden attempt has been initiated, the texts ensure that it will be complete in several ways, especially by negating the less lethal efforts of the situation. For instance, drug use and hallucinations sometimes facilitate the suicidal act and its fatality: Lu Anne can swim, but her judgment is impaired by her drug use; and, although Anna has a strong life urge, her drugged state promotes her sense of split from reality and facilitates her effort. Further, although many of the protagonists choose less lethal methods, the lethality of their attempts is increased.
because the protagonists implement them in isolated contexts that often discourage quick discovery, intervention, and rescue. Thus, self-poisoning, one of the least lethal methods—and the primary method of non-fatal attempts—is always lethal in these texts.

This "isolation," however, is also the product of others' responses—or lack of responses—to the protagonists’ suicide-associated behavior. Indeed, Akers says, "Probably only a minority of suicides are firmly resolved to die up to the very last," that "the actual outcome of [attempts] may depend upon factors other than the suicide’s intention" (274), and that, whether or not someone attempts and commits suicide "depends on the reactions of others" (309). And, finally, the most fatal suicide facilitator in these texts is the absence of others’ interest in or action toward the protagonists. Sometimes, this lack of interest is consistent with earlier events in the narrative: for instance, Vronsky’s dismissal of Anna’s distress is consistent with his earlier behavior. However, frequently, this disinterest or inaction seems to be a narrative fluke, a ploy that violates the narrative’s own mimesis or coherency of situation and character. For instance, it diverges tremendously from the narrative logic when Justin, a pharmacy assistant in love with Emma, watches her eat arsenic and abides by her command not to tell anyone she has. Nor does it make sense that Charles—dolt that he sometimes is—would, as a doctor, abide by Emma’s order not to open the letter while their property is being repossessed and Emma’s physical and mental state visibly decline before him. Moreover, even Emma’s poisoning has been determined, neither Justin, the pharmacist, nor Charles induce vomiting—even after Homais says, "we must administer a powerful antidote" (231). Instead, they wait for Homais to conduct "an analysis"—even though Emma’s letter identifies the poison (232). Justin and Charles "don’t understand" the hesitation—but do nothing themselves. As the famous Doctor Lariviére tells Homais, he "would have done better to introduce [his] fingers into her throat" (235).

Similarly, it isn’t entirely logical that Victor and Mariequita would not be curious about Edna for several reasons. Victor acts like he’s in love with Edna when she arrives at the beach house and takes "some little time to comprehend that
[Edna] had come alone, and for no purpose but to rest" (596-97). Mariequita contemplates Edna "with the greatest interest." Both, seeing Edna, "stayed dumb with amazement before what they considered to be an apparition," and both tell her the water is too cold to swim and not to "even think" of bathing--but neither are puzzled enough to observe her. It also seems unlikely that Coverdale, who has curiosity about and concern for Zenobia, would let her walk distraught and alone into a dark woods--especially given Zenobia’s comments before parting from Coverdale. Similarly, given Herminia’s comments, it seems odd that Dolly, who has loved and appreciated her mother for seventeen years, would invite her mother to kill herself, go to sleep in the same house, not check with her mother that night, but then go to say goodbye to her in the morning. And, surely, Lu Anne--who has just commanded Gordon to save her--does not expect him to be suddenly incapacitated by a pain he has never before experienced. Perhaps the Lisbon group suicide is most difficult to understand: would several neighborhood boys who are obsessed with "saving" the Lisbon sisters, having realized the sisters have begun implementing a suicide circus, silently "flee" out of the house and into their beds, "shamming sleep" and seeking no help, such that, although three of the girls used the less fatal methods of gas and pills, two of these three die, Lux "twenty or thirty minutes after" the boys flee (216, 219)?

Of course, the protagonists are responsible for their own attempts, but their attempts also become more lethal because of others’ responses--or lack of responses. Recall that Akers’ list of the essential features of the suicidal process include "the reactions of others to the person’s suicidal behavior and to his or her attempts to communicate a desire for help with the problems" (308), and that Kobler and Stotland say "suicide results less from a crisis or loss of hope as such than from an inadequate response of others to the person’s pleas for help" (in Akers 295). Whether they give clues or not, the protagonists are frequently ignored by others, including: the Lisbon neighbors, Dolly, Justin, Charles, Rodolphe, Vronsky, Coverdale, and Gordon. These narrative stretches, so to speak, suggest not only that the protagonists need "help" to die on their first attempts, but that the
masternarrative is willing to provide it. Furthermore, although the exaggerated lethalness of the attempts suggests that the protagonists have strong death wishes, their strikingly lethal deflections from nonfictional female suicide is indicative of a covert cultural compulsion for female suicide that is regularly associated with or directed toward "deviant" women, women who begin to exert their own wills, sexual or otherwise. Moreover, this larger cultural impetus toward female suicide under particular interrelational conditions is also suggested and supported by the texts’ structural similarities--by structures that facilitate fictional and promote real female suicide.

Dying for the End: The Structural Dynamics of Death

As we saw above, when Anna says, "I feel that I am flying headlong over some precipice but must not even try to save myself. And I can't" (389), her "flying headlong" is in large part due to the masternarrative’s compunction for female suicide and its effort to cajole over its precipice characters who might not seem at high risk for suicide. While character and structure are inextricably related to each other in any text, they are particularly conjoined in the female suicide masternarrative, which, at its nexus of character and structure, augments its texts’ lethality. Further, although Marxists and narratologists express some competing notions of the role of structure in narrative, in female suicide narratives, structure and ideology are tellingly and synergistically conjoined in ways that help us understand the disturbing cultural compunctions behind the female suicide masternarrative.

Fredric Jameson says that the "true target of the Althusserian critique . . . is . . . the structural notion of homology (or isomorphism, or structural parallelism)" (43), but Seymour Chatman says "a general theory of narrative needs to account for the macrostructures, that is, the general design of plots. Macrostructure in turn implies a theory of plot typology, how plots group together according to structural similarities" (84). Chatman goes on to say:

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the notion that all narratives can be successfully grouped according to a few forms of plot-content seems to me highly questionable. Work should proceed genre by genre, for much is to be learned in comparing narratives from a content-formal point of view. We are not ready yet for a massive assault on the question of plot macrostructure and typology. (95)

Indeed, because of their plot similarities and their structural and thematic or ideologic mergings, female suicide narratives provide a fruitful opportunity to explore how ideology and structure combine, for instance, in the masternarrative’s use of kernels.

Narrative kernels are "real properties of narrative" that "may be isolated, and should be named," "narrative moments that give rise to cruxes in the direction taken by events," "nodes or hinges in the structure, bracing points which force a movement into one or two (or more) possible paths," and later kernels are consequences of earlier ones (Chatman 53-54). The interrelationally-compelled plot kernels in female suicide narratives are directly related to the masternarrative’s character and thematic trends. However, other, more structurally-demarcated kernels recur at the end of female suicide narratives, augmenting the masternarrative’s death dynamics of character, theme, and plot. These kernels produce plots that seem remarkably linear, forward-moving, and closed, but these same structural elements also simultaneously subvert the masternarrative’s linearity, closure, and completion, such that this competing narrative dynamic of linearity and circularity contributes to the larger sense of ambiguity in the texts by offering a confusing, even disturbing reading experience that, finally, facilitates deaths and endings in fictional texts and in historical women.

One of the most blatant ways in which fictional female suicide structurally diverges from nonfictional female suicide in order to facilitate its protagonists’ deaths is in the characters’ completion of suicide on their first attempts. While fatal first attempts are sometimes interpreted as gestures of strength and determination (especially in women, whose predominant suicide behavior is nonfatal), they also preclude the possibility of secondary intervention by other characters. Thus, the kernel of first-time suicide completion enhances the
masternarrative's lethality and shows how its structural rhetoric augments its thematic rhetoric, increasing the lethal rhetoric of both. The masternarrative's promulgation of this particular kernel is especially telling given that, in historical suicide, seventy-five percent of those who commit suicide will have made at least two previous attempts before finally killing themselves (Maltsberger 100) and that, while men usually commit suicide on their first attempt, women commit seventy-five to ninety percent of all non-fatal suicide attempts (Rich et al., Kaplan and Klein 262). But, uncompleted attempts are also regularly interpreted as cries for help, and the protagonists' first-time attempts are also consistent with their tendency to diverge from real female suicide by withholding clear expressions of pain, suicidal intentions, or requests for help.

However, there is also some gross conflict between the masternarrative's character development and structure. Although many of the protagonists want to escape from their restrictive, dissatisfying lives, they consistently have much more sustained, even life-long, desire for interrelational connection, which should diminish the lethality of their attempts and promote uncompleted ones. Even those who express strong, usually sudden, desires to be alone—including Anna, Emma, Edna, Susan, and Constance—feel a competing wish for interrelational compatibility and commitment. Indeed, were satisfying interrelational connections available to the protagonists, most of them would likely not attempt suicide. Furthermore, while first-attempt completions seem to suggest the protagonists' determination to die, their suicide intents and attempts, as noted above, are frequently ambiguous and impulsive.

In addition to the masternarrative's dominance of character and theme, its disparities of structure and character also betray its structural overdetermination of its protagonists' deaths. Further, other narrative kernels betray and facilitate the masternarrative's overdetermination of death. For instance, while the endings of female suicide narratives are always disturbing, they are rarely gruesome. The representations of the moment of death is typically short, even non-existent, and it regularly occurs at the end of the narrative.
Anna’s and Emma’s deaths are exceptions to the master-narrative’s rule. Anna dies at the end of the penultimate part of the novel, with seven percent of the narrative left. However, the narrative approximates the textual finality associated with other protagonists’ deaths because Anna’s death occurs at the end of the seventh of the novel’s eight parts, with the narrative focalization of Anna’s thoughts at death, and because Part VIII begins with an abrupt change in focalization and tone: “Nearly two months had gone by. It was already the middle of the hot summer, but Sergius Ivanich Kozynshev was only now preparing to leave Moscow” (695). Further, although Part VIII refers to Anna’s death, it is primarily about Levin’s marriage. Emma’s death is also unusual because she eats arsenic with ten percent of the novel remaining and because her death is narrated with unusual length and detail—with descriptions of her vomiting, pain, and convulsions; nevertheless, Emma also dies with seven percent of the narrative remaining.

However, most of the protagonists die at or beyond the very end of their narratives. Lu Anne, whom we last see alive, and Zenobia, whose death is also not narrated, die in the last two and five percents of their narratives, respectively. Constance, Lily, and Herminia die and are discovered in the last one percent of their narratives. And several of the characters die with or just beyond their text’s last sentence. For example, in the last line of The Awakening, Edna hear childhood sounds and recalls childhood fragrances. "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan" ends with Lucy, whom we last see in the midst of her leap, fantasizing about driving through Paris at the same time the song’s music continues for several seconds after its lyrics end—metaphorically suggesting that Lucy is, indeed, driving off into immortality, if only artistically. "To Room 19" ends with gas pouring into Susan’s lungs and brain "as she drifted off into the dark river" (1908). Thelma and Louise ends with our vision of Thelma and Louise see suspended in their convertible above the canyon. And, after devoting four pages to the descriptions of the suicides, "Patriotism" ends when Reiko "plunged the point of the blade deep into her throat" (1125).

Unlike detective fiction, in which the representation of the dead body is a necessity, and unlike Greek dramas, in which, as Nicole Loreaux reports, female
suicide consistently occurs off stage, the narrative representation of the woman who has committed suicide is optional—but, nevertheless, meaningful. Indeed, while the actual deaths are often not narrated, the protagonists' focalization is so closely aligned with the narrative voice that readers safely assume the protagonists die with the narratives' end. As a result, the protagonists' corpses—including Susan's, Edna's, Lucy's, Lu Anne's, Thelma's, Louise's, Maria's, and Reiko's—cannot be described. Indeed, as noted earlier, the masternarrative's presence is so strong that occasionally its narratives end with a fully alive protagonist on the brink of suicide—as it does in Alice Fulton's "Queen Wintergreen," which ends with its protagonist fully conscious, suddenly stepping into a river, her long skirt becoming heavy with water.

Although the absence of detailed descriptions of the deaths and corpses invites readers to romanticize them, the protagonists' deaths are also sometimes explicitly romanticized. When the corpses are described, they are usually described briefly and often with a large element of romanticization of the death. There are exceptions, however, to this romanticizing trend. The descriptions of Emma's dying and corpse are particularly gruesome—and include commentary on such things as the chlorine water brought "to keep off the miasma" (242). Countess Vronsky's description of Anna's corpse at the time of death—given months after Anna's death and from Vronsky's perspective—is also gruesome, but it is also infused with romantic words and images. Vronsky finds:

the mangled body still warm with recent life. The head, left intact, with its heavy plaits and the curls round the temples, was thrown back; and on the lovely face with its half-open red lips was frozen an expression—pitiful on the lips and horrible in the fixed open eyes—an expression which repeated, as if in words, the terrible phrase about his repenting it—which she had uttered during their quarrel. (706-707)

Perhaps it is ironic that one of the most gruesomely-described corpses is Constance's, who, early in the novel, expresses romantic sentiments about love and death and who finally embraces the masternarrative's effects: "She was lying on the bed. Her mouth hung open and her eyes were glazed. A bluish froth covered her
lips and oozed down over her chin. One swollen hand dangled from the bed, and the empty bottle had rolled some distance across the floor" (289). Hawthorne's description of Zenobia's corpse is also gruesome—and romanticized. Coverdale says:

Were I to describe the perfect horror of the spectacle, the reader might justly reckon it to me for a sin and a shame. For more than twelve long years I have borne it in my memory, and could now reproduce it as freshly as if it were still before my eyes. Of all modes of death, methinks it is the ugliest. Her wet garments swathed limbs of terrible inflexibility. She was the marble image of a death-agony. Her arms had grown rigid in the act of struggling, and were bent, and--thank God for it!--in the attitude of prayer. Ah, that rigidity! It is impossible to bear the terror of it. It seemed . . . as if her body must keep the same position in the coffin, and that her skeleton would keep it in the grave, and that when Zenobia rose, at the Day of Judgment, it would be in just the same attitude as now! . . . One hope I had; and that, too, was mingled half with fear. She knelt, as if in prayer. (235)

The romanticization continues: Hollingsworth wounds "the poor thing's breast. . . . Close by her heart, too!" and Coverdale says, "And so he had, indeed, both before and after death" (235). When, with his "utmost strength," Silas Foster "endeavored to arrange the arms of the corpse decently by its side," Zenobia's arms "bade him defiance" three times, returning to the position Coverdale hopes is one of prayer (236).

However, even as Coverdale comments on the ugliness of Zenobia's corpse and promotes a fanciful image of Zenobia, he simultaneously indicts one source of that imagining:

Being the woman that she was, could Zenobia have foreseen all these ugly circumstances of death, how ill it would become her, the altogether unseemly aspect which she must put on . . . she would no more have committed the dreadful act, than have exhibited herself to a public assembly in a badly-fitting garment! Zenobia, I have often thought, was not quite simple in her death. She had seen pictures, I suppose, of drowned persons, in lithe and graceful attitudes. And she deemed it well and decorous to die as so many village-maidens have, wronged in their first-love, and seeking peace in the bosom of the old, familiar stream--so familiar that they could not dread it--where, in childhood, they used to bathe their little feet. (236)

As noted in Chapter 3, Coverdale refers to the century's preponderance for representations of the drowned Ophelia, from *Hamlet*. Some of the other
protagonists' bodies are also described with romantic embellishments. While we don't see Reiko's body, before she kills herself, she puts on her death-face makeup, lifts Shinji's dead head, wipes the blood from his lips, and kisses him. Selden sees "on the bed, with motionless hands and calm unrecognizing face, the semblance of Lily Bart" (325), and repeatedly sees in her corpse peacefulness, a "tranquil," "sleeping," "calm" face, "peaceful cheek," and in her body a tranquil, "motionless sleeper" (325-26). And, while it seems that prussic acid would cause a particularly painful death, Dolly finds Herminia's body "cold and stiff upon the bed, in a pure white dress, with two crushed white roses just peeping from her bodice" (223), her "hands folded on her breast, like some saint of the middle ages. Not for nothing does blind fate vouchsafe such martyrs to humanity. From their graves shall spring glorious the church of the future" (223).

For the most part, the powers of the masternarrative transcend authorial sex. However, female-authored female suicide texts generally do not include a narration of the protagonist's death, a visualization of the moment of her death or of her corpse (while Constance is an exception, consider Susan, Thelma, Louise, Edna, Lily, and Peg). However, the male-authored texts in this corpus routinely describe either the protagonists' deaths or their corpses: consider descriptions of Anna, Zenobia, Emma, Reiko, the Lisbons, Herminia, and Clarissa. Maria's, Lu Anne's, and Lucy's male-written deaths exclude descriptions of the dying body, but two of these narratives are informed by the creative presence of females: "The Ballad of Lucy Jordan" is performed by Marianne Faithful, and Lu Anne's death and narrative are modeled after The Awakening. As Shelley says after Lu Anne's memorial service, "The press likes a coffin and we didn't even have one" (254). And, perhaps female authors, in some unconscious rebellion against the defilement of women's bodies or out, erase the corpses in an attempt to respect and reclaim the bodies and the deaths, or to respect the readers' sensibilities, especially their female readers. Of course, Lu Anne's absent body--in conjunction with her repeated religious references--invites us to consider her in relation to Christine--or, the Suicidal Woman, as discussed in Chapter 4--perhaps more than any other protagonist.

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The narratives' structures also promote the romanticization of death by precluding the possibility of showing surviving characters' grief or loss—the latter of which also augments the protagonists' own general sense of purposelessness and dispensability. Given the myth of male stoicism and interrelational indifference, perhaps the impossibility of showing grief spares the narration of emotionally vulnerable or ruined—or heartless, indifferent, or culpable—male characters in order to support the myths that invalidate male interrelational loss. Indeed, Vronsky forestalls the possibility of being labeled weak by enlisting to fight in a war. And Rodolphe—who is, of course, suspect—thinks Charles, the only male partner whom we are sure is greatly affected by his partner's death, is "very meek for a man in his situation, comic even and slightly despicable" (255). Sometimes, even when the deaths occur in the narrative, the narratives show no grief: for instance, in the 1936 film *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cora—who does not, recall, commit suicide in the novel—commits suicide and Alice, Cora's close friend and companion, is too busy enjoying her newly-landed man to acknowledge, let alone grieve for, her dead girlfriend and companion.

Perhaps even more disturbing than the absence of illustrations of grief is the sense of relief or indifference suggested by some of the characters. Consider the students' reactions to the Heathers suicides (discussed in Chapter 3), Rodolphe's and Léon's reactions to Emma's death, as well as the reactions of others who visit Charles and are "bored to tears" (242). Even Charles' mother rejoices "in her heart at regaining some of the tenderness that had wandered from her for so many years" (248). After Lu Anne's death, Shelley she cries and says, "Goddamn it... I mourned her. You think I didn't mourn her? I thought she was wonderful. I always thought it was like somebody fed her a poisoned apple" (257-58). However, we see no evidence of Walker's grief—and he reconciles immediately with his wife after Lu Anne dies. And Shelley reports that, while Lu Anne's children cry at the memorial, her husband "looked relieved, which he damn well was" (255). While Coverdale says that Priscilla is "deeply grieved" about Zenobia, he also suggests her mourning is limited: "But a character, so simply constituted as hers, has room only
for a single predominant affection. . . . we find her retaining her equilibrium amid
shocks that might have overthrown many a sturdier frame!” (242).

The representation of grief and loss over the protagonists’ deaths is generally
absent or minimal, but a few of the narratives show grief and loss without shading it
with romance or glamour. Given their relatively "early" locations in the texts, it is
not surprising that Emma’s and Anna’s deaths are followed by unusually descriptive
attention to the loss felt by their survivors. Countess Vronsky says that Vronsky
"was beside himself--it was terrible to see him. He did not say a word, but off he
galloped to the station. . . . they brought him back like a corpse. . . . then came
raving madness" and a six-week period of silence and near anorexia (704).
Oblonsky recalls seeing Vronsky sob "with despair over" Anna’s corpse, his face
"aged and full of suffering" (701), and Vronsky describes himself as a ruined man
for whom nothing is pleasant (706).

Charles’s and Justin’s grief over Emma have elements that might appear to
romanticize it--for instance, Charles asking for locks of her hair and Justin cries on
Emma’s grave; however, their loss, especially Charles’s, is reported with a singular,
lengthy poignancy (perhaps made more poignant by Charles’s characteristic
emotional genuineness, simplicity and directness) from the time Emma reveals that
she has eaten the arsenic until Charles dies. Passing his hand over her hair, he
dissolves "in despair at the thought that he must lose her," and "Emma heard none
but the intermittent lamentations of this poor heart, sweet and remote like the echo
of a symphony dying away" (232). The lovely image of dying symphony sounds is
shattered, however, when Charles begs the doctor to save Emma (233), flings
himself upon her corpse (238), wants to keep it in his house for days after she dies
(239), and buries Emma in her wedding dress--a particularly apt image, given the
interrelational thematics of the masternarrative. Charles starts to "hate your God"
(240), imagines that he will see Emma again, and tries to convince himself she is on
a journey. But he is also overcome with "fierce, gloomy, desperate rage," self-blame
(246), "Wave upon wave of despair" (243), "horror" (244), and "torture" (244), and
he "lay awake never ceasing to think of her" (248). There is nothing glamorous
about Charles's loss—perhaps because, unlike the other protagonists' partners—we are fairly sure that he will not recover from her death (which he does not, and which is another link in Berthe's doomed orphanhood, labor abuses and poverty).

Others also mourn Emma: on the way to her house, her father is "devoured by anxiety," dizzy, and hallucinating, and, when he sees "the black cloth," he faints (244), then falls "weeping, into Bovary's arms" (245), and says Emma's death "is the end for" him (248). Justin staggers and pales (246), and later kneels on her grave, weeping, sobbing, and panting "under the weight of an immense sorrow" (248). However, the poignancy of these feelings is set in relief against the lack of others' grief over Emma—for instance, as noted earlier, Madame Bovary's gladness for the opportunity to re-establish intimacy with her son, Léon's and Rodolphe's empty responses, and even Homais's opportunistic response to the poisoning.

Although no survivors' loss is as deep or complete as Charles's, there is also some unusual illustration of loss following Zenobia's death: Silas Foster sheds a tear when her body is found; Moodie walks to the funeral "in deep mourning, his face mostly concealed in a white handkerchief" (239); and Coverdale saves her shoe until the time of narration, years after Zenobia dies. Westervelt, however, is quite expressive about his loss, judgment, and grief in regard to Zenobia's suicide. He says Zenobia's suicide is "absurd" (239) and laments the loss of her active, powerful mind; flexible heart; buoyant constitution; beauty; influence; and her loss of "life's summer all before her, and a hundred brilliant success." Hollingsworth says, had she been patient, she would have had "Every prize that could be worth a woman's having" and romantic fulfillment (240).

This grief, sometimes romanticized, affects surviving characters in ways that could positively reinforce someone whose motivation to attempt suicide is to deliver revenge to or extract remorse from others. Wouldn't Zenobia be pleased to know that Hollingsworth requests that she be buried near his planned grave, on the hill filled with their shared memories. And, while Constance's own romanticization of the masternarrative's interrelational myths is subverted by our image of her with glazed eyes, swollen limbs, and bluish froth oozing from her mouth and down her
chin, this depiction is offset by Lorck's response to her body: upon reading Constance's suicide letter, "he stumbled back, white as a corpse," storms "wildly through the rooms," breaks down the door, leaps to the bed, raises "her lifeless body to his chest," utters "a piteous cry," drops the body and falls across it" (289). Finally, Selden's reaction to Lily's corpse might motivate others to commit suicide with hopes for a reunion with loved ones in death, as discussed above: Selden feels "that the real Lily was still there, close to him, yet invisible and inaccessible" (325), and the

impulse was to return to her side, to fall on his knees, and rest his throbbing head against the peaceful cheek on the pillow. They had never been at peace together, they two; and now he felt himself drawn downward into the strange mysterious depths of her tranquility. (326)

Confused, "The mute lips on the pillow refused him more than this--unless indeed they had told him the rest in the kiss they had left upon his forehead" (329). Selden absolves himself of blame, considers "all the conditions of life [that] had conspired to keep them apart," then kneels beside Lily, "penitent and reconciled," and "draining their last moment to its lees; and in the silence there passed between them the word which made it all clear" (329)--which, of course, is presumably, "love."

While these three texts are unusual because they show grief and loss, they also risk providing positive reinforcement for suicides. Calvin Frederick and H. L. P. Resnik propose that suicidal behavior may be reinforced when children see the results it has for others who have committed suicide: "They may observe the success of a manipulative attempt, the guilt following a hostile act, or the pleasure of being cared for solicitously. Any of these suicidal conditions can become reinforced behavior when the individual experiences tension and behaves in a similar way himself" (44).

* * *

In each of the master-narrative's texts, there is an inexorable, driving, linear movement toward the protagonist's death, which is augmented by the master-narrative's manipulations of character and situation in order to compel individual characters and plots toward their destined ends. Through these repetitions
of narrative technique and the apparent readerly satisfaction obtained by each narrative—and each death—the masternarrative thrives, creating its own subgenre of narrative. However, while the very elements of the masternarrative—its structures and its repetitions of character, structure, and themes—promote an inexorable linearity and female death, they also subvert the masternarrative’s collective sense of linearity and closure in ways that advance the production of female suicide narratives such that, finally, in these narratives, there is only death, but there is also no death.

Although the female suicide protagonists clearly die, in some ways, they never entirely die, both at the individual textual level and at the collective level of this masternarrative. I first felt this simultaneous sense of death and un-death years ago during the week in which I coincidentally read *Anna Karenina*, *Madame Bovary*, and *The Awakening*. By the time I finished the third text, I felt that each successive text—through its similarities to the earlier two—had retrospectively diminished the impact of the preceding characters’ deaths, essentially, by formulaically depriving the characters of their individuality. By the third suicide that week, I partly felt, "here we go again," and I minimized my sense of loss for the characters—which made me even more angry with the implications of the texts. Of course, most people don’t read three female suicide texts in one week. However, having considered this more fully throughout this project, I still believe these texts of death also subvert death in order to continue to promote it, that they proffer a threatening, living, even haunting kind of death. This is perhaps one of their most elusive dual dynamics of these narratives, but let me try to capture it, both in relation to individual texts and to their collective.

In many cultures, the corpse is an essential part of the funeral rites, an essential site for and experience of closure for survivors—such an essential site that people and institutions go to great lengths to retrieve corpses from ocean depths, charred ruins, and snowy mountains, that they give traditional funeral rites to bits of bodily remains discovered decades after a death has taken place. Inherent in this prioritizing of effort and resources is the suggestion that survivors must see the body
in order to have what is typically called "closure" on the deceased's life. However, in narrative theory terms, in female suicide narratives, even as we can be sure that the protagonist dies and the narrative finds narrative closure, the absence of the protagonists' bodies partly precludes the text's offering narrative completion. This occurs primarily, however, through readerly responses, to what is colloquially called "closure," but which in narrative terms is called "completion." That is, because readers are not able to obtain "closure" with the individual characters, the individual narratives often thwart our sense of their own completion. The texts are, indeed, closed or ended in relation to plot, but their abrupt endings leave readers emotionally suspended just after having had our typically prolonged engagement with the protagonists also end rather suddenly and impulsively.

And because this effect is repeated throughout the corpus of female suicide texts, the masternarrative itself works to subvert its own defining force of death and endings in the collection of masternarrative and in individual texts. Indeed, this subversion of the sense of death also facilitates continued death, both at the individual and collective level. These endings, with their absent or glamorized bodies, eliminate the ugly incentive to curtail their own reproduction in future texts. Moreover, they are somehow attractive enough to readers such that, with all their individual distinctions, the female suicide stories are continually retold within the masternarrative's constructs; in this way, the masternarrative promotes its own continuation in the replicating production of new texts. Through the masternarrative's repetitions of form, character, theme, and imagery, the beginning of each "new" individual text--apart from its own distinctions--precedes its first words.

Precisely because female suicide narratives end simultaneously with their protagonists' deaths, Peter Brooks's psychoanalytic theories about death and narrative are useful for considering the texts' individual and collective readerly effects--and how both of these effects change when the texts are interpreted in relation to each other. Brooks applies Freud's ideas of the relationship between the repetition compulsion and instinctual drives to formulate a theory of reading that
argues that we are instinctively driven toward stability, toward a return to an earlier state of things, to the end of narratives, and to death. While Brooks theorizes about how we read individual works and the common elements of reading that compel us to finish all works, his theories invite a particularly apt application to and insight about the dynamics of the female suicide masternarrative and its charges.

Brooks says that repetitive tropes and mnemonic elements in literature "are in some manner repetitions that take us back in the text, that allow the ear, the eye, the mind to make connections, conscious or unconscious, between different textual moments, to see past and present as related and as establishing a future that will be noticeable as some variation in the pattern" (99). Similarly, the repetitive elements of female suicide narratives bring us back to earlier texts at the same time that they establish a future path for reading and writing other, new but old, similar but different texts. And this recalcitrance further augments the narrative techniques of individual narratives, not by reiterating a sense of utter sadness, death, and loss, but, on the contrary, by desensitizing us through repetition, by diffusing the impact of each particular narrative’s death-end, by diminishing the impact of each individual loss, and by suggesting that there is no true end to these narratives of the supposedly ultimate end.

Brooks also says:

Crucial to the space of this play are the repetitions serving to bind the energy of the text to make its final discharge more effective. In fictional plots, these bindings are a system of repetitions which are returns to and returns of, confounding the movement forward to the end with a movement back to origins, reversing meaning within forward-moving time, serving to formalize the system of textual energies, offering the pleasurable possibility (or illusion) of 'meaning' wrested from 'life.' (108)

But the mass effect of the masternarrative ensures that another narrative will be written so that another female protagonist can kill herself at its end. Thus, the individual and cumulative effect of the masternarrative, of this ending of the masternarrative, links the end of each narrative more closely to the beginning and ending of itself and of others—which suits Lessing’s narrator’s comment that Susan’s and Matthew’s "life seemed to be like a snake biting its tail" (1882). In this

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recalcitrance of beginning and ending, of life and death, there is a re-uptaking of narrative energies that are never fully discharged along any path, but that become circular and forward-rolling. Thus, because of the very existence of the masternarrative, the end of each female suicide narrative, with the incomplete release of its textual energy, produces not a complete narrative end or an absolute death of a protagonist, but—in a kind of repetition Brooks does not anticipate—a further reifying of the masternarrative text itself, a redirection and return of that same textual energy toward some narratively-honored promise that variations of this very same story, this end, with its sufficiently insufficient textual and readerly release, will soon enough be retold, a promise that is, among narratives, particularly strong given the female suicide masternarrative’s various strengths and particularly threatening, given the existence of suicide contagion.

In this way, while there is, indeed, death and closure at the end of each one of these narratives, within the collective, the degree of closure or completion of any one of the texts is compromised. And, because there is no final and entire discharge of their energies, they create a kind of haunting narrative immortality that is different from the immortality created by more distinct works of art: instead of standing independently in the past to be immortalized through future interpretations and appreciations of a more unique work, the masternarrative promises the future re-embodiment of these texts. This cumulative effect of the larger masternarrative is apropos of and consistent with its individual text’s structural preclusions of bodily representations and grief. That is, as the grieving process for and about individual characters is pre-empted by any individual text’s characterization, structure, and voice, the deaths of and grieving for other female suicide protagonists remain "permanently" suspended in a narrative morgue, at least until the next narrative begins.

So, in one way individual female suicide narratives support, perhaps more than any other kind of narrative can, Jameson’s statement that "narrative also means something like teleology" (in Lyotard xix). Rebirths of the female suicide masternarrative also indicate that, consistent with Jameson’s concepts of the
now-expired master narratives of science, individual female suicide narratives are "evoked at their moment of crisis and dissolution" (in Lyotard xix). That is, these narratives live on because of how they end; they are continually evoked because of how they are "dissolved," which makes their complete dissolution impossible. Moreover, although these texts rely entirely on the act that is meant to end and them, in contrast to the master narratives of science, the female suicide masternarrative is evoked long before the dissolution of any particular narrative. The act that is allegedly the defining moment of dissolution is the very act that ensures that these narratives will never truly stop.

Perhaps we should celebrate this veiled immortality because it subverts the masternarrative's own efforts. However, while the masternarrative both promotes and undermines its own endings—or its sense of endings—in fictional narratives by promoting a general continuation of the masternarrative in a variety of rhetorically savvy ways, its structural rhetoric may be lethal in other ways, in ways that inform historical women. Recall from Chapter 2 that, in 1984-85, Madelyn S. Gould and David Shaffer monitored teen suicide rates in the New York city area during the two-week period after local television stations broadcasted four fictional television movies featuring suicide (1986). During this two-week period following the broadcast of three of the movies, the average number of suicides attempts "was significantly greater than the mean number of attempts before." Furthermore, these broadcasts were followed by "a significant excess in completed suicides": after three of the broadcasts, teen suicides in New York occurred in excess of six deaths, which, projected nationally, would amount to eighty excess deaths among ten- to nineteen-year-olds. This led Gould and Shaffer to conclude their paper with a statement about the urgency of presumptive evidence that suggests "that fictional presentations of suicide may have a lethal effect" (693).

However, Gould and Shaffer also found that there were no completed suicides within the geographic and time parameters of the study following the broadcast of the second film in the series. While all four of the movies featured suicide, in the second movie, a seventeen-year-old high school student commits
suicide after several interpersonal crises, and most of the film focuses "on the reactions of the surviving family members" (690-92). It appears then, that the very structure of the female suicide masternarrative may offer a particularly strong invitation for suicide modeling. That is, through its structural dynamics, the masternarrative not only facilitates the re-writing—or imitative effect—of fictional texts and fictional women’s deaths, it also becomes complicit in the promotion of real women’s suicides.

Gould’s and Shaffer’s findings partly challenge Frederick’s and Resnik’s hypothesis that witnessing the grief produced by a suicide might prompt observers to learn, consider, and attempt suicide to evoke a similar response in their survivors. Of course, circumstances of suicide are diverse, and Gould’s and Shaffer’s study, and Frederick’s and Resnik’s hypothesis may both be valid in different ways and situations. Further, this confluence of one set of statistical findings with a speculative theory reiterates, again, the dualities associated with these narratives: whether the suicide is represented early or later in the narratives, the texts are in some way problematic for real suicide because of their structures, characterizations, and themes, but also because of their repetitiveness as texts. Indeed, given Gould’s and Shaffer’s findings, it becomes painfully ironic that the erasure of the female bodies that is, as noted above, most often undertaken in texts with female authors and performers may not only additionally facilitate the avoidance of grief and loss and the romanticization of women’s death, but also female suicide modeling.

Further, if we conjoin sociologists’ understanding of suicide contagion with literary and cultural theories about ideology, structure, and desire, and with the implications of the masternarrative, the masternarrative’s usually covert, lethal merging of misogyny, ideology, and structure becomes critically clear. We can presume that the very structure of the female suicide masternarrative affects our reactions to and identification with its texts and its protagonists and becomes, however inadvertently or insidiously, complicit in facilitating fictional and nonfictional female suicide. Given this, Jameson’s statement that "narrative also means something like teleology" becomes imbued with a pressing truth for suicide
narratives (in Lyotard xix). Indeed, far beyond anything Brooks might have imagined in his narrative theories about death, repetition, and the dynamic of reading, these narratives keep readers—and, perhaps, most of all, female readers—perpetually and problematically dying for the end.

Culture: Blame and Reward, or Another Double-Bind

The masternarrative’s incongruous ambiguities enable it to promote female suicide in a variety of ways, and its combination of character and structure helps advance a complicated dynamic of death and blame that tightens the double-bind of suicide around women, both fictionally and non-fictionally, individually and collectively. As Jack says, the sex-role system for women “promotes widely shared social expectations based on a pejorative stereotype of the ‘helpless but helpful’ woman—passive, emotional, nurturant, and expressive rather than instrumental” (191). As discussed in Chapter 5, if women fulfill standard roles for and expectations of women, they are blamed. That is, real women’s devastation in the wake of interrelational failure continues to be institutionally criticized by androcentric theories of psychological maturity—so when women suffer interrelational distress, it is often dismissed and they disparaged by the very society that promotes female interrelational dependence.

And yet, the interrelational path that women are culturally encouraged, even prescribed, to take—to be married, and, in the wake of interrelational distress, miserable, even suicidal—also results in strident indictments against them for taking the path. For instance, in relationships that include a suicidal partner, the partner who is more overtly symptomatic—and which is usually the wife—overtly express interrelational psychological needs for mutual interdependency, growth, and connection, and the partner—usually, the husband—expresses the same kinds and degrees of needs, but covertly and by projecting their dependency needs onto their female partners (Tabachnick; Canetto 1992-93 8, Canetto et al., 1989 245; Canetto and Feldman). Following his study about of married suicidal people, J. V. Hattem reports that the suicidal partners were concluded to be "more emotionally unstable,
more hypersensitive to rejection, and more critical of the world than their nonsuicidal spouse," that the suicidal partner "felt weak dependent, and inferior" to the spouse, who, in contrast, "felt more self-oriented, exploitive, and competitive, and recognized their need to have relationships with weak others" (in Lester 1988 7). Jack also found that patients shared the "negative stereotype of women as less independent, less competent, less objective, and less logical than men, which led them to be more self-denigratory and to have a more negative self-concept" (109). And Robin J. Lewis and George Shepeard found that college students not only expected women to be more suicidal than men, they also judged women more harshly than males for similar suicidal behavior. The participants in their study believed:

that male athletes who suicided were considered more emotionally well-adjusted compared to males who suicided because of a relationship failure and all females. . . . [A]thletes who suicided were seen as more competent and less distressed compared to those who suffered a failed relationship. Females were also seen as more distressed compared to males. (187)

Further, they found, "Those victims who are women, or who are males in atypical gender roles [that is, sensitive to failed relationships], are viewed as less well-adjusted than those who behave in ways consistent with their gender roles (in this case, male athletes)" (194).

This negativity is directed toward suicidal women in professional discourses as well as in personal ones. As Canetto points out, "Most of the research on women, relationships, and suicide assumes that women's personal pathology is responsible for the relationship problems" (1992-93 9). Kaplan and Klein criticize the assumption that suicidal women are inappropriately needy, that their suicide attempts are attempts to control and to use undue power and coercion to get these needs met (and reinterpret the dynamic of this assumption 271). Suicidal women, especially those who make non-fatal suicide attempts, have been harshly criticized by the general population as well as by social and health scientists as hysterical, passive, weak, neurotic, deficient, immature, hostile, and, especially, manipulative (Canetto AAS, Kaplan and Klein). Neuringer and Lettieri say, "there are some
suggestions that women tend—more than men—to use suicide attempts as an aggression manipulation [sic] (20). They cite, among others, Erwin Stengle, who hypothesizes that women are more manipulative than men and that they use suicidal gestures as a way of expressing aggression, and L. Berkowitz, who says that aggression plays a role in female suicide" (20-21). More recently, Roy reports that while only ten percent of those who made uncompleted attempts reported that their motive was to "frighten, get back at, or make someone feel sorry for the way he or she had treated" them, seventy percent of the patients’ psychiatrists attributed the attempt to these motives, to what Roy calls this "hostile or manipulative reason."

Furthermore, Roy says, "Although there is not a specific personality trait, attempters"—who are most often women--"are often immature, egocentric, anxious, dependent, hostile, impulsive, and have difficulties in relationships" (1989 1425).

This negativity toward female suicidal behavior seems most strongly directed toward those who participate most in non-fatal behavior: women. Jack presents a convincing survey of the clinical attitudes toward non-fatal behavior in women, citing several studies that indicate that the clinical judgment of doctors, nurses, social workers, and other health professionals are influenced by sex role stereotypes that characterize women patients negatively, impose negative biases on them, and result in women being more readily diagnosed as "psychiatrically disturbed" than men (111, 221-25). Jack reports that troubled patients—two thirds of whom are women—are viewed most unsympathetically by men (222, 224), and he cites several reports from A. R. Patel’s overview of the attitudes held toward non-fatal suicide attempters, during which Patel found that junior doctors and nurses had "unfavourable attitudes" toward self-poisoners (in Jack 220). According to J. Bernard, "Attempted suicide is of course the most unpopular of all complaints with the medical profession, and even the normally angelic nurses can turn quite waspy at the sight of a living attempt" (in Jack 221). Jack reports that the British Medical Journal says that "many of these episodes appear to be half-hearted or histrionic, and the medical staff who have to deal with them sometimes feel a sense of irritation which they find hard to conceal (221). These attitudes toward nonfatal
female attempters also affect their clinical care and treatment: "The fashion is to treat them with contempt and discharge them as soon as possible" (M. Murray cited in Jack 221), and M. Woodside notes, "Their admissions may be regarded with disfavour, treatment may be narrowly confined to their physical condition, provision for aftercare or psychiatric investigation haphazard or ignored" (in Jack 221).

Some explanations for the sex-differential in suicide also seem to have an underlying bias against uncompleted attempts and against women. M. Linehan theorizes that "attempted suicide was seen in our society as a weak and feminine behavior, and less available to males" (Linehan 1973 in Lester 1988 11). Further, women's high rate of uncompleted attempts has been attributed to: their lack of intellectual concern and imagination, their unquestioning acceptance of traditional values (Neuringer and Lettieri 20; cite Durkheim); their failure to successfully organize and execute suicide (Neuringer and Lettieri 20 cite Henry and Short 1954); their having less confidence and assertiveness than men, which enables them to accept life's trials more readily than men (Clifton and Lee 1976 cited by Neuringer and Lettieri 21); and their vanity, which causes them to avoid more disfiguring, violent methods (Neuringer and Lettieri 20 cite Diggory and Rothman).

Perhaps this propensity to blame women—which is congruous with the masternarrative's larger rhetoric of female blame, as noted in Chapter 5—suggests one reason why suicide narratives primarily feature women. Since women commit most uncompleted attempts, it is no surprise that descriptions of suicide attempters are sources of misogynistic expression or that female suicide narratives offer another vehicle through which to satisfy a larger compunction to blame, indict, and punish women on various counts, including their husbands' adultery—and to blame and celebrate them and their plight. However, given the harsh attitudes toward non-fatal female attempters, perhaps, by directing its protagonists to first-time fatal acts, the masternarrative spares them the wrath directed against non-fatal attempters—of course, at the expense of their lives.

While one might speculate that judgments against suicidal women serve women by discouraging female suicide, these judgments also reflect and bolster the cultural
predilection for gynicide by discouraging women from seeking help (and thereby, perhaps increasing the acuity of their situations), by promoting more "admirable" fatal behavior in women, or both. And, in order to "justify" this gynicide, the masternarrative constructs a complicated dynamic that ranges from indifference toward the protagonist by the text, characters, and the protagonists themselves, to blame toward her by the text, characters, and themselves. Indeed, although some of the implied authors offer compassion toward the protagonists, their compassion—although, more usually, their neutrality—is, nevertheless, a mask for the masternarrative's treatment of its protagonists and for the cultural, social, and interpersonal mechanisms that hold its shroud.

Moreover, the protagonists' "personal pathologies" are frequently highlighted in ways that also invite both compassion for and indictments against them; that distribute the responsibility for their relationships' failures and their deaths away from others and toward the protagonists; and that fail to recognize other forces that promote women's suicidal behavior. However, this distribution of blame and responsibility also supports the illusory "free will" dynamic that often insidiously invites us to view the suicides as heroic, radical gestures of independent will—which is another part of the cultural mechanism that supports female suicide. In this way, the female suicide masternarrative both praises and indicts women for committing the same act.

The masternarrative's rhetoric of female blame is often established in the character contexts of these narratives long before the suicides, through the illustration of female-interrelational blame (regarding adultery and divorce, for instance), the protagonists' role-defying lack of consideration for others, and through their assumption of self-blame. The protagonists' distance from their children enables these characters to kill themselves, encourages readerly distance from and judgment of them, and may diminish the sense of character mimesis and loss. Thus, the very quality that enables the protagonists to commit suicide also encourages readers to feel distance from and judgment toward them. Further, because the texts rarely explicitly indict the phenomenon of suicide contagion, they further locate the
"decisions" to commit suicide within the protagonists. This may support a more "attractive," "admirable" view of the characters and their independence, but it also deflects or minimizes cultural liability for their deaths.

Although the protagonists assume a fair amount of self-blame and generally avoid blaming others, because they generally die at the end of the texts, they cannot be criticized for their suicides by other characters or by the narrators—nor can other characters. However, in the few texts in which the protagonists do not die in the last moment of the narrative, other characters are rarely indicted for the protagonists' fate. Charles is the exception: soon after Emma dies, Charles blames "himself bitterly for being such a scoundrel" (246). Later Charles says he can no longer blame Rodolphe, that "Fate willed it this way" (255)—although the narrator says, Rodolphe "had been the agent of this fate" (255). Gordon Walker is also indirectly indicted by Shelley, who says, "I always thought it was like somebody fed her a poisoned apple" (258), but Gordon can only be blamed indirectly for his suspicious role in Lu Anne's death because her body has not been found. Jack Glenn says it was "another blow" that Lu Anne's body wasn't found, but Gordon— who knows the body would have been found replete with suspicious scratches and illegal drugs, says, "It wasn't a blow. . . . It was better. I thought it was" (255)—which, for him, it is.

In texts in which the protagonists do not die at the end of the narrative, blame and criticism are sometimes directed toward the protagonists. In The Blithedale Romance, grief and blame regarding Zenobia's suicide are conjoined. Years after her death, Westervelt says, "Twenty years of a brilliant lifetime thrown away for a mere woman's whim!" (241), and Hollingsworth says, "Ever since we parted, I have been busy with a single murderer!"—but it is unclear whether he means he is haunted by Zenobia or himself (243). In perhaps one of two extremes, the last line of The Woman Who Did proclaims Herminia's worth in the narrator's eyes: "Herminia Barton's stainless soul had ceased to exist forever" (223). At the other extreme, characters in Anna Karenina deliver harsh judgments against Anna—and none toward themselves. Countess Vronsky says Anna "ended as such a woman
deserved to end. Even the death she chose was mean and vulgar" (704). That Anna killed herself:

Only to prove something unusual. Well, she proved it! She ruined herself and two splendid men—her husband and my unfortunate son. . . . For the husband, it is better. She has set him free. But my poor son had given himself up to her entirely. He had thrown up everything—his career, me; and then she did not even pity him, but deliberately dealt him a deathblow. No, say what you will, her death itself was the death of a base woman, without religion. God forgive me! I cannot help hating her memory when I see my son’s ruin! (705)

Vronsky’s grief is mixed with blame, his happier memories "for ever poisoned" by his last memories of Anna as "cruelly vindictive" and "triumphant, having carried out the threat of inflicting on him totally useless but irrevocable remorse. . . . sobs distorted his face" (707).

While the death’s position at the narrative’s end precludes the deliverance of blame toward the protagonist, it also spares others from being blamed. Since these are usually heterosexual, married women, the death at the end makes it impossible for the text to present—or have to face—the ways in which their male partners may be implicated in their distress or their suicides. Furthermore, because the deaths occur on the first attempts, the partners cannot be blamed for not helpfully intervening like they might, had the protagonists’s died on later attempts. In this way—and concomitant with the blame dynamics of nonfictional interrelational rupture, female distress and suicide—the masternarrative structure minimizes or deflects, in particular, male blame and responsibility, but maximizes the protagonists’ blame and responsibility.

Thus, the structural deflection of blame augments the protagonists’ tendency to direct the blame and responsibility away from others and toward themselves. This is concurrent with the blame dynamics of suicidal women, and, thus, seems gender-appropriate for the protagonists. But, this hyperfeminization of the protagonists’ blame dynamic becomes the route toward their hypofeminized suicidal behavior: that is, it enables them to commit the more masculine behavior of first-time completions. Thus, the masternarratives hypofeminizes its female protagonists
to facilitate the protagonists' masculinized deaths, to protect male characters from any overt responsibility for their deaths, and to deliver that responsibility, criticism, "free will," and blame to the protagonists.

There is also a larger cultural predilection for first-time attempts that facilitates the protagonists' suicides. In addition to the harsh judgments delivered toward non-fatal behavior, there appears to be some reward for--or, at least, less judgment against--those who make completed attempts. Hawton et al. that "Doctors made a clearer distinction between those patients they considered genuinely suicidal--to whom they were relatively accepting--and the manipulative to whom they were less so" (1981 in Jack 222), and Shula Ramon et al. discovered that those considered to have depressive syndrome evoked more sympathy than those thought to have manipulative motives--and, of course, the protagonists in these narratives typically do not manifest lasting clinical depression (Jack 221).

In addition, the phrase "successful attempt" has generally been replaced by the phrase "fatal" or "completed attempt," the earlier widespread acceptance of the former phrase--which is sometimes still used--suggests a pro-completion rhetoric that is seen throughout the health science literature (see Maltsberger, Neuringer and Lettieri, Robins et al. 1959). Neuringer says highly suicidal women value life and death differently, that when death becomes good and life bad, they are considered "validly suicidal," rather than being "primarily motivated to manipulate others or cry for help" (Neuringer 1988 49). Alvarez says, "At a certain point of despair a man will kill himself in order to show he is serious" (76), and Motto says, one of the pitfalls in assessing suicidal risk is that "patients with a great deal of strength may experience severe disruption before it becomes evident to an observer" (Motto 1989 139). Of course, there are grave distinctions between completed and uncompleted suicide attempts, but somehow these syntactical associations of completed suicide with "success," "strength," "seriousness," and "validity" unintentionally, but nevertheless, inherently valorize completed suicide attempts over uncompleted ones. One wonders if the master-narrative's purveyance of its protagonists' rather silent, completed first attempts is a result of this value system.
However, even though completed suicide is more valorized than uncompleted attempts, Jack describes non-fatal self-poisoning as "the ultimate expression of the helplessness and dependency inherent in the stereotypic female role" (Jack xiv), and Canetto says non-fatal suicidal behavior is considered more feminine than fatal suicidal behavior and that "young adult women receive more sympathy for their non-fatal suicidal behavior than either men or older women" (Canetto AAS). Further, according to Neuringer and Lettieri, women's nonfatal attempts receive less disapproval than nonfatal behavior in men (22), and female attempters are taken less seriously than male attempters (33). Given these beliefs about and judgments against non-fatal attempts, perhaps the protagonists' first-time completions are meant to shock and impress readers--are the protagonists' attempts to insist on some, albeit posthumous, validation as they diverge from standard female suicide behavior and commit more masculine suicide behavior. Further, some of the suicides are treated with explicit praise and validation. For instance, Emma runs to get the arsenic, "in an ecstasy of heroism, that made her almost joyous" (229); Lionel is, according to Shelley, relieved by Lu Anne's death; one of the onlookers at Lily's death scene exclaims that Lily's suicide "was the greatest mercy" (325); and even Coverdale says that Zenobia's pain is so great that "Destiny itself . . . in its kindliest mood, could do no better for Zenobia, in the way of quick relief, than to cause the impending rock to impend a little further, and fall upon her head" (223).

While most of these texts at least partly validate the suicides, some more overtly than others, suicide is more explicitly endorsed in several cultures and ways. Suttee, the Indian custom where wives commit ritualized suicides on their husbands' funeral pyres, and hari-kari have been identified as "instances of culturally learned self-destruction" (Frederick and Resnik 43). Akers has also identified suttee and seppuku as positively-defined suicides. According to Akers, in order for suicides to be positively-defined, they must be sacrificial suicides, whereby someone commits suicide to help another, or obligatory suicides, such as suttee, seppuku, and the
suicides committed by Prussian soldiers who shoot themselves in the head after failing (304).

Perhaps we are more explicitly familiar with positively-defined male suicides, including those that take place during war, than we are with positively-defined female suicides. *Suttee* has obtained some familiarity as a positively-defined female suicide, but suicide is also positively-defined for women in other instances—that, of course, follow spousal abandonment and abuse. For instance, in Pakistan, "Islamic attitudes and laws that favor rapists, have turned rape into an instrument of male revenge" (Scroggins), and after women have been "power raped"—often while they are being held in police custody as political retaliation against their husbands—they are rejected by their families, friends, and neighbors and urged to commit suicide.

While in most countries, females commit suicide at a fraction of the rate of men, in 1987, after two decades of studying female suicide in Papua New Guinea, Dorothy Ayers Counts reported that, in contrast to Western trends in which only one quarter of completed suicide attempts are made by women, in Papua, New Guinea, eight of nine completed suicides are women's (1987 194; also see 1988). Counts discusses several studies of communities in Peru and Papua, New Guinea, where women are married, often against their wills, to improve their fathers' and brothers' status. Having no legal, financial, familial, or political authority, sometimes the women suffer intolerable living conditions at the hands of their husbands and in-laws, including polygamy, infidelity, legal public beatings and humiliations, social restrictions, and labor abuses. These women receive no help from their kin or the law while they are alive, and their only socially-sanctioned way to escape from and punish their tormentors, to assert control or autonomy, and to avenge themselves or compel others to avenge them is for them to commit suicide. Counts reports:

These women use suicide as their only means of political strategy, as a way of shaming their often neglectful, passive kin to respond to their husband's and in-laws abuses, even if only post-humously to clear the shame the women have suffered at the treatment of their husbands' and in-laws. (1988 93)
If posthumous retribution is made on behalf of the deceased woman, it sometimes includes charging the husbands with murder—or murdering the husbands, especially if the suicide occurs after the husband has beaten the wife. This fatal retaliation, however, may also follow the financial compensation that is frequently made to the deceased’s blood relations (1988 89 cites M. F. Brown 1982 6, 8).

Of course, as M. F. Brown concludes, suicide is a defective instrument of power for these women because "it reproduces the very social and symbolic structures that make self-destruction a compelling option" (1986 326). This endorsed system of female suicide is least "beneficial" to the deceased women—but it is perhaps most beneficial to their living kin, who benefit, first, from arranging their sister’s or daughter’s marriages in order to advance the kinsmen’s social status, and then who receive financial reward for neglecting her while she is tormented alive, for essentially waiting for her to commit suicide before helping her.

While these instances of culturally-endorsed female suicide are easy to critique by many cultures’ standards, given the interrelational consistencies of Western women’s real and fictional suicides, perhaps we ought to consider how a less explicitly-endorsed, but, perhaps equally significant, female suicide behavior is promoted in Western cultures. This includes non-fatal behavior because sometimes those who make uncompleted attempts go on to commit suicide: up to twelve percent of non-hospitalized attempters subsequently commit suicide (Akers 277), and, as noted in Chapter 1, seventy-five percent of those who complete suicide will have made an earlier attempt (Maltsberger 100) and "a person who has once been to the brink is perhaps three times more likely to go there again than someone who has not" (Alvarez 108).

Jack addresses how women are socialized toward behaving suicidally, and Canetto cites several U.S. studies that find that cultural norms in U.S. appear to encourage non-fatal suicidal behavior in women (AAS). In some ways, this apparent endorsement of suicidal behavior in women appears incongruous with the several earlier-cited reports about relatively wide-spread negative attitudes toward
non-fatal behavior—and, perhaps, therein lies the source and the strength of the Janus-like promotion of female suicide.

While the response toward non-fatal behavior seems to take on an ambiguous face of judgment and support, perhaps some of this ambiguity recedes when we consider the propensity of non-fatal female behavior in Western cultures. Further, while Akers says that in America, positively-defined suicides rarely occur, Keith Hawton says that "Suicide rates tend to correlate with the degrees of acceptance of suicidal behavior in particular cultures." For example, in Japan "very high suicide rates prevail," and "suicide has historically been viewed as an acceptable and sometimes even honorable option" (Hawton 1986 144). Of course, there are considerable differences between non-fatal and fatal behavior, but it appears that Western suicidal behavior in women—non-fatal and fatal—is both culturally-criticized, and culturally-sanctioned behavior for women under interrelational distress. While the protagonists' suicides may not be as explicitly positively-defined as the non-Western examples cited above, given the tenacity of this behavior in women and its direct correlation to female sex role socialization, perhaps it is time to acknowledge the subversive, covert social sanctification of Western female suicidal behavior—especially its cultural endorsement under the guise of the ambivalent cultural critique sometimes offered by elements of individual texts, and even in the presence of other anti-suicide norms.

In addition to the forces that Jack identifies in the sex-role construction of female suicidal behavior, perhaps we ought to consider narrative's potential, especially this masternarrative's potential, to promote—among other things—female suicide. In the early history of the novel, fictional narratives were implicated as dangerous epistemological mechanisms that were especially threatening to women's development. While nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary art has become accepted for its own sake and as an expressive, but not necessarily threatening, cultural production, given the findings in the past two decades on the nature of suicide contagion, perhaps it is time to reconsider the epistemological and social effects of suicide texts.
Indeed, oral narrative has been implicated in association with female suicide. Counts discovered during her studies discussed above, that in the folk tales of Papua, New Guinea:

a misused woman will allow herself to be publicly humiliated so that her kin are moved by pity or shame to come to her aid. She may cover herself with ashes, refuse to eat, and permit her tormentors to kick and burn her and take her personal possessions until her kin are shamed into defending her. If an abused person's relatives are insensitive and do not come to her assistance, then she is likely to kill herself. These alternatives are open to both men and women, and in oral literature both sexes respond to abuse with passivity or suicide. However, in real life the only male suicides for which [Counts has] data killed themselves either because they were unable to control their households of multiple wives or because they were ashamed by their affines. It is notable that villagers consider these men to have been victims of sorcery and, therefore, not acting of their own will. (1988 92-93)

Narrative clearly affects the suicide practices of historical men and women in Papua, New Guinea, where the narrative itself is androgynous, but where its effects are primarily sex-specific for women, who appear to be more susceptible to the narrative's models than the men do. Although the paucity of Western narratives' representation of interrelationally-suicidal has not fully protected men from committing suicide following interrelational loss, I wonder how male suicide rates would be had our abundance of female male suicide narratives been met with an equal or greater abundance of male suicide narratives. Similarly, I wonder if Western women are more suicidally reactive to interrelational loss in part because of the predominance of the female suicide master-narrative.

Akers and Hawton limit their discussions about positively-defined suicides to completed suicide; but, if we consider the totality of suicidal behavior, fictional and non-fictional, fatal and non-fatal, then it appears that female suicidal behavior--that is, the majority of Western suicidal behavior--may be culturally-taught in several ways, including by the master-narrative. Indeed, even though the narratives in this corpus are narratives of completed suicide, Frederick and Resnik say, "some individuals do not always go through with these [suicide] rituals" (43). Of course, most women do not participate in suicide rituals, and the majority who begin the
ritual do not complete it. This may be because, as noted earlier, the lethality of female suicidal behavior may be mitigated by forces that do not, even when present, seem to have much mitigating effect in fictional women's suicide—such as women's access to and selection of less lethal methods, their desire not to hurt others, and because their goal is frequently not to die, but to escape from pain, protest against separation, or invite others to engage in mutual connection with them (Roy, Pommereau 326, Bettridge).

It is probably impossible to quantify the impact of the fictional female suicide master narrative and its effect on women, but Jack Kevorkian's suicide-assisting activity signifies something about the gendering of suicide in the United States. Among others, Stephanie Gutmann notes the disturbing fact that Kevorkian's first eight patients were women, that he began assisting men only after he was publicly charged with misogyny—and that most of his assistees continue to be women. Further, most of the men he has assisted had been diagnosed with terminal diseases or were in severe pain and physically incapacitated, while several of Kevorkian's female "patients" had ambiguous complaints, often resembling those of depression, and, as news and family reports regularly reveal, autopsies on some of the women have identified no organic disease processes. After reading the women's case histories, Gutmann reports that those women who had physical conditions had non-terminal diseases, such as breast cancer, emphysema, rheumatoid arthritis and Alzheimer's disease, and that "the patient often seems to have been most worried about the disease's impact on others" (1E).

Indeed, Kevorkian was first contacted by the husband of one patient, Janet Adkins, who complained to Kevorkian "that he had to remind her of her tennis lessons" after she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Alzheimer's "can take around 15 years to fully develop," but doctors told Adkins she would eventually be dependent on her husband for bathing and feeding. Gutman reports that Ron Adkins "appears to have answered for [his wife] throughout the pre-death conference with Kevorkian," and that Janet Adkins died "when she was still able to carry on clear conversations and demolish her son at tennis." Ron Adkins explained,
however, that "if she was going to err she'd rather err on the side of going too soon rather than too late" (5E).

There is some irony, given Raymond Jack's discussions about the pathologizing of women's normative social roles, that Kevorkian is a pathologist—one trained to deal with sick cells, not with sick people. Indeed, Kevorkian seems to benefit from and advance the larger pathologizing of women and their distress—to literally kill women, sometimes in the absence of organic disease. Although Kevorkian's activities are different in many ways from the situations and fates of the masternarrative's protagonists, these trends are clearly part of a larger, mutually-informing dynamic of female suicide promotion in Western culture.

This dissertation is not an attempt to undermine individuals' rights to commit suicide: indeed, it is perhaps more than anything else an attempt to expose the factors that covertly promote suicide for certain people under certain circumstances and that, therefore, may profoundly undermine the reputed self-determination of this act. While I believe some accommodations must be made to enable people to die with dignity, those accommodations require, of course, meticulous interdisciplinary, multi-institutional consideration. Furthermore, Jack Kevorkian's efforts to assist individuals to commit suicide warrant some concern and investigation.

But there is also no lone perpetrator of Western female suicide—not the over-prescription of medication to women (as discussed by Jack), not Kevorkian, not the female suicide masternarrative. But the masternarrative is, clearly, one part of a larger system of sex role conditioning that includes women's helpless attributional styles, interrelational prioritizing, limited options, and pro-suicide myths and models that covertly promote the acceptability of suicidal behavior in real women under particular circumstances and that results in an increase of non-fatal and fatal suicidal behavior among women. This female suicide masternarrative and its texts clearly facilitate the idea of female suicide—for fictional and real women. Given the role of behavior modeling and social learning (or, knowledge construction), the phenomenon of suicide contagion and modeling, and others' observations about the impact of sociohistoric factors on suicide, this particular fictional masternarrative may be part
of an immeasurable, but very real, female suicide masternarrative that bleeds into historical lives. Although Western female suicidal behavior has not received the attention or notoriety received by some of the suicide practices of some other cultures, given the factors and phenomena associated with the contexts and texts of Western female suicide, it is time to assign some notoriety to the masternarrative’s insidious, artistic, and culturally-elevated promotions of female suicide.
NOTES

1. Interestingly, in June, 1996, *Life* published a two-paged photograph of a twenty-two year old woman looking into the camera, her head pinned between the track and the wheel of a metro car (story Adato; photo Atwood). The unnamed young woman lunged herself into an oncoming metro in Paris, the train stopped, and, after hearing herself crying for help, "Parisian firemen freed her tangled body from the tracks" (11). She survived and reports being happy that "fate has offered her a second chance" at life. Ironically, the story's title is, "Choosing Life." Of course, this woman didn't choose life; she simply got lucky. However, while the story—although brief and simple—may, especially with its two-paged sized photo in an already oversized magazine, promote modeling, at least the title may mollify some of its inherently contagious effects by emphasizing the choice of life, even if this wasn't the unnamed woman's choice. Of course, one wonders if this woman has heard of Anna Karenina.

2. See Sainsbury 1986 37; Murphy 171; Koranyi; Roy 1989 1415; Dorpat; Robins 1959; and Whitlock.

3. Exceptions include Lu Anne and Edna, who see doctors informally in the months before they die, but who do not offer them complaints; and two of the Lisbon sisters, who visit doctors after their uncompleted attempts and weeks before their completed ones.


5. Hawton theorizes that the lower rates are due to the Catholic regard of suicide as sinful and speculates that the recent decrease in negative attitudes toward suicide and lowered inhibitions regarding suicide may be related to a weakening of religious faith in the Western world (1986 144). Kerkhof and Clark believe that organized religion, especially Catholicism, provides a form of collective community that decreases suicide rates because it increases social integration (50). Perhaps suicide rates are underreported in religious countries because of the shame associated with suicide. Indeed, all five of the Catholic Lisbon sisters' suicides—two of them completed during second attempts—are listed in church records as accidents because, the priest argues, one can’t know what the girls were thinking at their moments of death (37).

6. Reiko and Shinji are exceptions: they pray to the gods every day together and before they commit suicide.

7. However, Maracek suggests that increased childbearing flexibility will also decrease women's suicide rates because "fewer children and fewer child rearing years (by delayed marriage) encourage and permit women to seek alternative sources of self-esteem outside the family" (1970 cited in Jack 242). Contrary to other findings. Maris, however
found "no significant difference in the total number of children born to natural deaths and suicide completers" (1989 104).

8. Others who argue that social isolation increases suicide risk or that social integration decreases it include: Sainsbury 84; Akers 293; Henry and Short; Neuringer and Lettieri 13; Maris 1989 97; Maltsberger 85, 115.


10. Findings suggest, however, that there is a societal adjustment period in regard to women’s suicide and employment, and that lowered suicide rates follow higher employment rates after societies have adjusted to changes in women’s roles. See Kaplan and Klein 268-69.

11. Also see Stephens on the suicidogenic role of worthlessness, low self-esteem, self-negation and powerlessness (84-85); Maltsberger on decreased self-regard (84); Jack on suicidal women’s self-derogatory attributional style (191); Buie and Maltsberger 1983 on the worthlessness accompanying the loss of external sources of self-worth (1983 in Motto 136); and Neuringer and Lettieri on suicidal women’s dissatisfaction with "what they are and what they do," their feelings of inadequacy and self-dislike (89); and Sainsbury (84).


13. See Schneidman 7 1986; Sainsbury 84; Motto 1989 132; Minkoff et al.; Beck 1967, 1974, 1975a; Yuft and Benzies; Maltsberger 1-3, 65, 84; Jacobs 68-72; Leenaars 58; Motto 1989 135; and Litman 1989 144-45.

14. Litman reports forty percent (1989 45); Murphy, thirty to eighty (cites Dorpat and Riply, Barraclough et al. 1974); and Maltsberger that thirty-three to sixty-six percent of suicides have past or present diagnoses of major affective disorder (99).

15. See Sainsbury 84; Motto 1989 132; Litman 1989 145; Maltsberger 74; Robins 1986 125; Murphy 171; Robins et al.; Dorpat and Riply; Barraclough et al.; and Beskow.

16. Schizophrenia, although difficult to diagnosis, may include delusions, hallucinations, thought disturbances (especially the feeling that "thoughts have been inserted into their head are now being broadcast to the world"), unassociated, incoherent, or absent speech, impairment of daily activity, social withdrawal, and emotional detachment (C. Thomas 1759). Psychosis is characterized by personality disintegration, loss of contact with reality, delusions, and hallucinations; psychotic people fail "to mirror reality as it is, [react] erroneously to it, and [build] up false concepts regarding it," and they generally require hospitalization (C. Thomas 1631).

17. Akers 276 cites Schneidman and Farberow 28-32; Stengel; and Pokorny. Also
Neuringer and Lettieri 16 citing Lester 1972; E. Davis; Dublin; Lester 1988 8-9; Lester and Lester; Maris 1969; Marks and Abernathy; and Marks and Stokes.

18. Note: For information on the motive of interrelational connection, see Roy, Pommereau 326, Bettridge; Neuringer and Lettieri 20 note Lester 1972; Lester 1988 9. Menninger identifies the desire to escape as one of the three primary motives for suicide (Litman 1989 147 cites Karl Menninger 1938), and Schneidman reports that the common action of suicide is escape, the common goal cessation of consciousness or pain, rather than death (1986 10, 5). Also see Maltsberger 75; Litman 1989 145; Motto 1989 135 cites Furst and Ostow 1979; Jack 223; and Neuringer and Lettieri 85.

19. However, Roy says uncompleted attempts are made impulsively, with two-thirds of them consider for less than an hour before the attempt is implemented (1989 1425).

20. The Virgin Suicides' Cecilia and Therese are the only protagonists in this corpus who do not complete suicide on their first attempts.

21. Perhaps the most extreme exception to the tendency for female suicide protagonists to die at the end is Richardson's Clarissa, whose starvation suicide is protracted through hundreds of pages.
CHAPTER 7

A Reading: Compassion, Criticism and Complicity
in Doris Lessing's "To Room 19"

Everything was in order. Yes, things were under control.

"To Room 19"

Introduction

Because the narrator of Doris Lessing's "To Room 19" (1963) so frequently repeats Matthew and Susan Rawlingses' thoughts about their own intelligent, rational behavior, she taints these assertions with suspicious irony. For instance, Matthew and Susan are admired for their moderation, reliability, and "their abstinence from painful experiences" (1882)--as if anyone can simply and entirely avoid life's painful events. The narrator also emphasizes the Rawlingses' egocentric, myopic visions of self-perfection: "because of their foresight and their sense for what was probable, nothing was a surprise to them" (1882). Clearly, the narrator is articulating Matthew's and Susan's discourse, and, regardless of how often they and the world praise their intellectualization of marriage and love, her frequent repetition of this discourse implicitly highlights and criticizes it and the couple's visions of marriage, self-determination, and intellect. And, of course, this same repetition suggests that life and the story may likely not honor Matthew's and Susan's visions and constructions—that, while things may appear to be or actually be "under control" and "in order" now, they may not stay that way (1884).

Consistent with the narrator's indirect, ironic critique of the Rawlingses, Lessing regularly offers through the narrator's irony an extended, scathing
commentary about the larger constructions of gender that inform Susan's and Matthew's marital decisions and roles. Even as Susan, Matthew, and society validate the norms that define the Rawlingses' marriage, Lessing trenchantly indicts them by revealing their contributions to Susan's descent. And, as author, Lessing, known for her social realism, illustrates and problematizes the complexity of the gendering of interrelational roles in several ways: through her use of voice and indirect discourse; thematically, in her representation of the nature and role of "intelligence" and marriage; metaphorically, with her use of gardens, snakes, demons, and death; and, structurally. Lessing—who shares the implied author's beliefs and values—crafts an effective, unique, scathing, and artfully double-voiced story that indicts the gender and marital constructions embraced by Susan, Matthew, and society as much as, perhaps even more than, any other text in this corpus.¹

Lessing is also known for maintaining "a strong sense of moral responsibility" as a writer, and at the same time that she offers this social critique, she expresses a noticeable degree of compassion for Susan and even for Matthew regarding their situations (Gilbert and Gubar 1880). For instance, when, in bed at night, Susan and Matthew discuss their days' events, her days are "(not as interesting [as his], but that was not her fault) for both knew of the hidden resentments and deprivations of the woman who has lived her own life—and above all, has earned her own living—and is now dependent on a husband for outside interests and money" (1883). While the implied author clearly critiques the marital system here, she also shows, with some element of understanding and compassion, its detrimental effects on Susan. Although Matthew reaps many of the benefits of the system in which he, too, is complicit, Lessing also suggests, albeit briefly, that the system is not entirely healthy for Matthew, either. After his affairs, Susan notes that he comes home "harassed rather than fulfilled" (1886), that he is "never really struck . . . by joy" (1886), and that he becomes "thin, even gaunt" (1902). While the narrator presents these views through Susan's indirect discourse, we have no apparent reason to doubt Susan's perceptions about them.

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However, Lessing, with her crafted compassion for and critique of this couple and the larger mores they embrace, also becomes unknowingly controlled by and complicit in another larger system that surrounds "To Room 19": the female suicide masternarrative. As will become clear, while Lessing's story is filled with conscious craft and clarity of purpose directed at exposing marriage and gender norms, it also participates in, abides by, and succumbs to another set of disturbing mores, those of the female suicide masternarrative—its character, themes, plot, and its micronarrative details. While I discussed many of its intertextual similarities to other female suicide texts in Chapter 3, let me note that Susan appears to be even more an intertextualized "model" female suicide protagonist than I had imagined. Her character influences may date back to the Classic Greek tragedies, when Nicole Loraux says female suicides were not shown, but narrated from off-stage and wherein "No death of a woman takes place without involving the bed" (24). Similarly, as I discuss shortly, Susan's actual death is not shown because she dies just as or after the story ends—and she dies on a hotel bed.

Lessing's story is also useful for a focused reading of the components and dynamics of this masternarrative because it compacts and accentuates the masternarrative's common components into the short story form. However, because the female suicide masternarrative is a theoretical compilation of trends among many narratives, none of the real texts in the female suicide corpus satisfy all of its prescriptions. And Susan differs from many of the protagonists because she suppresses and then abandons any impulse toward interrelational connection earlier than they do, because she has no fear of death, no regrets, and a very strong suicidal intent. Nevertheless, the masternarrative's strength emerges in its flexibility, and Doris Lessing's "To Room 19" is in many ways a real "model" representative of the masternarrative (that is, in contrast to the theoretical model I have described throughout this dissertation) because it satisfies most of the masternarrative's trends, while it also, like all of the masternarrative's real texts, diverges from others.

However, Lessing's story is also useful for illustrating the tension produced by the negotiation of individual texts and authors within the larger context of the
collective of female suicide narratives. Lessing is a "self-described 'architect of the soul'" who believes that "the writer must be especially inventive during this age . . . [of] 'one of the great turning points of history'" (Gilbert and Gubar 1880). As described by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar:

Lessing believes that only an extraordinary effort of imagination can free humanity so that it will be capable of surviving. Therefore, all of her books study what she analyzed in the *Children of Violence* novels, namely, "the individual conscience in its relation with the collective." . . . Lessing is searching for a vision of unity that can empower the individual to survive the fragmentation of modern life. (1881)

It is, then, particularly ironic that Lessing's own "effort of imagination" is so informed by the master narrative, that her individual effort is so reliant on and representative of the female suicide collective--indeed, so much so that this story ensures not Susan's survival, but her death, which may also function as a model that threatens the survival of some historical women. However, in addition to illustrating the "fragmentation of modern life"--or, perhaps, more aptly for the female suicide narratives, married life--"To Room 19" also fruitfully illustrates several locations of duality and elements of fragmentation related to the textual, authorial, and thematic issues presented by the merging of the individual and the collective.

For instance, as discussed in Chapter 3, "To Room 19" is strongly intertextual: it participates extensively in the implicit intertextuality of many of the female suicide texts that precede and succeed it. But, whether it does so consciously or unconsciously, unlike most of the texts in the corpus, it makes no intratextual or extratextual references to suicide, female suicide, or the role of art in constructing life and knowledge; thus, it does not recognize or problematize its own relationship to its antecedent texts--for instance, as *Heathers* does. In the absence of parody or even reflection about its own intertextual dependence, "To Room 19" becomes increasingly complicit in purveying those norms, regardless of what may have been Lessing's own intention. No matter how vehemently Lessing works in this work and others to indict marital institutions, this story is swept into a dynamic of narrative that in many ways undermines individual authorial efforts, that produces a

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story that marches Susan directly to its fatal end, led there not only by the serpent-man in the story, but by the haunting narrative master of female suicide.

In this way, "To Room 19" also illustrates the problematic role of the author-implied and real—in promulgating the female suicide masternarrative. This story exposes some of the dualities and ambivalence located in female suicide narratives: first, the dual positions of a personally compassionate and socially critical, but also a clearly unintentionally complicitous author; and, second, the dual positions of authors and texts, especially in relation to their power, self-determination, and creativity, to their being constructors of and constructed by texts and culture.

Finally, although Lessing’s "To Room 19"—with all her narrator’s scathing irony and her own controlled story constructions—suggests that the narrative itself is "in order," "under [the] control" of Lessing’s visions and craft, and, while the implied author suggests that her superior vision reigns over story, character, and readers, it is informed and controlled by a larger female suicide masternarrative that firmly situates this story into global myth-making efforts and judgment against deviant women. This duality in some ways parallels the duality espoused by several protagonists, as discussed in Chapter 6, and it shows that, like the Rawlingses’ marriage, although "Everything was in order. Yes, things were under control" (1884), they often are not in order—or, rather, they are, indeed, in order, but predominantly in the order of the masternarrative.

Susan’s Interrelational Trajectory

Like several of the protagonists, Susan has many characteristics that should mitigate her suicide risk: she has no apparent family history of suicide, no suicidal preoccupation or death wish, no substance abuse, and no medical illness. Indeed, she declines Matthew’s recommendation that she see a doctor. But Susan also experiences a marriage and death that are clearly a version of the female suicide masternarrative interrelational trajectory. She and Matthew marry willingly, and their early marriage perspectives are conjoined: considered by themselves and others as "well-matched," Susan and Matthew "did fall in love" after knowing each other.
for "some time" (1881). While Susan and Matthew at first seem to flout society’s rules by marrying late, they quickly embrace them, and there is a sense that their choices are wise and successful: "this balanced and sensible family was no more than what was due to them because of their infallible sense for choosing right" (1882). Susan describes Matthew as a "handsome blond man, with his clear, intelligent, blue-eyed face" (1891), and she tells herself that the "whole extraordinary structure" of their lives revolves around their love (1883).

During the first several pages of the story, the narrator emphasizes that Susan’s and Matthew’s decisions are made mutually, voluntarily, and intelligently. However, the narrator emphasizes Susan’s and Matthew’s reliance on intellect so much, of course, that the implied author asks us to grow suspect of these assertions, to recognize that her interpretations of Susan’s and Matthew’s decisions differs from theirs, even as she conjoins the narrator’s voice with the couple’s already conjoined voices. The negative consequences of their having chosen intelligence to the exclusion of feeling soon emerge.

Some of the key elements in the masternarrative’s interrelational trajectory are its protagonists’ loss of freedom, their sense of constriction, and their interrelational dissatisfaction in their spousal and maternal relationships. Early in "To Room 19" the narrator says, "A high price has to be paid for the happy marriage with the four healthy children in the large white gardened house" (1886), and the passive voice does not rule out the possibility that Susan and Matthew might pay this price together. But it isn’t long before we realize that Susan, who, like other protagonists, is typically dependent on her husband for everything, also, like other protagonists, makes most of the changes and pays the highest price for the marriage.

This is regularly evident in the protagonists’ experiences as mothers and heterosexual partners, including Susan’s. Susan begins to feel that her life and her soul have not been her own, "but the children’s" (1886), and, when they have their two-month long holiday from school, Susan
would lock herself in the bathroom, and sit on the edge of the bath, breathing deep. . . . Then she returned to the family, wife and mother, smiling and responsible, feeling as if the pressure of these people—four lively children and her husband—were a painful pressure on the surface of her skin, a hand pressing on her brain. She did not once break down into irritation during these holidays, but it was like living out a prison sentence, and when the children went back to school, she sat on a white stone seat near the flowing river, and she thought: It is not even a year since the twins went to school, since they were off my hands (What on earth did I think I meant when I used that stupid phrase?). (1890)

In this description of Susan's maternal behavior and unhappiness, she—sitting by the water of the bathtub, then the river, breathing slowly—is already being likened to the snake-demon, already spiritually tainted by and implicitly judged for her deviant maternal feelings.

And, when Susan tries to tell Matthew she never feels free, he claims that he isn't free either: "I have to be [at the office] at ten—all right, half past, sometimes. . . . Then I've got to come home at a certain time. . . . [B]ut if I'm not going to be back home at six I telephone you" (1891). Susan feels "remorseful. Because it was true. The good marriage, the house, the children, depended just as much on his voluntary bondage as it did on hers" (1892). But, as for other protagonists' male partners, "bondage" means something different for Matthew than it does for Susan. Matthew leads dual lives, while Susan lives entirely within the confines of their marriage and property: he "had become like other husbands, with his real life in his work and the people he met there, and very likely a serious affair" (1897). When, after twelve years, Susan decides to change these boundaries by leaving the house during the day, she can only do so after discussion with, approval by, and financing from Matthew. He, on the other hand, changes rules whimsically and seeks no permission for his affairs. Susan, who forsakes her job when she gets pregnant, depends on Matthew's income for her "support" and her "freedom"—the same income that produces her privileged, constrained dependence on Matthew, that enables him to lead a private life that excludes her and precludes her intervention in it, and that enables him to support and then monitor Susan's transgressive behavior.
While Susan asks herself, "But why did he not feel bound?" (1892). Lessing makes clear it is because, contrary to what Matthew tells Susan and to what she accepts, he isn’t bound—financially, emotionally, or physically, as is evident in his generally casual attitude about his affairs. Susan tries to diminish the impact of Matthew’s infidelity by telling herself:

The whole thing was not important. After all, years ago they had joked: Of course I’m not going to be faithful to you, no one can be faithful to the one other person for a whole lifetime. (And there was the word faithful—stupid, all these words, stupid, belonging to a savage old world.) (1884)

At first, it seems possible that these sentiments may be or have been shared by Susan and Matthew. But, when Susan sleeps with Matthew knowing that he has hours earlier slept with Myra Jenkins, it becomes clearer that Susan is, once again, abiding by his concept of marriage, his rules and wishes. Matthew is also affected by these rules, of course: his infidelity seems to be a response to the flat, intellectualized marriage that he has advocated, a response that, on one level, Matthew’s and Susan’s intellect tells them they should expect and accept, but that, as we see, haunts Susan.

While Susan is unlike most of the protagonists because of her fairly subdued external reaction to Matthew’s chronic adultery, Matthew’s adultery signifies as an important act of Susan’s interrelational abandonment. Before she knows about Myra, Susan feels "sadness because so much is after all so little. . . . [T]his was life, that two people, no matter how carefully chosen, could not be everything to each other" (1884). At this point, our sympathies may be equally strong for Matthew and Susan because they seem to be equally devoted to their marriage and family. But, the deadly discrepancy between them becomes clearer.

Susan is, like other protagonists, particularly emotionally dependent on Matthew because she experiences the negative social relations typical of fictional and non-fictional suicidal women. Her normative role as housewife and mother facilitates her isolation, and there is no evidence that she maintains active relationships with family members or friends. Of course, this isolation also makes it difficult for her to have an affair, flimsy or meaningful, in contrast to Matthew, who
has many opportunities to have both kinds. Susan is deeply alone, and since she has little else but her marriage in which to believe and no one but Matthew to turn to, when he turns away from her, she is, like the other protagonists, lost.

Unlike the typical protagonists, however, Susan is trained with an employable skill. Indeed, Susan seems to have the largest variety of options open to her, including renewing her publishing work—which she had planned to do after her children had returned to school. However, when Matthew asks, "Are you thinking of going back to work?" she says, "No, no, not really" (1897). Nevertheless, that Susan can, should she decide to, return to her previous employer—who continues to solicit her—suggests a viable option that, because it is present, but not employed, increases our surprise with Susan's suicide. That is, because we know Susan can get a job, perhaps even move away from her marital home, we are doubly struck by her suicide—and doubly aware of the master narrative's deadly manipulations of event and character to support itself. Indeed, although Susan implements some problem-solving effort in arranging for Room 19 and for Sophie, she, like the typical suicidal woman, generally suffers from constricted feelings about work and problem solving, especially in regard to finding fulfilling activities and interrelational alternatives, such as divorce. Indeed, while Susan's and Matthew's open marriage suggests something less than traditional marriage, they abide, if not to their fidelity vows, to their vows to "Til Death Do Us Part": neither expresses the desire to divorce; Susan does not consider it, even when Matthew asks if she wants one; and Matthew says, "It is a bit impossible to imagine oneself married to anyone else, isn't it?" and pulls Susan's head to his shoulder (1905).

Because Susan does have viable employment options, her suicidal resignation is especially prominent among these narratives. Although Susan is directed or seduced toward Room 19 by the demon, she suggests nothing fatalistic about her life or behavior. On the contrary, the first half of the story repeatedly reiterates that Susan and Matthew self-consciously create their lives. But, as Susan realizes that her marriage—the centerpiece of her life—has dissolved, she tries to hold onto the notion of their marital bond. After Susan learns about Myra, she says, "Well, if
what we felt that afternoon [during their first sex] was not important, nothing is important, because if it hadn’t been for what we felt, we wouldn’t be Mr. and Mrs. Rawlings with four children" (1885). Susan’s entire life and identity are invested in being Mrs. Rawlings, so although she tries to convince herself that Matthew is married "body and soul" to her, that his affairs are "absurd," and they can’t touch their marriage, she feels "as if life had become a desert, and that nothing mattered, and that her children were not her own" (1885). In contrast to Matthew, who continues to have affairs, Susan cannot "imagine herself going off without him" (1891).

After Matthew’s affairs begin, Susan tries to convince herself of the importance of her role as wife and mother: the story makes repeated references to "the four children and the big house that needed so much attention"—which, in their cliché, suggest their insufficiency for Susan (1885). Her domestic role appears to be somewhat sustaining—if only minimally so—until the children are older. But, as Matthew’s affairs continue, Susan feels increasingly dissatisfied and constricted, persistent impatience, rage, and fright—and she proposes hiring a live-in maid. Given that it behooves Matthew’s freedom to maintain Susan in her current, constricted role, it is not surprising that Matthew offers what Susan calls several "reasonable" objections to her proposal that would unfetter Susan from her domestic confines (1897). But, while Susan first believes, internalizes, and tries to accommodate Matthew’s views, she begins to resist Matthew, with his pleas for the children and his outstretched arms. And the next day she hires Sophie for part-time domestic work.

Gradually, Susan becomes increasingly aware of her own dissatisfaction and dispensability, but during her first day away from home, some of her earlier fear is replaced by a kind of epiphanic invigoration after Susan discovers that her essential self exists apart from her family: she thinks, "Here I am . . . and I’m just the same. Yet there have been times I thought that nothing existed of me except the roles that went with being Mrs. Matthew Rawlings. Yes, here I am, and if I never saw any of my family again, here I would still be" (1900). After realizing that these roles are
not vital parts of her being and suggesting that she can imagine leaving them and her family, she continues to remove herself from them. By Susan's careful "arranging," Sophie moves into "Mother's room" and becomes "altogether the mistress of the house" (1902). She is "a success with everyone, the children liking her . . . and Matthew finding her 'nice to have around the house'" (1899), and Mrs. Parkes—who starts wearing Susan's discarded floral overalls—adjusts to Sophie's presence and authority. Sophie becomes the children's surrogate mother, and Susan hopes she will become Matthew's next wife—after which she will, as Susan's replacement, also share her first initial and her last name.

Susan seems almost to plan covertly the augmentation of her own insignificance and erasure. Early in the story, the narrator says, "She was keeping [the demon] off, because she had not, after all, come to an end of arranging herself" (1890). This early in the narrative, "arranging" might mean "preparing" herself—for what, we aren't yet sure; it also might mean "replacing" herself, but there is no doubt that Susan is aware of and feels in control of what is happening. And although she seems surprised, even disappointed, by the depths and breadth of her erasure and her family's adjustment, she suggests that she knows, long before we do, the implications of her "arranging herself," that she will not reach "the end" until Sophie has adequately replaced her: "thinking in secret fear how easy it was, how much nearer to the end she was than she thought. Healthy Fräulein Traub's instant understanding of their position [Susan's wanting Sophie to "play mistress of the house"] proved this to be true" (1898). Indeed, as Susan simultaneously recognizes her own dispensability, she, intentionally or not, arranges for her own erasure—arranges, finally, to leave her children in caring, loving hands. Susan's physical and emotional erasure, including her self-erasure, is an extension and a result of the original tenets of the Rawlings marriage, of the couple's original denials of emotions, in two ways: Susan has, largely because of the couple's emphasis on reason at the expense of emotion, lost her emotional connection with her family and children, which makes it easier for her to leave them; and, of course, they have lost
their emotional connection with her, which makes it easier for them and for her to accept her erasure, to let go.

Whether Susan initiates her replacement because she wants to test or lessen her family’s need for her, to get space, or to facilitate their adjustment to her absence, her weaning of them reiterates her feeling of being dispensable and self-fulfillingly promotes her actual dispensability. Recognizing that she has been replaced, Susan thinks: "to sit at her own bedroom window, listening to Sophie’s rich young voice sing German nursery songs to her child, listening to Mrs. Parkes clatter and move below and to know that all this had nothing to do with her: she was already out of it" (1904). Of course, if we link the possessive pronoun of "her child" with its grammatical antecedent, "Sophie’s," the meaning becomes "Sophie’s child," not Susan’s. And this domestic erasure of Susan is exacerbated by Matthew’s ongoing replacement of her as a lover and his indifference regarding her "affair."

However, once Susan recognizes how irrelevant she has become, she seeks "shelter against her own irrelevance" by "[sliding] down into the hollow of the bed" (1906). This image, of course, further identifies Susan’s increasing approximation with the demon snake, but it also recalls the earlier simile about Susan being held "in cold storage" (1887)—that is, as a corpse. Indeed, the result of her efforts promotes her increased feeling of listlessness, but it also lessens the lack that her family will experience and the guilt she might experience if and when she leaves them. Her sense of erasure and dispensability is so complete that the already minimal concerns she feels for them when she kills herself are allayed by the thought that Matthew should marry Sophie, to whom Susan had dedicated her house (1907) and "who was already the mother of those children" (1908). Finally, while the narrator tells us that each time Susan leaves Room 19, Fred looks at it and sees that "It was undisturbed. She might never have been in the Room at all," we sense that when Susan leaves the Rawlings family, it, too, will seem as if she had never been there at all (1900).
Facilitating Susan’s Suicide

Susan’s interrelational trajectory of female suicide is assisted by “To Room 19”’s characterization, situation, plot, and voice. Although it is not clear that Susan ever felt pleasure in her usual domestic activities, she has no interest or pleasure in them during the time of action. In either case, she does not meet the official diagnostic criteria for depression—which is not to say she is not distressed or that Lessing did not want her to appear depressed. Further, she does not meet depression criteria, she medicalizes her own unhappiness: because she violates the intellectual norm that is predominantly set by Matthew, she thinks Matthew "had . . . diagnosed her finally as unreasonable" (1896). This, of course, associates emotions--and women's distress following their interrelational and social limitations--with a disease process--which is consistent with Raymond Jack’s findings about responses to women’s emotional conditions, as cited in chapters five and six. And, indeed, following the master narrative’s larger normalization of socially deviant women, Susan’s onslaught of feelings is accompanied by hallucinations: Susan maintains contact with reality and is able to perform daily functions, but she probably becomes schizophrenic.

Susan’s hallucinations are part of a worsening split that is typical among the protagonists, but Susan’s fragmentation precedes and is not limited to her hallucinations. When Susan returns from bringing the children to school, she does not want to enter her home and, panicked, she goes to the garden, where:

she spoke to herself severely. . . . First, I spent twelve years of my adult life working, living my own life. . . . [And from the moment I became pregnant for the first time I signed myself over, so to speak, to other people. . . . So now I have to learn to be myself again. (1887)

As Susan tries to learn to be herself again, she feels she is not herself--and her intellect fails to clarify why this is so: "I’m simply not myself. I don’t understand it. Yet she had to understand it. . . . [Yet she could not understand" (1891).

Susan’s internal fragmentation of self worsens: she sees--like Anna, Constance, Lu Anne, Lily, and Emma--an altered face in the mirror, a classic symptom of fragmentation, one that regularly precedes the protagonists’ suicides.
She wants to believe in the "sensible face" that she sees in the mirror, but she also sees there "the reflection of a madwoman" (1897). With her increasingly severe internal fragmentation, her external fragmentation also worsens. Susan doesn’t tell Matthew the truth about Room 19 or her hallucinations, and, "In the dark she lay beside him, feeling frozen, a stranger. She felt as if Susan had been spirited away. She disliked very much this woman who lay here, cold and indifferent behind a suffering man, but she could not change her" (1898). Like several of the protagonists, Susan’s third-person reference suggests a more prominent fragmentation of self—and recalls other protagonists' third-person references just before their deaths, for instance, Lily's, Zenobia's, and Lu Anne's. Eventually, watching her children and Sophie play, Susan feels "her soul was in Room 19...; she was not really here at all. It was a sensation that should have been frightening... to know that all this had nothing to do with her: she was already out of it" (1904). When, shortly after Matthew proposes a foursome—and thereby exacerbates his abandonment of Susan and their marriage—Susan is particularly fragmented, feeling "her being flow into [the other restaurant patrons], into their movement" (1907).

Susan's fragmentation, like that of the other protagonists, begins with and is facilitated by her general inexpressiveness and her self-stifling, often on behalf of her attempt to be intelligent. When Susan starts feeling "pierced as by an arrow from the sky with bitterness," she tells herself "that bitterness was not in order, it was out of court" (1885). But "her intelligence continued to assert that all was well" (1885), so she continues to live by the intellectual standard of her marriage: "Intelligence barred, too, quarrelling, sulking, anger, silences of withdrawal, accusations and tears. Above all, intelligence forbids tears" (1886). When, in an unusual act of expression, however muted, Susan admits to Matthew that she feels constrained, he says "[The children will] be off your hands, darling Susan, and you'll have time to yourself" (1886). She succumbs to his response—which convinces her to continue to abide by the very rules that make her miserable and enable Matthew to maintain the status quo: Susan’s limitations and domestic
fettering his freedom. Later, while Susan partly communicates her need to be alone to him, he feels like a stranger to her, and she tells him little else. When he asks if she is well, she says, "Yes, dear, I am sure I am quite well" (1902), although she knows she is not.

As we have seen, Susan and Matthew bifurcate intelligence and passion, favoring the former and repressing the latter in their relationship and lives. So it is not surprising that Susan, who is eventually awash in emotions, is not more emotive, not even as she learns of Matthew’s infidelities. Just before killing herself, Susan internally "[dissolves] in horror at them both, at how far they had both sunk from honesty of emotion" (1906). Susan’s reticence facilitates the lethality of her attempt because she tells no one about her feelings, hallucinations, or intentions. Susan’s reticence, of course, conflicts with the communication dynamic of suicidal people discussed in Chapter 6, and with a reality in which "the great majority of suicidal persons communicate their self-destructive intentions to those around them, including their physicians" (Roy 1423).

The blame dynamic in "To Room 19" also facilitates Susan’s suicide much like it facilitates other protagonists’ suicides. While the narrator and implied author indict Matthew’s enforced intellectualism, Susan, lucid or hallucinating, criticizes Matthew for nothing and criticizes herself for much. She makes regular attempts to acquit Matthew, to deflect anger and blame from him:

And if one felt that it simply was not strong enough [that is their love for one another, as as wellspring], important enough, to support it all, well whose fault was that? Certainly neither Susan’s nor Matthew’s. It was in the nature of things. And they sensibly blamed neither themselves nor each other. (1883)

Even when Matthew returns home with a harassed look after his affairs, Susan acquits him:

But none of it by anybody’s fault. (But what did they feel ought to be somebody’s fault?) Nobody’s fault, nothing to be at fault, no one to blame, no one to offer or to take it . . . and nothing wrong, either, except that Matthew never was really struck . . . by joy; and that Susan was more and more often threatened by emptiness. (1885)
As Susan tries to dismiss the importance of Matthew's affairs, saying "it was inevitable" that he would be tempted, she blames herself for the bitterness that pierces her: "bitterness was not in order, it was out of court" (1885). And, as Susan's intelligence denies herself "quarrelling, sulking, anger, silences of withdrawal, accusations and tears," she becomes increasingly self-contemptuous and dismissive (1885). Given Matthew's predilection for "intelligent" responses, it is not surprising, then, that when Susan starts feeling irritated, restless, empty, and confused (1888, 1889, 1891), she convinces herself these feelings are "not sensible" and "utterly ridiculous" (1888, 1890). She "despises" her "utterly ridiculous" but persistent emotions, feels guilty for avoiding the children's calls (1890), that she is "irrational" (1892), and that "there was something really wrong with her" because she feels bound (1891-92).

Moreover, consistent with the rhetoric of blame promoted by the texts and discussed in chapters five and six, Susan praises Matthew and rationalizes his behavior, even his affair, blaming herself for the marriage's condition and Matthew's decision to commit adultery: "He had become like other husbands, with his real life in his work and the people he met there, and very likely a serious affair. All this was her fault" (1897). Furthermore, she admits she is "breaking her part of the bargain" when she wants time away from the house (1897). Later, when he proposes a foursome, she rationalizes, albeit with a hint of disdain, "Of course . . . he could be bound to say that, if one is reasonable, if one never allows oneself a base thought or an envious emotion" (1906). Finally, she thinks, "But she had let herself in for it" (1907). In every instance, Susan blames herself and acquits Matthew--which, typical of the protagonists--promotes her suicidal path.

Like many of the protagonists, Susan first abides by traditional concepts of women's duty to her family, but then she abandons these precepts. When she first begins feeling resentful about her familial obligations, she thinks:

All this is quite natural. First, I spent twelve years of my adult life working, living my own life. Then I married, and from the moment I became pregnant for the first time I signed myself over, so to speak, to other people. To the
children. Not for one moment in twelve years have I been alone, had time to myself. So now I have to learn to be myself again. That's all. (1887)

Devoted to her family, Susan resigns from her job when she gets pregnant and cares for the children herself, since "childhood is short" (1886). While Matthew parties without Susan, she stays home "because of the four children" (1885). While raising them, "her soul was not her own, as she said, but her children's" (1886). While Susan and Matthew agree that "children can't be a center of life and a reason for being. . . . they can't be a wellspring to live from. Or they shouldn't be" (1883), the children become the center of Susan's limited world.

But, unlike the surviving model women—for instance, Kitty Levin and Madame Ratignolle—and like the other protagonists, Susan does not want her children to be her world's center. Eventually her family becomes "a painful pressure on the surface of her skin, a hand pressing on her brain" (1890), and she begins to feel "caged" (1892) by her role as "hub-of-the-family" (1886). Matthew "did his duty, perfunctorily; [but] she did not even pretend to do hers" (1897). While Susan never seems to be emotionally close to her children, she—like Edna, Anna, Emma, and Lu Anne—grows increasingly distant from them in the year before she commits suicide, physically and emotionally. This is typical of the mother protagonists, but, unlike most of the protagonists, Susan briefly wonders about her husband and children in the moments before she dies:

she had to think about Matthew first. Should she write a letter for the coroner? But what should she say? She would like to leave him with the look on his face she had seen this morning—banal, admittedly, but at least confidently healthy. Well, that was impossible, one did not look like that with a wife dead from suicide. . . . But she decided not to trouble about it, simply not to think about the living. . . . [W]hat did it matter whether he married Phil Hunt or Sophie? Though it ought to be Sophie who was already the mother of those children . . . and what hypocrisy to sit here worrying about the children, when she was going to leave them because she had not got the energy to stay. (1907-08)

Exhausted and vacant, Susan's "body and soul," are no longer Matthew's, but they will soon be in the snake man's full possession.
Of course, Susan thinks about her children—but not enough to compel her to live. Unlike most of the protagonists, Susan does not go to church or express a denominational interest. However, Lessing infuses "To Room 19" with religious imagery, and Susan's visions of the snake/demon/man figure are clearly informed by Christian notions. Indeed, while several of the protagonists are covertly likened to Christ—especially Zenobia—Susan's seduction by the serpent directs us to see her as a metaphor for Eve, and, later, her becoming serpent-like directs us to see her as Evil. Susan violates Christian concepts of womanhood, wifehood, and motherhood, and, by going to her death with and then as a serpent, the text suggests that she pays for her deviations by going to hell.

Furthermore, the story situationally ensures that Susan will die: indeed, even though she uses one of the less lethal suicide methods and her suicidal intent is not clear until the very end of the story, she attempts suicide in one of the most lethal situations of all the protagonists. By convincing Matthew that she is having an affair, he likely thinks Susan intends to live. Until the last two pages of the story, we also imagine the possibility that Susan will get a job, a lover, or leave her family. She thinks she should "learn to be [herself] again, that's all" (1887) and imagines herself at fifty, "blossoming from the root of what she had been twenty years before" (1887). She thinks, "here I am, and if I never saw any of my family again, here I would still be" (1900). Even when she blinks "tears of farewell out of her eyes" (1903) and dedicates her house to Sophie (1907), it may be because she will start a new life elsewhere—which would be, of course, to abandon her family.2

Finally, however, Susan's strong suicidal intent—which she expresses to no one—emerges suddenly at the end of the story. Susan's intent is linked to her motive: she wants to "run away and hide from the sheer effort of the thing" (1906), to "cry with sheer exhaustion" (1906), and she "buys her freedom" (1907) through suicide because she "had not got the energy to stay" (1908). While Susan's motive resembles those of others in her desire for rest and freedom, her exhaustion is emphasized, and there is no sense that she desires interrelational connection. Although Susan uses the less lethal method of gas and commits suicide more slowly
than most of the protagonists and with a method that allows an unusually long
opportunity for her to change her mind after she has initiated her attempt, she clearly
has strong suicide intentions: she knows she will not be disturbed in Room 19, waits
four hours before turning on the gas, and, as the gas takes effect, expresses no
wavering of intent. Because it is not clear exactly when Susan decides to kill herself
and we learn that she will do so only as she implements her effort, her suicide
maintains some sense of impulsiveness, much like that of other protagonists, who,
unlike historical people, commit suicide within moments or hours of deciding to,
rather than after lengthy planning and preparation.

Although Susan gives many indications that she wants to live, her final,
impulsive suicidal movement also emerges from her emotional and physical
progression throughout the story—even from its beginning, with the couple’s
intelligence construct. As Susan becomes emotionally distant and then numb, she
both needs to and is more easily able to escape to Room 19. But Room 19
symbolizes both her allegiance to and her violation of her marital and sex roles.
That is, because it is flat and anonymous, even and empty—and because there Susan
can be these things most—there she embraces and becomes the logical extension of
the marriage’s emotionally-deadening constructs. In Room 19, Susan can, perhaps
more than anywhere else, be the logical reduction of the woman her marriage has
asked her to be.

However, of course, at the same time, Room 19 is a place of rebellion for
Susan because it is her secret and because there she is not distracted and burdened
by her family and sex roles. In this rebellious place, Susan can reject all rules,
emotions, thoughts, expectations, activities, and threats—which is both the room’s
attraction and its trap for her. Further, because the room is for her both an
exacerbation of and rebellion against the marriage’s prescripts, it becomes a doubly
fatal chamber for Susan: it is a place where she can discard all feeling and emotion,
where she can approximate a living death and then die; but it is also a place of
private rebellion, which, on one level, she can most dramatically act out most
through suicide. So, although Susan’s suicide is in many ways surprising and
impulsive. It is also, in other ways, the logical endpoint of her early and then sustained emotional self-deadening.

Susan’s suicide attempt is also facilitated, of course, by her situation—which keeps the hotel clerk and her husband away from her and ensures she will not be found for hours. Because this preclusion of intervention is facilitated by her long-developing situation, constructed on lies, there is no need for a particularly contrived narrative ploy to ensure Susan’s death. However, as Chapter 6 discusses, the outcome of a suicide attempt often depends upon the action or inaction of another, and Matthew not only neglects Susan, by encouraging her affair, he pushes her toward her demon.

While Susan doesn’t explicitly tell anyone about her intentions or her hallucinations, she gives behavioral signs that something is wrong—enough for Matthew to suggest she see a doctor and to have her followed, but nothing more. Indeed, while Susan’s puzzling day trips are bold signs that something is amiss, Matthew expresses no interest in or concern with them until he hires someone to track her one year after they have begun. Although the motives for Matthew’s surveillance are not clear, they seem to involve his desire to justify and legitimize his adulterous relationships, especially his apparently serious one with Phil Hunt. Some of Matthew’s responses actually seem to egg Susan toward suicide: when she tells him that still doesn’t feel free even after "the children are at school and off [her] hands" (1891), he says, "But Susan, what sort of freedom can you possibly want—short of being dead!" (1891). Later, after he hires a detective, she thinks, "Well of course he was right: things couldn’t go on like this. He had put an end to it all simply by sending the detectives after her" (1903). Finally, when Matthew approves of her "affair," she thinks she "would not" (1907), and leaves for her new garden—this place of paradox, a place known for illicit rendezvous, but a place where Susan becomes essentially asexual (except, perhaps, for the arguably sexually-loaded "relationship" she has with the devil). Matthew’s approval of the fabricated affair both strengthens Susan’s desire to reach the end and, through his lack of intervention, provides a clearer path to it.
"To Room 19" begins, "This is a story, I suppose, about a failure in intelligence," and in its first few pages, the narrator repeatedly asserts that the Rawlingses' problems are neither Susan's nor Matthew's, but "in the nature of things" (1883). As Matthew and Susan, to different degrees, suffer from, and rather uncritically accept this "nature of things," Lessing indicts it and the couple, especially Matthew, for accepting, and imposing these mores on their marriage, themselves, and primarily on Susan. But, as Susan continues to be confused by and repress her feelings, as she works harder to abide by these rules of intelligence, Lessing gradually suggests that Matthew has been--and remains--the driving force behind their intelligence mindset, that Susan must expend more and more effort to convince herself of its attractiveness and validity. By the story's end, we can infer that Matthew--as the apparent purveyor of society’s norms--is the impetus behind the marriage's bifurcation of intelligence and emotion, its devotion to intelligence and its disregard for emotion, and that Susan, who berates herself for having feelings and then tries to suppress them, willingly abides by this driving force initially, but eventually, with almost as much will, succumbs to it.

However, while the narrator and implied author extend a fair amount of objective support toward Susan, this text also embraces many of the traditional techniques and qualities of the master narrative. While Susan at first seeks interrelational connection, her pre-death disinterest in heterosexual concerns is more sustained than that of other protagonists. Indeed, she can't imagine being touched by another man (1905), and the thought that she must produce a "Michael Plant" to act as her lover "made her want to cry with sheer exhaustion. Oh no, she had finished with all that. . . . [It] made her want to run away and hide from the sheer effort of the thing" (1906). Indeed, even sex with Matthew seems burdensome now: "good Lord, why make love at all? Why make love with anyone?" (1906). But even as she rejects traditional impositions of female heterosexual desire, as well as Matthew's unfaithful notions of sex, she continues to succumb to Matthew's influence: "Or, if you are going to make love, what does it matter who with?"
(1906-07). While Susan fabricates an affair in order to spare Matthew distress, her lie backfires when she realizes that Matthew actually seems keen on the idea. Finally, she is repulsed by the thought of heterosexual connection: having decided "she could not, and would not" find a lover (1907), she begins her last walk "To Room 19."

Thus, unlike most female suicide protagonists—who, amidst their frustration with their inability to have and maintain interpersonal connection, continue to experience physical and emotional desire—Susan rejects both spiritual and physical connections with children and men. But, Susan's position is multiply dualized: she is both the model woman and the model female suicide protagonist, and yet in one sense or another, she concurrently violates the norms of both the model non-suicidal woman and the model suicide protagonist.

For much of the story, Susan appears to be the model woman, the model wife and mother. Even as she begins to crumble because of the effects of these roles, she maintains the fragmentation that maintains her appearance of the model woman, but that also increasingly characterizes her as the model female suicide protagonist—that is, the fragmented woman who commits suicide in the masternarrative, not the woman who survives. Then, because of her disinterest in Matthew, she rejects the compulsory heterosexual and maternal norms imposed on women within marriage. But, at the same time that her heterosexual interest disappears, she is understood by her husband to be further violating the norms of married women by committing sexual infidelity—even though she never actually does so. And, of course, it is because of women's gender and marital norms to begin with—the same norms that allow Matthew and other male partners to readily commit adultery and abandon their female partners—that Susan wants to be alone, that she abandons all interrelational efforts, all prescribed essence of femaleness and femininity at the same time that she both abides by and flouts the prescribed essences of the female suicide masternarrative's suicidal and non-suicidal characters.

So, it is fitting and telling that, perhaps more strongly than any other text, "To Room 19" explicitly links Susan with the demon, not simply as victim, but as
demon herself. At first Susan is covertly associated with the snake. When Susan first starts feeling unhappy, she glimpses the brown river from the garden, and, reluctant to go into the house, is "[driven] . . . into the garden. . . . But she was filled with tension, like a panic: as if an enemy was in the garden with her" (1887, 1888, 1889). She continues to be likened to a serpent:

She did not once break down into irritation during these holidays, but it was like living out a prison sentence, and when the children went back to school, she sat on a white stone seat near the flowing river, and she thought: It is not even a year since the twins went to school, since they were off my hands (What on earth did I think I meant when I used that stupid phrase?). (1890)

Of course, as Susan becomes increasingly non-mothering with her children, she becomes increasingly demonized as a serpent. Gradually, the house garden is linked to a demon who is a snake and a man: in the garden, she would "see nothing but her devil, who lifted inhuman eyes at her from where he leaned negligently on a rock, switching at his ugly yellow boots with a leafy twig" (1897).

First, Susan sees the demon as a man’s face, and she, knowing it follows her, fears it and the garden. But the demon capitalizes on Susan’s unhappiness, isolation, and weakening ego-boundaries. As she begins to suffer and divest from the intelligent marriage, the demon seduces her toward the garden, which becomes a place of solace for her, a place she co-inhabits with the garden snake. Indeed, while Susan is sexually faithful to Matthew, she fabricates an affair in order to reassure Matthew, and she is gradually seduced by this demon away from her family, to the room, and to death. Thus, she becomes demon-like in and through this metaphoric act of infidelity, which continues to approximate her with the protagonists who commit actual adultery.

Gradually, Susan becomes increasingly snakelike, her hair hissing as she brushes it (1898, 1902), her eyes gazing at the river, her wish to be first in the Rawlingses’ yard garden, then in the hotel’s garden, with its green chair, bedspread, and curtains. When she, still at the house, blinks "tears of farewell," she feels at peace and knows "The devils that had haunted the house, the garden, were not there; but she knew it was because her soul was in Room 19. . . . [S]he was not really here

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at all" (1904). Moreover, as Susan becomes more comfortable with the snake, she becomes more comfortable with Room 19, which increasingly takes on the ambiance of a jungle: Room 19 is decorated in green, and the hotel's "façade was a faded shiny yellow, like unhealthy skin" (1899)—like the snake skin. While the demon has seduced her to Room 19 and to death—the demon being, of course, her interrelational deviance—during her last visit to Room 19, she thinks, "The demons were not here. They had gone forever, because she was buying her freedom from them" (1907). That is, Susan can only escape from her interrelational and heterosexual impositions and from the repercussions of her deviance from them by death. As such, death is Susan's way to freedom and her punishment for it. Indeed, it is clear that Susan's freedom and its costs are not good things, that even the freedom is demonized and sin-ridden: like a serpent, Susan spends her last four hours:

delightfully . . . letting herself slide gently, gently, to the edge of the river. Then, with hardly a break in her consciousness, she got up, pushed the thin rug against the door . . . She lay on her back on the green satin cover . . . She was quite content lying there, listening to the faint soft hiss of the gas that poured into the room, enter her lungs, into her brain, as she drifted off into the dark river. (1908)

The Narrative Voice of Death

"To Room 19"'s accommodations of the female suicide masternarrative's injunctions, of course, send Susan off to her death, and the symbolic associations with Susan inherently—as much as Lessing might wanted to have resist this—links Susan with not simply the effects of evil, but with the forces of evil as exhibited in deviant women. Susan's reticence about her distress—including that fatal reticence produced by her first-attempt completion—precludes the intervention of other characters. Susan's fatal first attempt denies Susan the possibility of help, change, happiness, and compassion, and it compels two ends—hers and the narrative's. This, as we will see, not only befits the narrative progression of "To Room 19" in relation to voice as well as to character and theme, it also honors a masternarrative that compels Lessing's story to end with Susan's suicide. Of course, by completing
suicide with her first attempt, Susan exemplifies the standard protagonist of the female suicide masternarrative and conflicts with real female suicide trends. Because Susan’s first attempt completion contrasts so strikingly with real women’s predominantly non-fatal suicide behavior, it suggests both her determination to commit suicide and the overdetermining effects of the masternarrative’s compulsion for her to do so.

"To Room 19"’s development of plot and character is also augmented by its progression of narrative voice. Throughout the first two pages of the story, the narrator narrates in the third person, heterodiegetic style. She primarily uses the pronoun "they," and she remains positioned at the focal points shared by Susan and Matthew. As we learn about what this couple believes and does together, the narrative voice emphasizes their unity. However, concurrent with other revelations that Susan and Matthew aren’t as mutually-determined as they believe they are and as they represent themselves to be, there is a gradual change in narrative voice. The narrator begins to use the indefinite pronoun, "one," which could refer to Susan, Matthew, the narrator—to anyone—and on the fifth page the narrator slips into Susan’s focal point through her parenthetical interpolation of Susan’s direct, first person, untagged thought: "(Why did I say sundown?)" (1885). Within a couple of paragraphs, the narrator aligns herself more consistently with Susan’s perspective: she narrates Susan’s views and visions, from within Susan’s physical position, frequently using indirect, tagged thought. When the narrator drops most of the tags and relies increasingly on direct, untagged thought, she is, as much as she can be, aligned with Susan’s perspective. Although there are occasional shifts in voice and focalization--such as interpolations of dialogue and of third person indirect thought (plural and singular)--by the fifth page, the narrator has aligned herself primarily with Susan, and she pretty consistently sustains this alignment until Susan’s silence is almost requisitely accompanied by the narrator’s.

However, in many ways the narrator is as or more loyal to the story’s and the masternarrative’s effects than to Susan’s focalization points. Even though the narrator intermittently exercises privileges of third person narration--which enable
her to provide more insight to Matthew's view than she elects to—she rarely utilizes these narrative resources. On the other hand, while her close alignment with Susan enables the narrator to reliably inform us about Susan's hallucinations and machinations, she also strategically withholds any information specific to Susan's desire, thoughts, or intention to commit suicide. Even we, whom the narrator makes privy to much of what Susan withholds from others, are not sure that she is considering suicide until the end of the narrative. Although the narrative's increased emphasis on snakes, gas, and the color green promotes an increasingly ominous sense of death and decay, we are only slightly more knowledgeable about Susan's actual intentions than Matthew is. Furthermore, if the narrative is to honor the progression of its own tightening loyalty of form and voice, it—with its and our alignment with Susan's perspective—must be curtailed just before Susan dies, just before the narrative irretrievably writes her away.

The forward-moving plot of "To Room 19" correlates with its forward-moving story and voice, which are chronologically correlated with the lives and voices as they are lived and "spoken" in the narrative world. The narrative deviates from this chronology only four times. In a narrative that spans thirteen years of story-time and that chronicles the mental deterioration of the main character, whose voice is also closely aligned with the narrator's, "To Room 19" offers remarkably few digressions to the past or imaginings of the future. This narrative technique, with its tight alignment of plot and perspective, honors the story's chronology and offers no flashforwards or flashbacks that might counter the effects of the culmination of this markedly linear, forward-moving plot. Indeed, the narrator further delays our understanding that Susan will commit suicide by waiting until Susan is in Room 19 to tell us that Susan has dedicated her house to Sophie.

The suspense produced by this delay is facilitated by the narrative's absence of a suicide note: although the integrity of "To Room 19"'s linear plot would have been maintained had we witnessed Susan writing a note or had the narrative included the discovery of a suicide note after Susan's death, the latter of these linear plot elements would have resulted in an abrupt change in focal point/perspective/voice,
and both would have diminished the striking impact of the narrative’s end. Instead, the absence of a note concurs with the narrator’s opportunistic focalizations, and it ensures that the surviving Rawlingses will remain ignorant about Susan’s conditions and motives. This combined effect of story and plot precludes the possibility of our seeing the results of Susan’s death in the narrative world—the representation of her corpse or the reaction, presumably grief, of her survivors. Furthermore, the lack of a note reflects and assists Susan’s own attempts to deflect criticism from Matthew within the narrative world, where she not only protects him from knowledge about her decline, but also from any responsibility for it.

This is not to suggest Susan’s suicide is fully or minimally Matthew’s fault. Indeed, while Lessing makes Matthew’s inadvertent complicity in Susan’s death relatively clear, she also shows, through Susan’s eyes, how Matthew benefits from the marriage’s parameters. Nevertheless, these other plot structures augment Susan’s approach and invite exculpation of Matthew within the narrative world. Furthermore, while Susan’s interpretations of Matthew may be hopeful projections and not entirely reliable, her recollections of how he is presumably hurt by the marriage mores—for instance, his gaunt, sad face and his harried look—promote, at least for me, some compassion for Matthew, even as it is clear that his philosophy and lifestyle have contributed substantially to Susan’s decline and demise.

Susan, like many of the protagonists, dies at or just after the narrative end, with the last lines of "To Room 19" reporting the gas pouring into her lungs and brain as—like a snake—"she drifted off into the dark river" (1908). And, because the narrative stops just before Susan does, it exemplifies Susan’s own nothingness after death and suggests that her death produces a larger kind of nothingness—which, for her, it does, and which is consistent with the narrative’s alignment of voice and plot. But "To Room 19" doesn’t bury Susan: her corpse, the symbol of her misery and of our loss, is unrepresented, even unacknowledged, in its story and plot. Thus, the narrative intercepts any representation of the emptiness others might experience because of her death. In this way, the narrative, as it exemplifies and promotes the sense of emptiness and nothingness for which Susan presumably and at least
partially had hoped, also diminishes or precludes our sense of whatever emptiness
Susan’s death should produce or actually produces in her survivors--the same
emptiness that she tries to diminish for others and embrace for herself, that she
desires and fears. At the same time that the narrative ensures that Susan’s misery
and corpse will be unseen and unburied in the narrative world, it also ensures that
they will go unrepresented or commented upon in the narrative itself through the
heterodiegetic narrator. Thus, the very narrative that has driven us to this end also
depreves us from fully experiencing it, diverts our attention away from it, and
diminishes our sense of it and its impact. In this way, "To Room 19''s alignment of
cracter, form, and narrative voice curtails its own existence as a narrative and
erases the products of its own techniques, such that Susan’s disappearing act, her
dying for the end, is imminently complete, both in her world and in ours. But, at
the same time, the end of this story, through the masternarrative’s recursive and
cumulative effect, further compels the masternarrative, tying "To Room 19''s
apparently absolute "end" to the beginning and ending of itself and of other female
suicide narratives--befitting the narrator’s comment that Susan’s and Matthew’s "life
seemed to be like a snake biting its tail" (1882).

Through "To Room 19''s linear representation of Susan’s life and voice, and
through its quick, clean truncation of her, these events and structures, direct
facilitators of the death-end, ensure that the reasons and responsibility for Susan’s
death will lie, within the narrative world, solely and silently with her, and that the
effects of her death within that world will remain unrepresented. In this way, voice,
structure, and character are unified--as they could be only had the narrative ended
with Susan’s unnoted death. While, in one way, "To Room 19" honors Susan by
existing for and through her, and through our reading and re-reading of her death, by
suggesting that without Susan, there is no story, that she is the essence of and the
reason for it, these same techniques also concur with, collaborate with, and promote
Susan’s death. This neat narrative ensures its own coherence, its own return to
stability, and, as it plays its death march, ensures its own quick, chilling, and
absolute end with Susan’s--an end that, in its allegiance to its masternarrative and
regardless of all that Lessing does to problematize Susan's suicide, also condones her death. As such, Susan and "To Room 19" become, aside from all of their distinctions, two more offerings in support of the female suicide master narrative.
NOTES

1. Because Lessing and her implied author are so closely aligned, I will refer to them interchangeably.

2. We are, however, given two clues that Susan may die. First, Susan, when recalling the first time she and Matthew slept together, refers to "when Matthew and I first when [sic] to bed with each other that afternoon whose delight even now (like a very long shadow at sundown) lays a long, wandlike finger over us. (Why did I say sundown?)" (1885). And, later, the narrator says it is "As if the essential Susan were in abeyance, as if she were in cold storage"--which, of course, recalls the image of a corpse (1887).

3. This occurs when Susan recalls when she and Matthew joked about maintaining their fidelity (1884) and when they made love for the first time (1885); when she recalls what was like at twenty-eight and imagines what she will be like at fifty "blossoming from the root of what she had been twenty years before" (1887); when she briefly recalls how she "signed herself over" to other people when she becomes pregnant (1887); and when, from the restaurant she recalls not looking back when she leaves her house and "silently [dedicates] it to Sophie" (1907).
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Narrative Ambivalences, Consequences, and Ethics

And she bowed and cursed to the man who reached and offered her his hand and led her down to the long white car that went past the crowd.

"The Ballad of Lucy Jordan"

The Individual and the Collective

While the female suicide masternarrative emerges from and is revealed in the shared trends of a variety of texts, its texts are also informed by a variety of dualities and ambivalences that, regardless of their potential implications for contagion, also speak to larger cultural anxieties regarding women, especially their desire, will, and how they might best serve and preserve patriarchal norms. As noted earlier, these dualities have implications for our interpretations of the individual texts' characters, themes, and structures. But, when we expand our view from considerations of the texts' individual dynamics to their more collective cultural contributions, questions emerge regarding the masternarrative's larger consequences, liabilities, and effects; the concept of narrative reliability and liability; the cultural implications of the masternarrative's power dynamics; the ideological and rhetorical implications of its structure; and its intersections of its aesthetics and ethics. Finally, the masternarrative is characterized by a variety of dualities as it concurrently critiques and curtails, but also praises and promotes female suicide. As Margaret Higonnet says, "Suicide, like woman in truth, is both fetish and taboo. A
symbolic gesture, it is doubly so for women who inscribe on their own bodies cultural reflections and projections, affirmation and negation" (68). Given the many dualities particularly associated with female suicide, perhaps it is time for us, like Lucy Jordan, to "bow and curse" to this master "who [offers us] his hand," to the "masters" who write these texts, especially the cultural forces that support the masternarrative.

Many of the texts' competing tensions are located at the nexus of their individual and collective effects. Several of the texts in this corpus—many of them canonized—have received decades of accolades, and the texts are often individually beautiful, engaging, sometimes even compassionate works that offer convincing critiques of the plight of women, especially the plight produced when their main and often only source of validation—heterosexual connection—falters. Indeed, some of the implied authors—the constructed, fictional personas of the author presented in the text by the historical author—express compassion and admiration for the protagonists. For instance, the implied authors' tones toward Herminia, Edna, Thelma, Louise, and Susan suggest that women's positions are difficult, even unjust. Indeed, in On Moral Fiction, John Gardner cites Anna Karenina as an example of "moral" art, of art which, "wherever possible . . . holds up models of decent behavior; for example, . . . characters whose basic goodness and struggle against confusion, error, and evil . . . give firm intellectual and emotional support to our own struggle" (106).

Anna Karenina does, indeed, offer us some of the most developed and moral characters in literature. As Gardner also says, "all true works of art can exert their civilizing influence century after century, long after the cultures that produced them have decayed," and perhaps fictional female suicide narratives have exerted a certain "civilizing influence" on suicide (105). Indeed, the social stigma of suicide has decreased and the compassion for those at risk for it has increased—even with the judgments noted in Chapter 6—at the same time that the technological advancements of recent centuries have made suicide narratives increasingly available, popularized, and lengthy, especially through the development of the novel and film. However, these texts have also exerted another kind of "civilizing influence" on culture and on
their consumers: while *Anna Karenina* is not an immoral text, it joins a large corpus of fictional female suicide narratives that detrimentally "civilizes" women by codifying, for "century after century," women's suicide in the face of interrelational rupture. Thus, although some of the texts powerfully illustrate the devastation sometimes caused by interpersonal loss, through their repetition of character, theme, plot, and structure, they also help the masternarrative purvey destructive messages that, then, abet the larger systems that detrimentally engender women and men. As these texts augment the general force of fiction and narrative with the power of suicide suggestion, they, at their least, deploy disturbing behavior models for women, and, at their worst, they become complicit in the promotion of female suicide.

**Reconsidering Reliability**

To assign or even to speak of narrative "complicity" or "liability" requires one to step onto a particularly risky interpretive limb, to take a position that is uncomfortable, even passé. Perhaps this position is especially precarious, given that it will forward a critique of a misogynistic, even gynicidal masternarrative that has been tolerated, even embraced, by the cultural forces that have soundly supported its development. But, given the potentially fatal dynamics of suicide and the previously unproblematized strength of the female suicide masternarrative, it seems particularly important to take this interpretive step—a step that also enriches our general understanding of narrative theory and literary ethics. In order to address the female suicide masternarrative's complicity in supporting detrimental gender mechanisms, I'll need first to discuss traditional notions of reliability and introduce a new concept in relation to reliability: *textual*, or *narrative reliability*.

Questions about reliability in narrative have been traditionally understood in relation to narrator reliability, or to the narrator's relationship to the implied author of any particular text. A defining question regarding narrator reliability is, "How does this text's narrator share or diverge from its implied author's knowledge, experience, expectations, beliefs, opinions, interpretations, and values?"
Approaching this question in steps, we might first consider factual concerns, or the question, "Is this narrator telling the 'truth' as understood by readers and by the implied author?" Then, we might address concerns of interpretation, or the question, "Do the narrator's interpretations concur with the readers' and implied author's interpretations?" And, finally, we might consider the judgments suggested by the question, "Do this narrator's reports, interpretations, and, then, judgments concur with the implied author's?" These are important—and often unsung, even neglected—interpretive questions for any text. Although texts and authors often provide readers with relatively clear signals with which to determine a narrator's factual reliability, it is more difficult—sometimes extremely difficult—to determine the relationship between the narrator and the implied author because the narrator's and especially the implied author's voices, interpretations, and judgments may be obscure, even indeterminate.

While literary texts have been interpreted in relation to questions about narrator reliability, the concept of masternarrative—as described in this dissertation (that is, not Fredric Jameson's master narrative, Jean-François Lyotard's grand narratives, or Peter Brooks's master plots)—invites, even compels us to extend notions of "reliability" from the traditional rhetorical and structuralist concepts of narrator reliability to considerations about a new kind of reliability, to the collective reliability of narratives and masternarratives—that is, to narrative or textual reliability. Like the interpretation of narrator reliability, expositions about narrative reliability would explore issues of fact, interpretation, and judgment. And, while textual reliability or unreliability can emerge in any one text and can illuminate the larger culture from which that text emerges, perhaps the most illuminating reliabilities or unreliabilities are those that emerge in relation to masternarratives—which, by definition, offer sustained, chronic expressions of meaning. Lest I be accused of exaggerating the epistemologically constructing potential of this masternarrative, recall Barbara Gates's statement about Victorian England, during which, "For the most part, fictions about women and suicide became more prevalent and seemed more credible than did facts" (125).
As earlier chapters show, the female suicide master-narrative repeatedly distorts and reflects more historical considerations of and experiences with female suicide through character, theme, and action. While some of the texts offer more compassion than others, the master-narrative's collective representations, interpretations, and judgments of female suicide is both reliable and unreliable in complicated and disturbing ways—for instance, in its disproportionate contributions to female suicide in fiction, in its protagonists' characters and actions, and in its emphasis on the role of inter-relational distress in female suicide.

Before I discuss how the unreliabilities of this particular master-narrative simultaneously invite a consideration of liabilities and ethics, let me devote more attention to general concepts about narrative reliability. The concept of the master-narrative asks us to consider not simply the relation of individual narratives to any particular master-narrative (that is, whether one text fully shares the values of its master-narrative), but the values (overt or covert) embraced by the master-narrative and their relation to the values of the societies and cultures from which the master-narrative emerges (or, the degree to which the master-narrative reliably or unreliably reflects the shared values of that culture). And, because master-narratives can only emerge with the support of at least some segment of society, they will, by definition, reliably reflect the values—covert or overt—of at least, a segment of society, if not the society at large.

This further complicates the notion, then, of narrative reliability because, while any master-narrative may or may not be factually aligned with the historical trends of its primary subject or action, the master-narrative's value systems may be either covertly or overtly divergent from or reflective of its culture's or cultures' covert or overt (or both, often competing) beliefs and values. For instance, while any one particular text in the female suicide master-narrative may seem to reflect some trends in female suicide, when we consider the larger use of suicide in fiction and the master-narrative's divergence from more sustained, global historical trends, the collective of fictional female suicide narratives becomes increasingly unreliable.
on the "factual" level—or, in the degree to which its repeated actions diverge from the larger historical context of suicide.

However, while the female suicide masternarrative's deflections from some behaviors of nonfictional female suicide enables us to characterize it as a partly unreliable representation of its larger culture or population, its reflections of some of the characteristics associated with historical suicide also enable us to characterize it as a partly reliable representation of, at least, the possible threat posed by interrelational distress for any particular individual. Further, the masternarrative's interpretations of and judgments toward particular female roles and suicide also reflect the overt elements of women's sex role socialization, as well as the covert, subversive embrace of female suicide under particular conditions. In this way, the female suicide masternarrative is both a contributor to and a reflection of the same gender norms of its larger culture—or, in this case, cultures. Even though this masternarrative offers a quantifiably unreliable or skewed representation of female suicide in fiction, it offers a fairly reliable reflection of the culture's use, interpretation, and even covert promotion of both female interrelational distress and female suicide.

This particular example of narrative reliability, then, inverts typical trends regarding narrator reliability. That is, typically, if a narrator's factual understanding of a story diverges from the implied author's factual understanding of it, the narrator's interpretation and judgments of the events in the story are likely to also diverge from the implied author's (although, inversely, it is not true that if a narrator shares the implied author's factual understandings, he or she will necessarily share the implied author's interpretations or judgments of the facts and events). Further, while we may debate any particular narrator's reliability or unreliability, the hermeneutic tools with which we participate in that debate are predominantly located in the text. However, the tools with which we approach a debate of any implied author's reliability are less static because, if the debate is possible, it relies on the changing historical and biographical indicators of the author's position. But, the author of any masternarrative is Culture, and, because Culture is endless and
additional texts will always appear, continual opportunity exists for the maintenance or revision of any masternarrative.

For instance, consider the challenges to the female suicide masternarrative offered by Heathers and The Virgin Suicides, as discussed in Chapter 3. And, because any masternarrative is always being written—perhaps maintained, challenged, or changed—by new texts, any masternarrative has no end. Once a masternarrative emerges, it cannot simply go away. So, any masternarrative will have no absolute death or closure, but the perpetual potential for alteration and revision, for a kind of narrative immortality—like the immortality that characterizes the female suicide protagonists, narratives, and masternarrative. Lest we be reassured by the palliating potential of this opportunity for constant correction, let us recall that masternarratives can only emerge from and be constructed by already existing, firmly-grounded narrative trends. They can be progressively changed and redirected, but the fodder for and the existence of a past masternarrative cannot be recursively erased. So, while the female suicide masternarrative in one way undermines its own linearity, in another way, with any masternarrative—as with any nonfictional suicide—there is no going back.

Considering Liability

While the masternarrative of female suicide embraces distortions of fact that maintain gender roles, this embrace, in conjunction with the general threat of suicide contagion and behavior modeling may strengthen these unreliable representations, may help them become increasingly reliable representations of women and suicide. That is, with perhaps a particular strength obtained though its formulaic repetitions, this masternarrative invites modeling, which, should the invitation be accepted, increases the incidence of nonfictional female suicide—which will increase the degree to which the masternarrative is reliable. In this way, this masternarrative—as long as it exists—again becomes a recurring, recursive, even endless promoter of women's myths and deaths. This circular dynamic, of course, is concomitant with the circularity that characterizes other elements of these texts, and through it the
masternarrative not only strengthens its myth-making potential, it also threatens to become self-fulfillingly prophetic, to, with increasing force, compel women to take its path.

Furthermore, because of the phenomenon of suicide contagion, masternarrative’s issues of reliability are compellingly linked to those of liability—more specifically, to the masternarrative’s and its texts’ however unintentional or unconscious complicity in providing suicide models and in inviting suicide contagion. Like the concept of reliability, questions about liability can be considered in relation to individual texts and authors, as well as to larger cultural producers and productions—such as the masternarrative and the forces that compel it. However, as I show in Chapter 7 with my reading of Doris Lessing’s "To Room 19," a text or a masternarrative may be liable regardless of its real author’s or even its implied author’s position on the issue at hand.

Before I continue to discuss liability in relation to masternarratives, let me make a clear distinction between intentionality, reliability, and liability. If evident, the implied author’s values will be present within a text, but even to attempt to identify authorial intention requires us to consider historical and biographical materials associated with the author. If we can identify and compare the beliefs and values of the implied author and the author, we can determine whether or not the author and the constructed figure of the implied author share beliefs, values, knowledge, experience, and so forth. If these positions are shared, then the narrative is told by a reliable implied author. While it may be impossible to determine any author’s relationship to his or her work, the endeavor may be illuminating; I have not embarked on it here only because of time constraints.

However, I imagine that some of the implied authors and the authors of the female suicide individual texts may not share the values supported by the female suicide masternarrative. Further, in the same way that a narrator may be unreliable or liable in many ways, but also liable for any particular moral issue at hand, the implied authors of any particular text may be reliable or unreliable in relation to the values of a masternarrative. For instance, although Lessing does not consciously
agree with the masternarrative's rhetorics or positions. She bolsters the larger unreliability of the masternarrative. That is, while complicity and liability are often associated with authorial intention, they are not necessarily so; regardless of an author's intention (presumed or claimed), a text can be unreliable or liable in various ways, especially when it contributes to a masternarrative's dynamics and, thus, to the larger cultural systems that support that masternarrative. In this way, once issues of reliability and liability emerge in the collective effect of the texts, they will inherently turn back on and taint individual narratives with difficulty, even complicity. So, once we recognize the dynamic that supports the masternarrative, it is difficult to say of one of the textual promulgators of that dynamic, "yeah, but this novel is okay."

But, this is not to say that any particular author intentionally promulgates or even shares the values of the masternarrative that informs that author's work. Indeed, this disjuncture further illustrates the breadth and strength of the masternarrative and its ideological effects on allegedly independent texts and authors. While the individual implied authors of some of the texts in this corpus clearly do not "agree" with--and some clearly oppose--the notion that women should die for the preservation of particular sex-roles, implied and real authorial efforts and tones may be undermined by the heavy hand of the masternarrative such that, even as some individual authors powerfully illustrate the repercussions of the masternarrative's myths, they are also affected by and become complicit in--however unknowingly and unintentionally--the masternarrative's rhetorical systems and the larger cultural systems that promote female suicide.

In the masternarrative's informing control of authors, finally, authors themselves become, like the protagonists they write, informed by a larger presence that undermines their authorial self-determination. This predetermination of texts and the potential undermining of authorial intent, of course, then aligns authors with the predetermined protagonists. For instance, much like Lucy Jordan—who believes or imagines she is being driven to Paris, but who is being driven to death—authors may believe they are writing one book, when they also are, given the larger narrative
and cultural contexts, writing, with that very same text, another book. And, in the same way that any one protagonist's suicide might appear to be an act of rebellion and individuation (which I will discuss again shortly), the repetitive acts of suicide, in the context of the masternarrative, become "copycat" acts of subversion and submission. In this split position of being a mastering, but also a mastered, writer, the authors and the texts become aligned with Herminia's novel in *The Woman Who Did*. A *Spectator* critic says of the novel: "the book is mistaken; the book is poisonous; the book is morbid; the book is calculated to do irremediable mischief; but in spite of all that, the book is a book of undeniably and sadly misplaced genius" (143). Indeed, the critique of Herminia's novel turns onto the individual texts of the masternarrative, texts that are the works of gifted writers, but that, as they gain an empowered critical mass, are also mistaken, poisonous, and perhaps doing irremediable, morbid "mischief" to notions of female suicide and to women.

These considerations of individual and collective reliability and liability, of narrative consequence and ethics, also show how narratological and ideological theories can be synergistic, rather than mutually exclusive. Seymour Chatman, a structuralist and narratologist, says:

> It is enough to distinguish the narrative from the real-life case by adding 'narrative' or 'fictive' to remind us that we are not dealing with psychological realities but artistic constructs, yet that we understand these constructs through highly coded psychological information that we have picked up in ordinary living, including our experiences with art. (126)

Although Chatman recognizes the sophisticated coding we bring to fiction, his claim partly dismisses the complexity of the interconnections inherent in any relationship between art and "reality." Fictional female suicide narratives are not and do not purport to be and should not be equated with memoirs, but they complicate traditional understandings of the relationship between fiction and non-fiction in a variety of ways. I am generally uncomfortable with the palliative platitude, "it's just a story," and one of the most compelling, dualistic mergings in female suicide texts involves their intersections of fictional and nonfictional constructs. Sometimes, as noted in Chapter 3, these texts collapse the distinctions between the fictional and
nonfictional by attending to inter- and extratextualities. Further, as sociologists continue to show us, we do, indeed, understand the constructs of suicide "through highly coded psychological information that we have picked up in ordinary living, including our experiences with art" (emphasis added Chatman 126)—which imbues suicide narratives with particularly threatening allegorical power and consequences. Indeed, because the "artistic constructs" of suicide are informed by and informing of important psychological and physical realities—including the institutionalized trajectories of knowledge and learning, it is, clearly, no longer enough to simply and comprehensively define, understand, and accept female suicide narratives as "fictive"—or, as "just stories."

While the title of John Gardner's article "Death by Art: 'Some Men Kill You with a Six-gun, Some Men with a Pen'' metaphorically refers to the power of fiction, this word play becomes particularly "loaded" in regard to suicide narratives because of the phenomenon of suicide contagion. Suicidology had just begun to more closely examine this phenomenon in the years just before Gardner's 1977 essay, and it was likely that he was unfamiliar with—and that some contemporary writers may also be unfamiliar with—the strength of this phenomenon. By 1993, Jeffrey Eugenide's narrators of The Virgin Suicides manifests familiarity with contagion: his narrators are unusual because they explicitly question their own and others' reliability and because they—and the novel—expose, parody, and judge the media's and popular culture's role in promoting suicide through particular characters and events. But these narrators also inadvertently comment on the larger liability of suicide after they quote the lyrics of a song by one of Lux's reportedly favorite groups: "Virgin suicide/What was that she cried? No use in stayin'/On this holocaust ride/She gave me her cherry/She's my virgin suicide." Rather than criticizing the band Cruel Crux for its lyrics, the boys—who are clearly, throughout the novel, even as men, trying to understand their own roles in the suicides—say, "The song certainly ties in nicely with the notion that a dark force beset the girls, some monolithic evil we weren't responsible for" (176).
Although the female suicide masternarrative has the perpetual potential for future revision and is, therefore, not absolutely monolithic, the narrators' comment in *The Virgin Suicides* describes the magnitude of the forces behind the female suicide masternarrative, especially the gendering forces for women, as well as the difficulty in identifying any one supporting force of these myths. Indeed, the narrators do not clearly identify this "monolithic evil," but, in relation to the female suicide masternarrative, it is the confluence of cultural anxieties about female desire and power; of subversive, even gynicidal values aiming to contain that desire and power; of the capitalization of suicide texts and modeling; and of the tolerance of destructive models, especially when they are directed at women, especially "deviant" women. Moreover, Eugenides appears to be aware that something bigger than the individual texts or authors is the driving force behind the masternarrative's embrace of female suicide, and he appears to try to resist this force through the countering effort of his anti-masternarrative text—or what we might call his counter-narrative text. Finally, however, it is both easier and more difficult to allocate the liability for these texts to a larger cultural condition, rather than to any particular author or text itself—that is, to indict everyone and no one. In other words, because the texts' effects occur only relatively covertly, they are difficult to identify, and because they only occur collectively, they can be more fully attributed to a larger, ubiquitous, and rather elusive force, rather than to any one, contained force, including the authors who produce these texts.

**Fettered Freedom Fighters**

While several of the protagonists express some vague or even more pointed awareness of the force of the masternarrative and its compunctions (as discussed in Chapter 3), in many ways, the protagonists are also singular freedom fighters for women: Alan Merrick tells his father that Herminia "lives for nothing else but the emancipation of women" (96), and, indeed, Herminia lives most of her life in an effort to "free" women. But Herminia's empowerment-through-emancipation is always a conflicted empowerment—and the conflict is strikingly revealed in her
quick willingness to commit suicide so Dolly will feel free to marry. While the ambiguity of the freedom-fighter conflict is often overlooked, Judith Messick notes the ambiguity of Constance Ring's character:

Constance's suicide, taken with her feminist pronouncements, troubled initial reviewers of the novel, who looked for a single message and could not find one. Amalie Skram, like her heroine, sends contradictory messages. . . . In Constance Ring, anger is not hidden or displaced as it is in so many nineteenth-century novels about women and marriage. . . . In the openness of her anger and the transparency of her protest, Amalie Skram is an important voice in the literature of women's empowerment. (302)

Messick is correct to note Constance's unusual expressiveness during her marital disillusionments, but Constance is not empowered by these expressions. Indeed, they result in silencing reprimands from others, in her own self-silencing, her self-denial in order to abide by traditional female roles, and in her agreement to remain unhappily married to Ring. Thus, Constance succumbs to the same interrelational constructs that kill the masternarrative's other protagonists. Although Amalie Skram, indeed, offers an important critique of female restrictions, Constance's very limited "female empowerment" is also sabotaged by her position in the masternarrative and by, of course, her suicide.

Indeed, as Herminia herself concedes, "it is hard to be a free soul in an enslaved community. No unit can wholly sever itself from the social organism of which it is a corpuscle" (178). This, as noted earlier, is why Herminia leaves Girton school and its dogmatic teachings, but Herminia, finally, could not "wholly sever" herself from her female role, and she, too, succumbs to the only female emancipation allowed by this particular masternarrative: even Herminia must die to emancipate her daughter for marriage. In this masternarrative, it is not just that female freedom can only be found in death, but that female freedom itself is mortal: As Lu Anne says, "Poor Edna gets a sight of herself, she explodes, crashes, burns. . . . Sees all that freedom, that great black immensity of righteous freedom and swoons, Oh My. And dies" (135). Finally, as Lu Anne says, at least for the masternarrative's female protagonists, "Oh, baby, . . . there ain't no free" (231).
Nevertheless, the texts repeatedly portray female suicide as a perceived and as a real route to freedom, peace, and escape, and especially as a mode of self-determined rebellion (see Chapter 6). Like seriously suicidal women, many of the protagonists predominantly want to escape from their lives and see suicide as "death liberations" (Neuringer and Lettieri 81, 86). The fictional suicides are perceived and represented as acts of freedom that allegedly accompany the protagonists' unfettering rejection of and departure from female roles, the ultimate acts of rebellion against institutions and establishments, but empowerment is identified with female suicide in several cultures. For instance, Dorothy Ayers Counts reports that studies from "West New Britain, and data from other Oceanic, African, and South American societies, suggest that suicides may be a culturally constructed way in which a powerless woman may avenge herself on her tormentor" (1987 202). Although important Euro-American norms—such as religious and parenting norms—position themselves against suicide, female suicide's at least partially positive definition in Western culture is suggested by the cheer expelled from the large metropolitan audience surrounding me as Thelma and Louise drove into the canyon. Western female suicide may not be as overtly sanctioned as the suicides of women in some non-Western cultures, but it is sufficiently, albeit covertly, positively-defined so that Thelma and Louise received ample praise for being a feminist film.

To further complicate the dual position of female suicide, women's suicidal behavior is also associated with helplessness, collapse, and weakness—with what I have called normatized characteristics: pathological, unhealthy characteristics that are associated with standard women's sex-role socializations. Thus, the act of female suicide is not only the ultimate embrace of female helplessness, but also the ultimate gesture of female strength, focus, and determination—of "death liberation" for real and fictional women. But, in its repetitions, the masternarrative subjugates characters, texts, and authors, and it undermines the efficacy of its own rebellion and liberation so that, while these narratives repeatedly suggest that the only powerful woman is a dead one, ultimately, the self-determination assumed in the act of suicide is undermined: each individual "decision" to commit suicide—which is frequently
lauded as an act of empowerment—actually exemplifies the protagonist's disempowered position both within her "individual" narrative and within the larger constructs of a powerfully prescriptive masternarrative.

Thus, even though some societal norms define suicide as a transgressive act and women are especially socialized not to transgress, the masternarrative's individual texts present this transgression as praiseworthy, and the masternarrative normatizes suicide, such that it and its individual texts positively define female suicide by embracing, but also by sabotaging, the transgressive nature of female suicide. Furthermore, if freedom is only accessible to these protagonists through death, and if the masternarrative undermines their deaths in its individual and collective rhetorics (as discussed in Chapter 6), then they do not fully die and can never obtain that mythical freedom promised by death. In this way, their death "option" can also never be truly rebellious because it is the masternarrative's prescribed option, so that female suicide, which is represented as the ultimate rebellion, actually maintains the masternarrative's status quo and the culture's status quo by supporting the reigning model—or ideal—woman (such as Kitty Levin or Madame Ratignolle) by rewarding her with life, and by constructing a "model"—as well as molded—deviant woman, and by then purging her from texts and communities.

While these texts are about women and purport to be narrating—or, in a sense, speaking for—women, they, of course, also speak against women. First, the protagonists' voices are usually silenced by themselves and by other characters, and, of course, by the deadly narratives themselves. Zenobia says:

Thus far, no woman in the world has ever once spoken out her whole heart and her whole mind. . . . But the pen is not for woman. Her power is too natural and immediate. It is with the living voice, alone, that she can compel the world to recognize the light of her intellect and the depth of her heart!

(120)

Indeed, the protagonists generally do not "speak out their whole hearts and whole minds." Their voices are also veiled because they are generally reticent about their thoughts and internal perspectives, so we access them primarily heterodiegetically,
though narrator commentary—which often removes their voices further from us. And, while Zenobia's proclamation about the power of women's living voices is corrective, it—and this rare instance cited above during which she actually does speak out—is immediately undermined by her suicide. Had Zenobia or Herminia or Constance implemented their proclamations, one wonders what different fates their texts would have met.

Moreover, although women sometimes write these narratives, this masternarrative's "pen" is not "for" women in another way. While these texts kill the protagonists, they also immortalize them and the historical women on whom they are sometimes based, but this immortalization is dependent on their suicides. For instance, Lucy Jordan "knew she'd found forever as she rode along through Paris with the warm wind in her hair"—and she, indeed, finds "forever" through art, in the original recording and in the song’s featured position in Thelma and Louise. However, while the suicides are overtly represented as acts of self-determination, the masternarrative guides many ambivalent protagonists to commit suicide on their first attempts, several to deaths they seem to accept rather than desire (see Chapter 6). Consider Reiko, for whom, as she writes her suicide note, "somehow, in the increasingly smooth motion of the tablet rubbing on the stone, and in the scent from the thickening ink, there was unspeakable darkness" (1120).

When does this masternarrative’s hand become not the hand that simply narrates one text or deprives one protagonist of her "freedom," but a murderous hand, a prescriptive force that touts female suicide as an act of empowerment while it simultaneously overrides the protagonists' life forces and becomes one of the most compelling forces of that ubiquitous "monolithic evil" behind their deaths? While, as discussed in Chapter 5, some texts invite us to perceive the protagonists as metaphorical murder victims, even in the absence of this invitation, the masternarrative has acquired such influential force that it re-write protagonists into suicide victims, that it acquires a vaguely murderous complicity as it reflects the gynicidal cultural complicity toward deviant women. Indeed, while I have intentionally avoided using the phrase "suicide victim" because I wanted to more
neutrally consider the protagonists' acts, it is clear to me now that these texts, some of them part of the literary canon, and these protagonists are also targets or victims of a literary *cannon* that reflects larger cultural prescripts and judgments aimed at women.

**Lethally Adjusting the Masculine and the Feminine**

However, in order to "aim" this cannon, so to speak, the masternarrative embraces another duality, a duality of gender: it hyper- and hypo- masculinizes and feminizes the protagonists in order to direct them to what is, finally, a predominantly hypermasculinized female death. Because men commit suicide more often than women, Louis I. Dublin called suicide a masculine behavior, and the masternarrative manipulates stereotypical gender attributes to satisfy its plot compunctions for female death—that is, to support the female-normatized act of suicidal behavior following interrelational distress as well as the male normatized act of first-attempt suicide.

For instance, the protagonists are typically feminine in their heterosexual desire, sometimes even hyperfeminized in their desperation for heterosexual connection. But they are hypoemphasized in their absent or weak desire for maternal connections—and that characterization further supports their suicide paths (see Chapter 6). Similarly, in their attempts to find mutual connections with men, they often break familial bonds and social codes for women: that is, in order to satisfy the compunctions of heterosexual womanhood, they abandon or deviate from traditional female roles and behaviors. For instance, the protagonists are hypofeminized in their paucity of expressions, especially with requests for help, and in their coping styles. And, Jack reports findings that "women with a masculine sex role orientation demonstrated greater career achievement, and possessed the attributional style of internal, stable and global attribution in relation to the success which we have shown to be associated with the possession of coping skill" (Jack 243 Wong et al.). But the female suicide protagonists do not possess life-saving masculine coping styles, but feminine ones defined by the dichotomous thinking and
helplessness discussed in Chapter 6. Further, when their relational efforts fail, they experience extreme duress—and are, thus, hyperfeminized. This is followed by their masculinized embrace of aloneness, their abandonment of attempts for mutual connection and of concern for others—which facilitates their hypermasculinized acts of completing suicide on their first attempts.

Given that Reiko kills herself so strongly against her powerfully present life force, it may not be surprising that she is one of the most hyperfeminized and hypermasculinized protagonists in this dissertation's corpus. In order to seek, confirm, and then honor an interrelational connection with her husband, Reiko is expected to, willing to, and does abandon her sense of self to abide by the Educational Prescript's and by her husband's and mother's expectations. She is hyperfeminized because she lives only for her husband and her marriage, but she then must be hypofeminized, immasculated, must break all familial ties except spousal ones, must repress her very strong life force in order to watch and participate in an extended, bloody double-suicide which violates her own nature and diverges from the practices of most women—whether they choose suicide or life. In the same way that freedom and fatality are linked in these texts, most of the protagonists are killed because they deviate from traditional feminine roles and characteristics, as well as through their deviation from these roles. That is, their deviance is both the justification for and enabler of their suicides.

The Pornographic

These narratives are also, at their individual and collective meetings, ambivalent in another way: while individually they can be beautiful, insightful narratives and sometimes helpful cultural critiques, as a collective—and, then, through that collective, individually—they become analogous to the pornographic. Again, Peter Brooks's reading theory—especially in its phallocentricity—invites a particularly apt application to the female suicide master-narrative. While the master-narrative features a woman committing what is supposed to be the ultimate act of female and feminine self-determination, its masculinization of the protagonists, its neat definition, linear
plot and story. loyalty to its own prescripts, and its narrative "climax" occurring at the narrative's end all recall more stereotypically masculine or male experiences such that, while these texts are driven by a focus on female bodies, they are dominated by, take on, and perpetuate models that are also fundamentally androcentric.

Further, to warrant being immortalized in its individual texts and in the circular dynamics of this masternarrative, these texts, the protagonists, and the historical women on which some of the protagonists are based, are co-opted by the masternarrative, molded to fit its notions of the "model" female suicide protagonist--which is to say, a woman who deviates from the "model" female survivor. This domination is grounded in the masternarrative's control of women's attributes, motives, and behaviors; in its control and objectification of their bodies and experiences; and in its minimization of their deaths through rhetorics of character and structure.

Moreover, because individual protagonists repeatedly approximate other female suicide protagonists, the masternarrative cumulatively minimizes any one protagonist's uniqueness. In this way, its character repetitions formulaically mold the protagonists, which augments the structural minimizations of their loss--or, rather, of others' loss of them. Indeed, in the same way that Rodolphe, looking through his love mementos, remembers some details, but "sometimes, however, he remembered nothing at all. All these women, crowding into his consciousness, rather shrank in size, levelled down by the uniformity of his feeling" (145), the protagonists are levelled by the molding effects of the masternarrative. Through the commonalities of their themes, plots, and characterizations, they become stock representatives of The Suicidal Woman, objectified and cliched in their repetitions. As a result, while any one female suicide text may seem tragic, collectively desensitize us to the tragedy of suicide.

Ironically, while the dead female body is the defining end and means of this masternarrative, the masternarrative leads us to and then immediately away from the protagonist's body. Thus, while female suicide narratives, like porn, are driven
toward the woman's passive and reclining body, the "satisfaction" or release of
textual energy describe by Brooks and generally presumed to be proffered at the end
of any narrative ride, the death-end confirmation and reward that Brooks feels is
inherent to the narrative drive, is partly thwarted by the female body's erasure
through the masternarrative's structures (for instance, its narratives ending with or
just before the deaths and its preclusion of showing the bodies or grief). Indeed,
like pornography, these texts do not publicize or attend to the fetid byproducts of
their production, either within the bounds of their covers, or within the larger
cultures of their productions. Furthermore, the erasure that occurs when the death
and the bodies are eliminated augments the effect of thwarted death that is created
by their repetition in the masternarrative. So, while the protagonist clearly dies,
there is no body, and there is the sense that nobody "dies" completely because the
deaths are minimized, but also because the masternarrative continually reincarnates
its Christines in variant forms in other texts. And, as discussed earlier, this
masternarrative trend toward female erasure is augmented by the texts' individual
replacements of their protagonists' with new bodies, new mothers, new lovers, with
replacement actors and wives.

In one sense, in the apparent linearity of individual text's plots and ends, the
masternarrative is structurally analogous to the phallocentric. However, in a
collective sense, it is at least also partly thematically analogous to the heterosexually
pornographic because the primary "meaning wrested from" and delivered by these
narratives is that women should be most validated, fulfilled, and alive by serving
others, by abiding not by their own desires, but men's--their masters' and their
masternarrative's. As such, porn and female suicide narratives benefit from the
continued socialization of women to serve others--and from a masternarrative that
discards and destroys women who do not fully agree with the terms under which
they must serve others, who attempt to own their own desires, sexual or otherwise,
whether their desires are to have monogamous, sexually appealing husbands or to
have adulterous affairs. However, of course, in most porn women are not supposed
to resist subjugation, but female suicide protagonists, in dying by suicide, abide by the ultimate subjugation to their master.

In any case, the protagonists' deaths remain reactions to men. As Judith Messick says in her afterword to Constance Ring, Constance, "like other suicidal heroines in nineteenth-century fiction," is "Fatally conflicted" because "she can see the problems of the old ways, but she cannot imagine new conventions to replace them." Her tragedy is that "she gives up the 'battle for her human dignity.' She yields up her feminist principles and lets men define her" (301). And the masculinized construction of the protagonists and the texts is aptly symbolized by several textual events. For instance, Arobin toasts Edna's father, a colonel, "on the birthday of the most charming of women, the daughter he invented" (576); Lucy is led off the roof by a man, and Susan to the dark river by a male demon; Gordon writes Lu Anne's film script, and Lionel writes her medical prescriptions; Reiko lives by the Shinji's and the Educational Prescript's teachings; and Lucy memorizes nursery rhymes "in Daddy's easy chair." So, when the audience at Thelma and Louise cheered, they cheered not an act of resistance, but an impulsive act of rebellion and escape, a reactionary response that culminates in their succumbing to male heterosexual constructs, in their final "voluntary" self-abnegation as women.

Thus, the power dynamics of female suicide are also riddled with dualities: in the same way that some pro-porn arguments are constructed on the notion of women's free will and on women employing their sexuality for their alleged self-empowerment, the suicides are "power options" that are also defined in relation to men and in association with this allegedly female free will. To be powerful, women must be passive and powerless. And, as Constance, Herminia, and Lily make clear, sex with men is a also financial contingency for the protagonists, one whose context-marriage--also often compels them along their suicide paths. Both porn and female suicide narratives constrict and defeat women under the guise of empowering them.

Similarly, while women are in some sense encouraged to participate in pornographic and suicidal activities, both acts are also tabooed acts that invoke negative judgments against women (see Chapter 6), that mold and subjugate female
sexuality. and that, moreover, diverge from the practices of most women—who don’t kill themselves or become porn stars. Further, both of these encouragements are used as weapons against women. That is, the validation given to airbrushed porn stars becomes a weapon directed against the body images and self-esteesoms of girls and women who try and often must fail to satisfy these predominant, artificial definitions of femininity—sometimes, of course, provoking potentially fatal eating disorders and diverting expenditures of energy, money, and time away from more enriching, substantial, and sustaining endeavors. And, the praise of female suicide texts and the larger engendering of suicidal behavior in women becomes a weapon directed at women. In this way, the texts turn not against themselves as androcentric texts, but against the very objects of their desired ends—women. Of course, in this way, the texts ask female readers to read against themselves, to, in Judith Fetterley’s term, immasculate—a particularly apt term, considering the hypermasculinization of the protagonists. Given the phenomenon of suicide contagion, these texts may be the ultimate experience in female readers’ immasculination.

Furthermore, both pornography and the female suicide master narrative share a sense of incommensurability of consequence. Some argue that pornography is not an inherently violent act, but those who believe it is recognize the difficulty of quantifying its effects, especially when the gender constructions purveyed in it are widespread. Similarly, the effects of female suicide narratives are also made incommensurate by the inherent difficulties they pose for research, as well as by existing research priorities and limitations. Perhaps, through a shift in epistemological emphasis and heuristic design, whether through anecdotal or more wide-scale research efforts, their effects might become more commensurate.

Finally, in its formulaic representation of women’s emotions, reactions, and deaths, I suspect that the female suicide master narrative desensitizes us to its damages, that, as it publicizes and makes formulaic a very private event, as it conventionalizes and minimizes these deaths, it trivializes them and makes them seem to be inconsequential, while it also concurrently masters women’s choices, lives and deaths. But this de-privatization may also create public stereotypes that
function as self-fulfilling models—either fictional or nonfictional, models that contribute to larger subversive mechanisms, such that the narratives, dramas, songs, paintings, and poems in which suicide continues to be the primary method of female "empowerment" or escape, must be related to the fact that suicidal behavior—that is, uncompleted and completed attempts—is dominated by women.

Optional Narrative Changes: Counter-Narratives

The issue of suicide is complex beyond anything I can address here. While this project indicts some of the cultural purveyors of female suicide, I believe in people deserve the right to die with dignity as they define it, to commit suicide and to define their own conditions of suicide, assuming those conditions do not directly implicate another person. Suicide, of course, can never really be an independent act; but, ideally, it will be as individually-defined as possible, which does not at all ensure that it will be "the right" decision.

I also believe in that transgressive texts can have much value. However, as this dissertation shows, suicide texts are far less transgressive than they are often presumed to be, and real conditions of suicide are less self-defined than they are presumed to be. Furthermore, "transgressive texts"—including allegedly transgressive texts like pornography—are often, finally, not very, often not at all, transgressive or revolutionary or unfettering or empowering, but, as parts of a permitted, and even desired, transgression that abides by the dominant purveyors of rules and culture. As such, they—including suicide texts—warrant continued scrutiny. Texts, of course, also include behaviors, and, while my perspective on suicide has changed because of my work on this project, I continue to believe—perhaps even more strongly now—that suicide is most often a tragedy that society and health professionals should seek to avert for many reasons, not the least of which is how it is covertly and overtly positively defined, especially in relation to any culture's power dynamics of gender, government, medicine, marriage, and so on.

Social scientists seem to share the assumption that suicide prevention is a worthy, if not an entirely realizable, effort. Alec Roy says suicide is preventable.
because nearly all people who commit suicide have a treatable psychiatric disorder.
communicate their intentions, and because many of them visit their doctors before
committing suicide (1989 1423). The first large-scale efforts to prevent suicide
began with the establishment of prevention centers in the 1960s. However, while
there has been a marked increase in suicide prevention centers in Britain and the
U.S. since the early 1970s, these centers have produced "equivocal results" on either
completed or uncompleted suicide (Jack 218)—which Ronald L. Akers says is
because most of the people who call them are communicative attempters who "are
not serious about suicide" (285). Jack also reports that efforts at secondary
intervention—the intervention given following attempts—have been met with
discouraging results, that their ineffectiveness is evidenced by estimates that between
fifteen and twenty-five percent of those who attempt suicide will make repeat
attempts within twelve months of their initial attempt and that one in sixty self-
poisoners will complete suicide within twelve months of an uncompleted attempt
(Jack 220).

Further, according to Jack, the pathology paradigm:
has exercised a limiting influence on the emergence of [therapeutic] models
with potentially greater explanatory value and thus has deprived vulnerable
people of the help they need. Its effects have been particularly pernicious for
women as it has frequently led to the commonplace attribution of mental or
personality disorders to them, although it has been demonstrated that there is
little clinical justification for such diagnosis. (245)

There may be several reasons for the embrace of this pathology paradigm regarding
women and suicidal behavior. However, according to Charles Neuringer, because of
the frustrations in understanding the relationships between "motivational-personality
variables" and suicide, suicidology has moved "away from explorations of the
psychodynamics" of suicide and toward "social engineering projects to prevent and
inhibit suicide" (1988 43). Presumably, suicide centers are among these projects.
However, beginning with Edwin S. Schneidman's descriptions of suicidal cognitions
in 1957 and including Jack's 1992 work, some suicidologists believe that efforts to
prevent suicide might be more fruitful if therapists were to contend with individuals'
cognitive styles. Jack situates his individual therapy program within a critique of the
sociohistoric influences of suicide (especially the gender norms that encourage nonfatal behavior in women), and he proposes treatment that focuses on cognitive restructuring and attributional retraining, on reformulating styles of learned helplessness, and that, especially in relation to individual’s assumptions of blame and control, encourages effective coping mechanisms and problem solving (Jack 225, 236; also cites Brickman et al. on 225).

While Jack’s comprehensive perspective recognizes the need to "undo" cultural effects on individuals, suicide rates continue to rise, especially among teenagers. Roy reports that:

In recent years, the suicide rate among adolescents in the United States has risen dramatically, though in some other countries it has not. . . . The increased suicide rates are thought to reflect changes in the social environment, changing attitudes toward suicide, and the increasing availability of the means to commit suicide. (1420)

Keith Hawton also speculates that the increase in teenage suicide in the past two decades and especially in the U.S. may be due to several factors, including altered attitudes toward suicide (1986 1420). Jack reports that S. C. Hirsch et al., pessimistic about the inefficacy of primary and secondary intervention, wonders: "whether socio-cultural influences prove more important than any treatment approach and whether a real reduction in the parasuicide rate will only come when the nature of society changes itself" (Hirsch, Walsh, and Draper 1983 in Jack 240). Jack suggests we look at social context in our effort to prevent suicide: "So long as psychological theory . . . does not include the analysis of symptoms in the context of their social and historical conditions, and the myths and stereotypes of our gender ideals, we shall not begin to see how to make changes" in treatment (Jack 245 quoting Lipshitz).

As Neuringer’s wish to understand the "'inner' forces leading to self-selected death" suggests, there is no clear demarcation between the "inner" and "outer" forces of suicide (Neuringer 1988 43). Indeed, these 'inner' forces appear to be more external than they have been presumed to be in fictional and nonfictional female suicide. While Jack’s cognitive approach to treating and preventing suicidal
behavior offers a critique of the sources of cognitive patterns, his therapeutic model focuses on the contributions therapists can make with individuals and inherently urges—or, perhaps, wishes for—sociohistoric correctives. And, given the power of narrative and myth in suicide, it may not be entirely futile to consider larger cultural correctives of suicide.

Jack’s discussion of how women’s "deviant" suicidal behavior is a byproduct of their normative socialization to be helpless and powerless (80), he refers to Elaine Showalter’s analysis of how ideas about what constituted "'proper' feminine behaviour shaped the forms, definition and treatment of female psychopathology over 150 years." Showalter demonstrates that psychopathology, and predominantly female disorders such as hysteria, were a consequence of, rather than a deviation from, the traditional role of the Victorian woman (72). Her interpretation of the development of hysteria includes a discussion of its common appearance and description in nineteenth-century romantic novels. Furthermore, like self-poisoning, hysteria usually occurred within the context of traumatic interpersonal relationships, and Jack notes that female self poisoning "has frequently been explained in terms of the hysterical personality supposedly common among its perpetrators," that hysteria and self-poisoning are conjoined by the form of the unconscious and physically dependent woman.

While Jack attempts "to establish correlation rather than causality" between socio-cultural changes and changes in parasuicide rates (240), I propose that there is at least a correlative—and most likely a partly causal—relationship between nonfictional and fictional, even printed fictional, suicide, a relationship that may be elusive, but that, as Counts’ work in Papua, New Guinea shows, can be powerful. Recall that, according to Akers, the social learning of suicide requires that "General cultural definitions of suicide are available, some of which define suicide under certain conditions as honorable," and that a person have "knowledge of suicidal techniques" and of their appropriate use, including their gender-specific appropriateness." Further, although "Many individuals learn these definitions," they
are not likely to apply them unless they experience "acute or chronic loss or crises and can find no hope for any other solution" (Akers 299-305).

Given that existing interventions in preventing suicidal behavior have been "markedly unsuccessful" (Jack 217), perhaps it is time to conjoin the last two decade's findings on suicide contagion with Showalter's 1987 work on literary influences on hysteria and Jack's 1992 work on the sociohistoric conditions that promote attempted suicide--and time to implicate fictional narratives in the growing acceptance and occurrence of female suicide. Any consideration of the social context in which women's suicidal behavior predominates by a wide margin should include a consideration of fictional narratives, both individually and collectively--or on the micro and the macro level--and Arturo Biblarz et al. say:

it is necessary to connect the macro and micro levels of analysis by looking at mechanisms and processes at the individual level that are produced by broad social processes; events at the individual level bring about actions that result in large-scale social change. (Biblarz et al. 375 citing Coleman)

Indeed, if we consider the micro effects of individual narratives and the macro effects of the masternarrative and its correlatives in culture and in women's suicide, it seems that there is a clear connection between these narrative effects. I have tried to combine micro and macro analyses of female suicide to show their interconnectedness, how individual texts and the masternarrative are produced by and produce larger perspectives of female suicide. Whether or not the purveyors of ideologies--and, particularly, those purveyors of myths involving women's suicide--want to effect large-scale social change, it is clear that myths and conditions of female suicide are represented in individual texts; and, presumably "large-scale social change" regarding female suicide could also include with changes in individual texts.

This is not to suggest that narrative is the sole purveyor or can be the sole corrector of myths about female suicide, myths that are ubiquitously defined and supported by other mechanisms of gender. However, let us recall some of the suggestions that fiction, even printed fiction, may influence social constructions of knowledge. Recall Stack's findings that "even without the help of the electronic

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media, well-publicized stories in the printed media were associated with increases in suicide" (355); Phillips' findings that "that the more publicity given to front-page suicides, the more suicides increase in the area where the publicity occurs" (1974 352); and Madelyn S. Gould and David Shaffer's findings that "the presumptive evidence suggests that fictional presentations of suicide may have a lethal effect" (1986 693). And, again, recall from Chapter 2, Gould's comment that:

In addition to imitative effects, the occurrences of suicides in the community or in the media may produce a familiarity with and acceptance of the idea of suicide. . . . Familiarity with suicide may eliminate the 'taboo' of suicide, lower the threshold at which point the behavior is manifested, and introduce suicide as an acceptable alternative response or option to life stresses. (Gould et al. 1989 p. 26; Rubinstein 1983).

Phillips', and Gould's and Shaffer's 1970s and 1980s work sets an essential foundation in sociology for implicating the female suicide masternarrative in real female suicide. This foundation is further grounded by Gates's earlier-cited work implicating Victorian fictions in assumptions about female suicide and Showalter's implicating nineteenth-century romance novels in the constructions of knowledge about women and hysteria. Furthermore, Jack notes a correlation between the gendering of hysteria and of non-fatal attempts, and, although non-fatal and fatal attempts differ in vital ways, they are similar in others. Clearly, this interdisciplinary work compels us to further indict the female suicide masternarrative in real behavior. Indeed, perhaps current psychosocial efforts to prevent suicide--social efforts, such as suicide prevention centers, and individual efforts, such as cognitive restructuring--might be augmented by larger cultural correctives that challenge some of the more ubiquitous sources of suicide teaching, sources that promote "normatized"--or maladaptive, normative--suicidal assumptions about and responses for women.

Again, this is not to suggest that challenging the masternarrative is the singular panacea of treatment for female suicide, any more than it is to suggest the masternarrative is solely responsible for teaching female suicidal behavior. Further, it does not assume that critics, reader, or artists will feel compelled to promote social
change, and, clearly, much of Western culture has embraced Poe’s dictum. "The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (The Philosophy of Composition 1846). As Jean Kilbourne makes famously clear in her "Still Killing Us Softly" video, the dead woman’s body has been regularly and unproblematically used to sell products, and countless ballads feature the death of a woman, usually her murder by her lover, often near a river.

However, should readers or producers of suicide texts decide to confront them, narratively-purveyed correctives could take many forms. Readers might "boycott" female suicide texts: by not reading, not talking or writing about, not embracing such texts, they are, according to social science theories and studies, protecting themselves from the potential effects of suicide contagion and, in a sense, refusing culture’s lessons of female suicide. However, this might be perhaps the most difficult corrective to implement because of the very nature of reading and sharing stories. Most consumers of narrative honor one fairly universal convention when discussing and recommending narratives: we don’t betray the end. To do so is almost sacrilegious—and perhaps even more so when it involves the "surprise" of female suicide. Consider, for instance, how many people heard, read, and talked about Thelma and Louise before seeing the movie—and, yet, how many of us walked into the theater knowing its end?

This convention of recommending and sharing stories, of course, makes it difficult for consumers to "boycott" these narratives—financially or psychologically—but especially those with such "loaded"—and, thereby, especially-protected endings, as those of the female suicide masternarrative. The convention—or rather, our agreement to honor it—also further empowers the female suicide masternarrative to continue its myth-making efforts, efforts that are already dependent upon and maximized by its endings and that are soundly grounded in reading culture. And, finally, it increases consumers’ vulnerability to the potentially dangerous effects of the narratives. Indeed, were we to tell the ends of these narratives to our friends, perhaps we would sabotage—or, at least mute—some effect of the end, as well as our
friends' degree of engagement with texts. We might, in more ways than one, keep them from "dying for the end."

This problematizes the notion of what it means to be a "good" sharer--and reader--of stories. Booth addresses the question of "efferent effect," of "carry-over from narrative experience to behavior." of what I call narrative consequences, in *The Company We Keep*:

In one sense, everyone who has read much narrative with intense engagement 'knows' that narratives do influence behavior. . . . [A]nyone who conducts honest introspection knows that 'real life' is lived *in* images derived in part from stories. Though our imitations are not highly dramatic, especially once we pass adolescence, everyone who reads knows that whether or not we *should* imitate narrative heroes and heroines, we in fact do. Indeed, our imitations of *narrative* 'imitations of life' are so spontaneous and plentiful that we cannot draw a clear line between what we *are*, in some conception of a 'natural,' unstoried self, and what we have become as we have first enjoyed, then imitated, and then, perhaps, criticized both the stories and our responses to them. (227-29)

Perhaps the best reader stands equidistant from a position of total immersion in a text and absolute demarcation from their potentially dangerous centers--which requires, of course, the exertion of some energy against the text, against, perhaps even, the positions of the narrative and authorial audiences. It might behoove the readers of female suicide texts to maintain this distance. Certainly, good readers read and viewers view critically, but they also must closely engage with characters and texts to do this--but, at what cost. Clearly, this engagement can be intense and demanding, as it is with longer narratives, in particular. However, as we know, fictional modeling and suicide contagion can take place when readers or observers are in some ways quite distance from character models--fictional or non-fictional. So, regardless of the position from which we engage with suicidal people or characters, we risk being informed by unhealthy models.

Of course, readers or teachers may not want to or be able independently to "boycott" these texts, canonized or not. While the cartoon at the beginning of Chapter 4 is meant to be partly jest, it pointedly comments on the epistemological influence of narrative--and, in particular, of suicide narrative--in social and sex-role
learning. This inherent role of narrative and the exacerbated role of suicide narrative perhaps places one of the best option for narrative correctives in the hands of those who write, produce, and criticize narratives. Gardner says, "it is clearly not true that the morality of art takes care of itself, the good, like gravity, inevitably prevailing" (105). To Gardner, moral critics "simply do their work, carefully and thoughtfully assessing works of art, calling our attention to those worth noticing, and explaining clearly, sensibly, and justly why others need not take up our time" (127).

However, critical efforts toward understanding suicide texts are complicated by the notion of contagion. Of course, while critical interpreters of these narratives may be less vulnerable to suicide contagion than non-critical interpreters may be, this has not been—and may never be—confirmed by research. Further, given the findings that even educational reports contribute to suicide contagion, critical participation with suicide narratives—even the explicitly moral act of problematizing the trends of these narratives—theoretically makes critics complicit in the promotion of suicide. However, while it might be "safest" for individuals to avoid suicide texts altogether, as readers or critics, no matter what suicidologists find about the contagious effect of suicide, it may be impossible to convince ourselves that "ignorance is not bliss"—or that, in this case, "ignorance may be life; knowledge, death." Further, critics don't only work for their own clarification and knowledge. However, it seems at least humanly possible and pedagogically and theoretically sound to problematize the texts with some of these interdisciplinary perspectives about suicide and female suicide.

And, although sociologists have not explicitly addressed printed fictions or the larger influence of narrative on suicide learning, they have raised ethical questions about suicide texts and the media that invite us to conjoin literary, ethical, and sociological concerns in relation to the production of fictional suicide narratives. For instance, Lillian Range et al. say findings about contagion raise an important question for journalists, writers, and public officials who report the news about suicide or provide entertainment that involves stories about suicide. Does the public's right to know outweigh the potentially harmful effect of publicly reporting a suicide? . . . The present results show

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that people believe that a connection exists, whether it actually does or not. Unfortunately, this belief could turn out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy that is fatal for teens. (340)

Further, Gould and Shaffer call, with "some urgency" for the development of research strategies that "identify the components of broadcasts that diminish suicidal behavior, if there are any, and those that encourage it" (1986 693).

Some sociologists have suggested possible responses to these concerns. For instance, Hawton recommends that media restrict publicity, especially where young people are involved, "perhaps reporting the essential facts and in as undramatic a fashion as possible" (1986 146). Recognizing the mass media’s role in suicide contagion, Akers says that, "many newspapers now relegate suicide stories to the back page or do not carry them at all" (303). Phillips predicted that the "more publicity given to an alternative to suicide, the more the suicide rate should decrease" (1974 352). And, Jack suggests that the provision of more positive role models would help decrease suicidal behavior in women: he says that as women delay childbearing, they become more androgynous, and "In this way more role models of female success become available and a cycle of reinforcement for female achievement is established" (Jack 242 interpreting Marecek).

Perhaps when Gardner described the artist as "the conscious guardian of his society, the only man in town who’s honest by profession" (176), he did not know how particularly apt this description was in relation to suicide narratives, that the artists of female suicide narratives—knowingly or not--distort reality such that they negatively, perhaps even fatally, inform women’s lives. Further, given that filmed fictional suicide stories do and that printed fictional stories may promote contagion, it hardly seems fair or apt or fruitful for writers to "reward" the cultural consumers on whom they depend with suicide texts.

In one way, sociologists’ findings that even informational pieces on suicide promote contagion leave us little to do but be silent about suicide--which, clearly, we cannot be. But, as therapists deal with individuals’ cognitive approaches, artists also have the opportunity to change some of the sociohistoric conditions of suicide.
simply in how they tell stories, especially suicide stories—that is, in how they elect to create social learning models for their consumers of narrative. Indeed, one wonders if, following Biblarz et al., who "debriefed" their participants following a study on the effect of fictional films on viewers' attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs regarding the use of suicide as a coping mechanism, Western culture might benefit from a debriefing that could be partly implemented by producers of cultural products for the masses (1991 375, 378). Should fiction writers, like some journalists, implement their "guardian" power as storytellers to effect cultural correctives toward suicide in the form of counter-narratives? to positively inform women's lives through the production of narratives that subvert the female suicide masternarrative? And—even though it may be difficult to measure any corrective effects that might result from narrative changes because narrative consumers are so dispersed—the producers of texts are perhaps most empowered to challenge texts, myths, and masternarratives through their often wide-reaching audiences. Indeed, since the most problematic dynamic of fictional and real suicide exists at the nexus of these texts, perhaps writers could step into that nexus with subversive texts that challenge the masternarrative's prescripts and ideologies.

This partial debriefing could occur in various narrative places and ways, at the beginning and the end of narratives, through character, theme, and structure. Indeed, recall Goethe's pre-emptive attempt to debrief readers even before they began reading, with his prefatory poem in later editions of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, his call for readers to "be a man" and not commit suicide. While Goethe did not structurally change the novel proper with this epigraph warning, and, although the ending was probably already known by most post Werther fever readers, Goethe's note "gave away the ending" for later readers and drastically changes their reading experience in an effort to discourage copycat suicides. While Goethe tried to dispel others' inclinations to see Werther as a model, writers could also more explicitly consider the implications of their "model" creations—that is, within the text proper, rather than in an epigraph. They could stop glamorizing and romanticizing suicide in fiction; they could begin, in their fictions, to explicitly

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recognize and indict the effect of media and contagion on suicide; they could re-characterize suicide protagonists in ways that don’t invite modeling; they could more adamantly thematize suicide as an unattractive option for the protagonists themselves; they could characterize suicide less as an act of self-determination and more aptly as a reactive, often prescribed act; they could explicitly problematize global myths about gender and suicide; and they could problematize the assumption that women are particularly vulnerable to suicide after interrelational distress.

In addition to character alterations, and given what we know about the structural implications of suicide narratives, perhaps authors could make structural adjustment to suicide texts, adjustments that would expose and critique the larger cultural impetus behind the female suicide mainstream. Counter-narratives might include deep structural changes to the texts proper, as I have discussed in Chapter 6. For instance, authors could, if they choose to write suicide narratives, remove the suicide from the privileged place of desire and discharge at the end of texts and begin the texts with suicide. In this way, the texts would, rather than work up to suicide as an act of reward and narrative gratification, defuse some of the narrative impulse toward suicide. This dramatic repositioning of suicide would enable authors to devote more attention to the effects of suicide, and, following Gould’s and Shaffer’s findings that suicide rates dropped after a television movie that had as its main focus a family’s grief after suicide, lower suicide rates.

These changes, of course, could be implemented with all suicide narratives. And, while the positive results of these counter-narratives would likely be—as are the negative results of the mainstream—their effects are immeasurably dispersed, we have every reason to think that they would make positive corrections to suicide myths. This is not to suggest that a "mere" change in form will undo all that has inspired and molded that form from without, but, as Gould’s and Shaffer’s study suggests, the relatively simple—but culturally complicated and difficult—act of changing the end of these narratives, of changing the location of the suicides, and of showing the devastating caused by them, might be one way to loosen the mainstream’s choke
hold. one that keeps our protagonists and ourselves perpetually and problematically "dying for the end."

Some authors have begun to do this, perhaps unknowingly: the protagonists in Judith Ortez Cofer’s "Nada" (1982) and in Marsha Norman’s play, "'night, Mother" (1981) make their intentions to commit suicide clear at the beginning of the texts, but both suicides still occur at the end. The double-suicide of the debilitated, impoverished, aging couple in "A Summer Tragedy" also occurs at the end, but it seems remarkably mutually determined. And, as discussed in Chapter 3, The Virgin Suicides and Heathers offer their own strong, parodic critiques of the masternarrative’s constructions—including its characterizations, themes, and forms. As they exaggerate and change the shape and character of the female suicide masternarrative, as they divert attention away from its protagonist, they mock and expose the prototype and the cultural compulsions that support the masternarrative.

However, given the stamina of this masternarrative, the call for changes, micro or macro, individual or global, in its entrenched structures, characterizations, and themes might be met with great resistance by the consumers and producers of this honored masternarrative. These changes would inherently critique and threaten not simply the literary or cultural canon, but the environment that supports it. After all, in many ways the status of these texts relies on their subgenre position, on their subversive, thriving, female suicide masternarrative. That is, if the masternarrative were intrusively popularized and faddishly rote, it would likely fade, if only temporarily. Further, the producers and consumers of disturbing texts may be uninterested in advancing cultural correctives. It still is, after all, a master’s world, even if that masterful position is subversively sustained.

Indeed, change is sometimes difficult; however, Fredric Jameson’s commentary about his master narratives of science and about forgetting the past is apt:

One recalls the great and still influential essay of Nietzsche on the debilitating influence of the fidelity to the past and the dead that an obsession with history seems to encourage. The Nietzschean 'strength to forget the past'—in preparation for the mutation of the superman to come—is here
paradoxically redeployed as a property of storytelling itself, of precisely those narratives, heroic or other, in which we have been taught to see a form of primitive data storage or of social reproduction. What this formulation does very sharply achieve . . . is the radical differentiation between the consumption of the past in narrative and its storage, hoarding, and capitalization in 'science' and scientific thought: a mode of understanding that . . . will little by little determine a whole range of ever more complex and extensive institutional objectifications--first in writing, then in libraries, universities, museums. (in Lyotard xii)

Similarly, because of the redeploying properties of the masternarrative's texts, of the very ways in which female suicide stories are told and in their redundancy, and of their fidelity to the past, these texts obtain an exponential power and become an epistemological source of primitive and complex data storage and dissemination. This "information," then functions--sometimes reliably, sometimes unreliably--in both artistic and sociological representations and constructions of women's interrelational roles and options, determining "a whole range of institutional objectifications" involving women. That is, these assumptions--although they have recently been challenged by some social scientists--have and may continue to "little by little determine a whole range of ever more complex and extensive institutional objectifications--first in writing, then in libraries, universities, museums." Indeed, maybe it would behoove us to resist the female suicide masternarrative's "debilitating influence of the fidelity to the past and the dead."

Readerly and Writerly Ambivalences

Several kinds of readerly ambivalences are among the variety of dualities, splits, and ambiguities that inform female suicide texts and their masternarrative. In large part, female suicide narratives work against the early recognition that they will end in death--presumably in order to increase the dramatic impact of both the death and the narrative end. While they sometimes hint that suicide is an option, they also maintain other options until well into the last stages of the narrative--that the protagonist will leave her husband, have an affair, get a job, continue living as she is, or dramatically change her lifestyle. The loaded thrill offered by the breadth of
these possibilities keeps us engaged, even as we recognize the growing possibility that the heroine will commit suicide, even as we become increasingly aware that her death may be figuratively beckoned by each paragraph we read.

Given that so many female suicide narratives end with or just after the suicide, perhaps we read such narratives with redoubled anticipation of their promised end, with an anticipation—that often grows and is sustained for as long as is narratively possible—for an end that promises not only the acquisition of some more standard type of narrative closure, completion, and stability, but an end that is intensified by its identification with and dependence upon the stability produced by the death of the woman. Once we recognize that we may be reading a female suicide narrative—although this usually occurs quite late in the narrative—our relationship to its end is, in some ways, different from less problematic texts. As with other texts, the confirmation of our "sense of the ending" validates us as knowledgeable, acute, perhaps intuitive, readers. This enhances the "discharge" of the end of these narratives because it enables us the self-flattery of thinking, "I thought so." Yet, the discharge of the end of a suicide narrative is also diminished, since, once we recognize that we are reading a subgenre of suicide narratives, our anticipatory pleasure of the end is, presumably, partly diminished.

In this way, the very repetition that validates and enhances our reading process by flattering our recognition also thwarts our release because of the same redundancy that enables that recognition. While this may happen with other texts, our desire to read to the end is further problematized in suicide narratives by our increasing sense that texts might end in the premature death of a character we have come to know and perhaps even like, someone with whom we have come to identify, by our ambivalence about reading toward an end we both desire and dread, want to reach and reject. Furthermore, once we suspect the masternarrative formula, we know that each page we read approaches and promotes the death of the protagonist, and that this end can only be realized by our agreement to continue reading—and our agreement by which we often feel compelled to abide, theoretically indicts us with some readerly complicity in our protagonist's death.
Moreover, our discomfort about a potentially impending suicide is inversely proportional to the degree to which we believe the character is resolved to commit suicide, and yet it may be difficult to convince us--given the surprise-effects of the masternarrative--of the protagonists' full intentions to die. Even though we might retrospectively understand the protagonists' impulsive decisions, our belief in the resolution of their decisions in one way palliates the effects of their deaths on us by assuring us that their suicidal escapes are something of a successful coup. In some perverse way, it is as if the protagonists' deviation from a reality in which men kill themselves four times more than women do and in which women attempt but do not complete suicide eight times more than men actually earns our respect for them and transforms their suicidal descents into an ascents. It is as if, in order for the protagonists to receive our admiration, they must discard the norms by which they have religiously abided (or, not so religiously, as Chapter 6 notes)--and they can do this, as dramatically as possible, by killing themselves. This increases our ambivalence about the text and our engagement with the protagonists--and it ensures that our "admiration" for them will be most keenly felt only retroactively, after the end of the narrative and the end of the protagonist's life. It also ensures that the surprise of a protagonist's suicide will be directly proportional to her silence. However, finally, the masternarrative cajoles ambivalent suicides from several of its protagonists, the already thwarted sense of the end's narrative discharge is further diminished and challenged.

Perhaps some of the ambivalences produced by these narratives wane when we know that, as a unified textual corpus, the female suicide masternarrative creates troublesome behavior models, which, exacerbated by the phenomena of suicide contagion, may participate in a quiet but disturbing and deadly process of epistemological construction and legitimation. In their diachronic, cross-cultural reproduction, the messages purveyed by female suicide texts are psychosocially reiterated such that their masternarrative assumes allegorical, biographical, and eventually mythic powers. By problematically merging truth with fiction, by bolstering disturbing ideologies of marriage and personal worth with textual
structures and other narrative elements that condone a dynamic of death, the female suicide master-narrative constructs and subsumes texts, women, and our visions in ways that support negative cultural constructs for fictional and real women, constructs that nourish the dual injunction, "women have to lose in order to win" (in Jack 54).

Finally, my relationship to this project has also been characterized by my own ambivalence and dualities, especially those informed by the identity politics of work, and, especially, it seems, of work in the humanities. I still do not assume that suicide is an immoral decision, and I still believe that some accommodations should be made for assisted suicide. However, my relationship to the issue of suicide has changed in some important ways because of my participation in this project.

As I worked on this dissertation, people whom I had just met would say, "That must be so depressing." And one particularly honest listener, with whom I later became friends, shared with me his initial curiosity and concern when, before having met me personally, he learned of my paper and dissertation topic. He said that he initially imagined that someone who would engross herself or himself in this kind of work might be particularly morbid, even suffering from depression. I'm sure his first glance of me as I prepared to read a paper--dressed primarily in black because I like the color, but also to honor the seriousness of the topic and my work with it--did not ease his concerns.

While this friend said his concerns were allayed shortly after talking with me, he spoke to me of the possible professional ramifications of how I might introduce my work, especially in writing--and especially for one who is facing the profession's job market. His comments compelled me to consider the larger issues of compassion and identity politics, especially the implications of how we position ourselves in relation to our work, especially when our work is with sensitive subjects. And, indeed, I have had countless opportunities to experience and consider the awkwardness that followed the question I have been most frequently-asked in the past couple of years, always by near strangers in both professional and personal contexts: "Isn't this depressing?" This question regularly accompanied hesitations,
broken eye contact, fidgety hands, and quieted, sympathetic tones, and it clearly functioned as an invitation for me to articulate my personal relationship to the project. Sometimes a particularly frank person would ask me directly, "Have you ever tried to kill yourself?"

In that pause during which I decided whether or not to address and ease concerns that were more often about me than my topic, I would often resent that I was again being expected or hoped to explain my personal relationship to the work; that I was, it seemed, being asked to diffuse the pressure of a silent default assumption that I had tried to commit suicide; and that I could only do so by answering for a near-stranger one of the most private, but strongly implied questions of anyone’s life. Furthermore, I believe that, because humans can imagine, they can have compassion for and likely understand experiences they haven’t had, that people can go widely but fully beyond their own experiences. So, I would also wonder why people seemed to so often default to—or need to rule out—the assumption that those who explore intimate subjects in the humanities explore what they have personally experienced rather than what they can "only" imagine. This assumption disturbs me for what it suggests about others’ belief in our capacity to understand difference and to offer compassion for those whose experiences differ from ours—or, for, finally, everyone else.

In any case, I would often resist my urge to ease my interlocutor’s discomfort or curiosity, would hesitate to relieve the silence, would not calm the fidgets. Sometimes I felt inclined to maintain my silence in some homage and kinship to the people and issues that have been central to my work—which is also to say, my life for the past many years, to those who have attempted or completed suicide. Sometimes I answered the call, usually when I felt strongly compelled to relieve the strain of my newly-met interlocutor, but also when I felt compelled to try to make objective, and thereby validate, my own hermeneutical position regarding my work. Of course, our work is always informed, enriched, or biased by our experiences, but because I was so often called to clarify my relationship to this project and never asked to clarify my relationship, for instance, to my thesis topic, I became
increasingly aware of the personal and even professional risks involved in engaging in subjects about problematic events and activities. In any case, when I did address these issues, I often felt as if I were positioning myself in contrast to and even against, even betraying, the issues and people about whom I care deeply; and that, in doing so, I was standing in the center, for fear, perhaps of standing in tabooed margins.

My relation to this project has also become ambivalent in another way because, although the subject is disturbing and the condition of being ABD is, of course, unnerving and challenging regardless of one’s dissertation topic, the work itself was not depressing. Indeed, it was often inspiring because I believe in its importance and because my conviction to researching and sharing this topic superseded the discomfort produced by the results of my research. But, of course, my inspiration was based in my finding texts that support my thesis, a thesis that bothers me, such that each time I happened upon a new text, I was both pleased and disturbed. In other words, while this work has frequently shown me how women, as others have pointed out, "have to lose in order to win," within my own efforts to explore and expose this disturbing body of texts, women also had to "lose" in order for me, another woman, to "win."

Further, my position with this project is ambivalent in yet another way. While I may have been, by association with my topic and by some of the default assumptions associated with it, errantly identified as an attempt survivor, my extended work with this project and with these models theoretically increases my own vulnerability to suicide contagion. This is something, of course, over which I have some personal control. However, because research also suggests that even educational reports contribute to suicide contagion, my written and spoken work on this project--as much as I have tried to inspire and advocate cultural correctives to suicide--theoretically makes me complicit in the promotion of suicide contagion (Phillips and Carstensen 689). While I hope this dissertation creates--as the Spectator accuses Herminia’s novel of creating--"irremediable mischief" in narrative theory, culture studies, women’s studies, in others’ critical and creative efforts, that
it inspires continued discussions about the implications of masternarratives. Of narrative consequences, reliability and liability, my work may theoretically be "poisonous" in another way. But I certainly hope not.

Finally, in exploring this particular masternarrative of female suicide, I hope for and invite others to resist its narrative imperialism, to find different ways of exploring the issues and nature of female suicide in reality and in fiction. I also hope that this work will invite descriptions and expositions of other masternarratives and other narrative consequences; of how individual choices are subsumed by culture's narrative choices; and, of how cultural producers and consumers might, through narratives, be aware of, construct, and more self-consciously and directly reject, accept, or adjust the models and choices espoused by masternarratives. My focus has been on the female suicide masternarrative, but this project illustrates how narratives and, especially, masternarratives, at their nexus of character, technique, and ideology, can be both socially constructed and socially-constructing. While I do not—indeed, I hope clearly do not—condone organized or institutionalized control of narrative, I embrace and encourage the continued interdisciplinary consideration of the criteria, conditions, consequences, and challenges of narratives and masternarratives, and of the impulses, values, and risks behind assuming that any narrative, whether or not it is informed by a masternarrative, is "just a story."
NOTES

1. Suicide was not stigmatized until the 6th century, when, following the "suicide-mania which was . . . the distinguishing mark of the early Christians," the Church, basing its authority on the sixth commandment, "Thou shall not kill," legislated against suicide. Since at least the beginning of 17th-century Europe, Church and State have responded to suicide with "official outrage and unofficial despair," and until 1961 in England those who attempted but did not complete suicide could be imprisoned (Alvarez 64-69).

2. These narrative positions are located on the communication model of reading, a model informed and used by narratologists and by rhetorical and structural theorists. See Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* for his seminal discussions about narrator reliability and Chatman's *Story and Discourse* for articulations and applications of the communication model.

3. Although the concept of narrator reliability is not new, my thesis, "Technique as Characterization: The Implications of Narrator Unreliability for Moral Liability," explores the various relationships between narrator reliability and liability.

4. Of course, had Herminia not committed suicide, she would be excluded from this corpus. This does not, however, ease the master-narrative's larger compulsion to guide its protagonists to suicide.

5. By "masculine" and "feminine," I refer to the hegemonically-defined, stereotypical characteristics associated with male and female gendering. I use these terms in relation to the characteristics associated with them, not as an advocate for the definitions.
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