

# **The Representation of Suicide in the Cinema**

**John Saddington**

Submitted for the degree of PhD

University of York  
Department of Sociology

September 2010

## Abstract

This study examines representations of suicide in film. Based upon original research cataloguing 350 films it considers the ways in which suicide is portrayed and considers this in relation to gender conventions and cinematic traditions. The thesis is split into two sections, one which considers wider themes relating to suicide and film and a second which considers a number of exemplary films. Part I discusses the wider literature associated with scholarly approaches to the study of both suicide and gender. This is followed by quantitative analysis of the representation of suicide in films, allowing important trends to be identified, especially in relation to gender, changes over time and the method of suicide. In Part II, themes identified within the literature review and the data are explored further in relation to detailed exemplary film analyses. Six films have been chosen: *Le Feu Follet* (1963), *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995), *The Killers* (1946 and 1964), *The Hustler* (1961) and *The Virgin Suicides* (1999). These films are considered in three chapters which exemplify different ways that suicide is constructed. Chapters 4 and 5 explore the two categories that I have developed to differentiate the reasons why film characters commit suicide. These are Melancholic Suicide, which focuses on a fundamentally “internal” and often ill-understood motivation, for example depression or long term illness; and Occasioned Suicide, where there is an “external” motivation for which the narrative provides apparently intelligible explanations, for instance where a character is seen to be in danger or to be suffering from feelings of guilt. Chapter 6 considers films that seek to elaborate upon the lasting effects of suicide on another character and these narratives are considered in terms of the type of effect that the suicide provokes. These films are situated within their generic traditions (the French *Nouvelle Vague*; the alcohol addiction film; *film noir*, neo-*noir*, “serious” drama; and the teenpic), allowing a rounded examination of representations of suicide and gender. Film sequence analyses and character traits and states are included in the Appendices. As a thesis, it is demonstrated that gender and generic conventions significantly influence the ways in which suicide has been represented and utilised narratively in the cinema.

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	9
PART I: CONCEPTUAL RESOURCES.....	15
<b>CHAPTER 1. CONTEXTUALISING SUICIDE: DEBATES, THEORIES AND APPROACHES.....</b>	<b>16</b>
Types of Suicide.....	16
Suicide Through the Ages.....	19
Cultural Context of Suicide.....	21
<b>CHAPTER 2. CONTEXTUALISING GENDER: DEBATES, THEORIES AND APPROACHES.....</b>	<b>27</b>
Sex and Gender.....	27
Sex as a Social Construction.....	29
Masculinities.....	33
Masculinity in Crisis?.....	42
Concepts of Femininity.....	46
Representation of Women in Film .....	47
Conclusion.....	51
<b>CHAPTER 3. CONTEXTUALISING SUICIDE IN FILM: DESCRIPTIVE CONTEXT.....</b>	<b>54</b>
Gender of Suicidee.....	55
Method of Suicide.....	57
Suicide in Film: Narrative Themes in Exemplary Films.....	62
Conclusion.....	69

PART II: EXEMPLARY FILM ANALYSES.....	71
<b>CHAPTER 4. MELANCHOLIC SUICIDE.....</b>	<b>74</b>
Melancholic Suicide: Historical and Generic Context.....	74
Exemplary Films ~ <i>Le Feu Follet</i> .....	81
<i>Leaving Las Vegas</i> .....	93
Conclusion.....	107
<b>CHAPTER 5. OCCASIONED SUICIDE.....</b>	<b>109</b>
Occasioned Suicide: Historical and Generic Context .....	109
Exemplary Films ~ <i>The Killers</i> (1946).....	119
<i>The Killers</i> (1964).....	129
Conclusion.....	142
<b>CHAPTER 6. THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUICIDE FOR OTHER</b>	
<b>CHARACTERS.....</b>	<b>145</b>
Consequences of Suicide: Historical and Generic Context ...	145
Exemplary Films ~ <i>The Hustler</i> .....	150
<i>The Virgin Suicides</i> .....	162
Conclusion.....	177
CONCLUSION .....	181
APPENDICES .....	189
<b>APPENDIX A. <i>Le Feu Follet</i> .....</b>	<b>190</b>
Sequence Analysis ...	190
Traits and States .....	183
<b>APPENDIX B. <i>Leaving Las Vegas</i> .....</b>	<b>195</b>
Sequence Analysis ...	195
Traits and States .....	198

<b>APPENDIX C. <i>The Killers</i> (1946)</b> .....	<b>203</b>
Sequence Analysis ... ..	203
Traits and States .....	207
<b>APPENDIX D. <i>The Killers</i> (1964)</b> .....	<b>210</b>
Sequence Analysis ... ..	210
Traits and States .....	213
<b>APPENDIX E. <i>The Hustler</i></b> .....	<b>218</b>
Sequence Analysis ... ..	218
Traits and States .....	223
<b>APPENDIX F. <i>The Virgin Suicides</i></b> .....	<b>231</b>
Sequence Analysis ... ..	231
Traits and States .....	235
<b>APPENDIX G. Films by Category by Decade by %</b> .....	<b>245</b>
<b>FILMOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>246</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>253</b>

## Acknowledgements

I feel lucky to have been supported throughout this endeavour by a number of brilliant people who have offered academic assistance, friendship and encouragement, namely, David Beer, Kristyn Gorton, Marcus Grant, Phil Hadfield, Ben Harker, Alastair Hodge, David Inglis, Alan Middleditch, Tom Nall, Chris Perry, Barry Sandywell, Phil Stanworth and Andrew Tudor. Professor Tudor – who puts the *super* in *supervisor* – deserves special thanks for his meticulous guidance, indefatigability and terrific generosity despite my often unreasonable demands on his time.

I should like to acknowledge the Department of Sociology for awarding me a tuition fees bursary, and the Department of Theatre, Film and Television for treating me as one of their own.

Finally, I owe a debt of some magnitude to my family, especially my parents, Margaret and Malcolm Saddington, and my partner, Ruth Larsen, for their constant support and unfailing patience.

## **Declaration**

The research submitted in this thesis is wholly the result of my own endeavours.  
None of it has been published.

## **Resumé**

Razors pain you;  
Rivers are damp;  
Acids stain you;  
And drugs cause cramp.  
Guns aren't lawful;  
Nooses give;  
Gas smells awful;  
You might as well live.

Dorothy Parker (1926)

When you've got nowhere to turn, turn on the gas.

Truman Capote (1986:66)

I did not, however, commit suicide, because I wished to  
know more of mathematics.

Bertrand Russell ([1967] 2000:38)



## INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on representations of suicide in film, explored against a backdrop of gender conventions and cinematic tradition. While films do not straightforwardly reflect the social worlds in which they are produced and consumed, consistent patterns of themes found across a range of films can be seen as symptomatic of both stable and changing social concerns in particular cultures. Thus it is with representations of suicide, a relatively common but surprisingly understudied form of film fatality, and gender, a frequent focus of film analysis in recent decades. In exploring such cinematic constructions for points of similarity and difference, sources of generic convention, as well as distinct narrative themes, we can thus begin to examine aspects of their popular conceptualisation in the cultures of which the films are part. Instances of suicide can be found in most major film types from sci-fi and comedy to melodrama and thriller, demonstrating how suicide has been used as a key narrative device to develop stories in a variety of settings. Suicide may dominate an entire film (*The Virgin Suicides*, 1999)<sup>1</sup>, be the moral and dramatic turning point of a film (*The Hustler*, 1961), feature as the climax of a film (*Le Feu Follet*, 1963) or function narratively in a lesser, though still important, capacity (for instance, cases of “heroic suicide” which we shall encounter later).

This research draws upon cultural studies, film studies, gender studies, sociology and suicidology and, by virtue of the fact that this is the first such study of its kind, and therefore without an established pathway to follow, I have sought my own route through this terrain. When I began work on this project there were very few articles and no books focusing conjointly on the areas with which I am chiefly concerned. Similarly, there was no pre-existing reliable dataset that I could simply take and use, which again provided its own set of challenges in the early stages of the research.<sup>2</sup> Assembling a dataset of films, creating categories on the basis of patterns discerned in that dataset, subjecting exemplary films taken

---

<sup>1</sup> In the interests of ease-of-reading, generally, the date of release (in Britain) will be shown for the first time only that a film is mentioned, and then not again.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Hylar and Moore’s (1996) article focuses on using films with suicide in them as a teaching aid for psychiatrists but does not focus on gender nor attempt any analyses of the films themselves.

from those categories to detailed analyses, and invoking relevant theoretical approaches provide the means for this initial exploratory analysis of the incidence of suicide in the cinema.

In this research, films are treated as multi-dimensional texts composed of numerous elements. These elements include setting, character, and story, as well as stylistic features such as lighting, sound, camerawork and editing. Formal scrutiny of the exemplary films is achieved through interpretive analysis that, using a standard framework of headings clustered around the tri-partite system of *story*, *setting* and *discourse*, allows a systematic examination of each exemplary film to be made. The analytic framework is designed to capture as much detail as possible about each film, thus facilitating examination and exploration of trends across the source material.

It is seen over the course of this thesis that generic conventions influence the portrayal of suicide and gender in films, though in different ways within different cinematic traditions, and that these variances can be tracked over time. The film traditions of importance here are those drawn upon by the six films analysed in detail in Part II: the French *Nouvelle Vague*; the alcohol addiction film; *film noir*; *neo-noir*; “serious” drama; and the teenpic. These contextual traditions, in combination with the ways in which maleness and femaleness are represented on screen, are examined in terms of their impact on movie representations of suicide.

The structure of the thesis can be summarised in the following way. Part I consists of 3 chapters. In Chapter 1, I consider the literature relating to theories of suicide since Durkheim, as well as pertinent historical and cultural representations of suicide. In Chapter 2 I outline a number of theories that relate to sex and gender and the social construction of masculinity and femininity, including the notion of a “crisis in masculinity”. In Chapter 3 I present an overview of a number of notable issues arising from detailed analysis of the source material, including the gender of the suicidee and suicidal method. This analysis further contextualises the films and the issues that are subsequently prominent in the film analysis. In this chapter I also provide an introduction to

each of the three main categories, including information about the movies exemplified, which is used to organise Part II of the thesis. As a whole, Part I provides the contextual framework for closer analysis. Part II is where this closer reading of the films takes place and it is here where the representations of suicide and gender, against the cultural backdrop of generic convention, receive detailed discussion.

In relation to the reasons why film characters commit suicide, two categories have been developed that suggest either a fundamentally “internal” and often ill-understood motivation, for example depression or long term illness, or an “external” motivation for which the narrative provides apparently intelligible explanations, for instance where a character is seen to be in danger or to be suffering from feelings of guilt. Where any of the films seek to elaborate upon the lasting effects of suicide on another character, these narratives are also to be examined in terms of the type of effect that the suicide had provoked.

For the first category, discussed in Chapter 4, where a character is driven to suicide owing to an internal imperative – labelled Melancholic Suicide (after Durkheim, 2002 and Freud, 2005) – it is shown that generic tradition does influence how the suicide is represented. These influences are examined in the course of in-depth analysis of two exemplary films featuring suicides of this kind, released within different cinematic contexts and in different periods, namely the French *Nouvelle Vague* (*Le Feu Follet*, 1963) and the American alcohol-addiction tradition (*Leaving Las Vegas*, 1995). The exemplary films feature two men, Alain and Ben, both driven to commit suicide in consequence of unhappiness emanating from within. There are hints in each of the films as to the reasons for their depressed state, but no cause is conclusively confirmed. Though the suicidal methods of choice are different, each film concentrates on the final days of the main character, right up to their deaths.

In Chapter 5, the category given the label Occasioned Suicide is exemplified by two films called *The Killers* (1946 and 1964, both inspired by the same Hemingway short story) and in fact, this overall category can be usefully classified further into three sub-categories, namely, where a “guilty” character

commits suicide to escape punishment, where a “victim” commits suicide to escape violence or harm, or where suicides essentially heroic in nature and performed in the belief that others will benefit. Both of the suicides in *The Killers* are classified in the second sub-category, as death is accepted to end the pained situation the characters find themselves in. As well as the exemplary films being linked by their source material, the cinematic traditions from which they emerge, *film noir* and *neo-noir*, are also linked, but with clear variations in convention that construct gender and suicide differently.

Films focusing on the consequences of suicide for others are discussed in Chapter 6 and are exemplified by *The Hustler* (1963) and *The Virgin Suicides* (1999). It is demonstrated that generic traditions – relating to “serious” drama and the teenpic – account at least in part for differences in the way suicides are portrayed between the two films. This group of films can also be classified into two distinct sub-groups, where, following the suicide of someone close to them, either a character’s behaviour changes as they learn to cope with the loss, or where they suffer confusion or anger and do not “develop” in any meaningful way. *The Hustler* epitomises the former, which *The Virgin Suicides* typifies the latter.

Genre and generic convention are included in this research in order to relate the films to the cultures and production context in which they were made and consumed as well as to track changes over time. Following Alexander (2003), such links should not be treated as unproblematic, but there are grounds for holding that inferences resting on such links can be made. As Tudor (1989) suggests, in relation to popular culture, it is ‘an “embedded” feature of social life...simultaneously both symptom *and* cause, reflection *and* articulation, language of ideological production *and* reproduction’ (1989:5) and with this in mind, we shall explore how film constructions of gender and suicide change over time and across genres. Box office success can and does influence the production of future films, but if we conceive of audiences as ‘active’ (Alexander, 2003:51), that is, making conscious decisions about which films to see, box-office alone does not provide a sufficiently discriminatory indicator of cultural significance. As Neale (2000) notes, without asking people why they have

purchased a cinema ticket, the actual reasons remain elusive and could vary from ideology, to style, to whim. However, identifying trends over time, in conjunction with an understanding of generic convention, can prove to be an effective indirect way of providing a richer analysis of the potential cultural resonances of particular forms of cinematic representation and their relation to what Alexander (2003) describes as the 'wider norms, values, laws, institutions and social structures' (2003:61) which constitute the situation in which a film is produced, released and understood.

The other significant contextual factor examined here and influencing movie representation of suicide is gender. Analysis of the gender of suicide attempters and accomplices in this research shows that men greatly outnumber women by a margin of nearly 3:1 (the actual figures are 70% male, 30% female). This trend is also apparent where specific methods are scrutinised, such that men outnumber women for every suicide method found in the films of this research, except for suicide by poisoning and by drowning (the figures for both are: men 42% and women 58%). In contrast to this male-female imbalance suicide statistics suggest that many more women than men attempt suicide. One possible argument to explain this difference (and one that this research sought to examine) revolves around the claim that a distinctively modern "crisis of masculinity" finds expression in suicide's movie representation, but this is implausible as the male-female imbalance long precedes the recent suggestion of a "crisis". A more plausible explanation relates to the typical construction of gender in films and the consequences of that construction for representation of suicide. Many scholars (for instance Tasker, 1998 and Haskell, 1987) agree that there is a systematic divergence in the typical construction of male and female movie roles, with narratives focusing mainly on active, male protagonists, while female characters are traditionally confined to more passive roles. Accordingly, given a story focus upon suicide, we might expect a narrative form dominated by active male protagonists to therefore feature more male suicides than female simply as a consequence of the frequency of male activity over female. Indeed, even in films that do feature female suicides, the primary focus often remains upon men (for instance, in the exemplary films *The Hustler* and *The Virgin*

*Suicides*) and suicide when employed as a narrative device is profoundly influenced to by established cinematic constructions of masculinity and femininity.

This thesis seeks to show how suicide is incorporated within film narratives as a device to explore conflict and trauma and one drawing upon a distinctive set of representations of the causes, narrative roles and consequences of such a device. In so doing it is assumed that the generic conventions brought into play in this process are significant in influencing the constructions of suicide and gender seen in these films, and that the typical patterns of representation that the research uncovers resonate with audiences' prevailing attitudes and beliefs about suicide and gender.

**PART I: CONCEPTUAL RESOURCES**

# CHAPTER 1. CONTEXTUALISING SUICIDE: DEBATES, THEORIES AND APPROACHES

This chapter aims to outline those approaches to the study of suicide that are most relevant to this research, including hugely influential ideas advanced by theorists such as Durkheim. Payne et al (2008) state that 'a history of mental illness is the greatest risk factor for suicide for both men and women' (2008:28), but as will be seen during this chapter and beyond, in the movies, there are a number of situations that typically result in suicide and not all have mental health issues as part of the narrative. This chapter begins with a discussion of types of suicide as outlined by various theorists, then continues by illustrating how variably suicide has been thought of historically and culturally in order to set the scene for the exemplary film analyses in Part II. However, to begin with, it will be useful to consider the question of definitions of the term "suicide".

## *Types of suicide*

Durkheim argued that the breakdown of social bonds led to suicide and his proposed analyses attempted to explain why these ties between people sometimes disintegrated. Durkheim's definition of suicide was as follows,

The term suicide is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result. ([1897] 2002:xlii)

Other writers have developed similar definitions, including Barry (1994), who takes into consideration liberty to make one's own choice,

A suicide is a deliberate and voluntary performance or omission, done with adequate freedom and knowledge, that aims at the destruction of one's life. It is a planned, chosen, intended and consented action to bring death as either a means or an end in itself. It is a choice made



where death is reasonably expected to result from the specified performance or omission in common circumstances and situations. (1994:10)

Fairbairn (1995) covers similar ideas in his definition, particularly in referring to the act of suicide itself as potentially being as much a part of the suicidee's plan as is the death, as well as including the possibility of suicide via another person's actions; this last point aptly illustrated in the movies in *Falling Down* (1993) and *Minority Report* (2002),

Suicide is an act, whether of commission or omission, and whether performed by himself or others, by means of which an individual autonomously intends and wishes to bring about his death because he wants to be dead or wants to die the death he enacts. (1995:84)

I will draw upon ideas such as these, though a factor missing from these definitions that will be required for this research is a notion of narrative clues and cues in the film itself, which affect how we view the act. In this research we will encounter cinematic suicides ranging from the depressed (*Le Feu Follet*) to the manic (*The Beach* (2000)), from the traumatised (*Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003)) to the heroic (*Gran Torino* (2009)), from the irrational (*Last of the Mohicans* (1992)) to the rational (*The Taking of Pelham 123* (1974)), from the troubled (*Peeping Tom* (1960)) to the serene (*Soylent Green* (1973)) and all points in between. Given this range, Durkheim's suicides, as set out in his four-part typology, offer a valuable starting point, as they show how social factors can influence a seemingly individual and private decision. Such circumstances are commonplace in films, such as suicide following a family discussion (*The Black Dahlia* (2006)) or workplace disagreement (*Tunes of Glory* (1960)). It was Durkheim's view that the more a person was integrated within their society, for example by being Catholic, or by being married, or by being a citizen of a country exiting a war, then the less likely that person was to kill themselves. If they were not integrated within their community, they were vulnerable to *egoistic suicide*. There are, however, also dangers in being too integrated. This is characterised by Durkheim in terms of highly regimented situations with possible honourable

attachments such as the military, where *altruistic suicide*, death for the good of others, might take place. The practice of suttee, where (healthy) wives are expected to follow their dead husbands to the afterlife, is also an example of this kind of suicide.

In addition to integration, as discussed above, Durkheim also utilised the concept of regulation in order to identify and describe two more forms of suicide. After a breakdown in social order, for instance following a financial or natural disaster, people may feel adrift and unable to behave as they once did. In this context, self-killing was labelled *anomic suicide* by Durkheim, the opposite of which was *fatalistic suicide*, where a high degree of regulation may make people feel they have no alternative but to commit suicide (for instance prisoners). Halbwachs (1978), developing Durkheim's ideas, believed that integration and regulation could be brought much closer together using the idea of attachment or detachment from one's social community. For Halbwachs, isolation – which he terms a 'hiatus' or 'void' - plays a huge part in suicide, 'the true cause of the suicide is the void that has formed around the suicidal person and ... if there were no such hiatuses there would be no suicides' (1978:290).

All Durkheim's four types of suicide can be found in the cinema. For *egoistic suicide*, John Wayne's character in *The Shootist* (1976) can be cited as he settled his affairs and said his goodbyes (thus severing the bonds that tied him to his community) prior to embarking on the journey to his death. For *altruistic suicide*, a film with a heroic suicide in it will serve as an example, such as *Armageddon* (1998). An example of *anomic suicide* can be seen in *Battle Royale* (2000) where a group of school children are abandoned on an island and compelled to harm each other in an effort to survive, which drives some of the children to kill themselves in the absence of normal social conventions. Finally, the deaths of the four eldest sisters in *The Virgin Suicides* can be thought of as instances of *fatalistic suicide*. After being confined to the house for over a year, it seems they came to the decision that suicide was their only way out.

Fairbairn (1995:126-137) also suggests various types of suicide, which include no hope, existential, dutiful, altruistic, revenge, political/ideological, driven by others

to 'do the right thing', multiple/mass, and judicial (where the suicidee believes they have done something so wrong that death is the appropriate response). As we shall see later, many of these formulations of the suicidal impulse find expression in the movies.

Jeffreys (1997) also believes that 'revenge suicide' should be included in any list of suicide types, something termed 'Samsonic suicide' (1997:185) by the author. Jeffreys' research into the Yoruba tribe found that committing suicide in the presence of the person provoking such a response means they are held responsible for the death until a debt has been paid to the bereaved family. There are hints of this in the suicide that takes place in *Caché* (2006), where Majid cuts his throat in the presence of a man he feels has wronged him. In Yoruba culture, until the debt is paid, the corpse of the suicide resides in the home of the person owing the debt, in order to ensure the debt is paid quickly.

### *Suicide through the ages*

Within Western culture, suicide has generally been viewed in contradictory ways, pertaining to both dignity and despair. Although most religions hold suicide to be a sin, art (including literature, poetry plays and film) has regularly featured characters that have chosen death in order to save others or their own virtue (Wymer, 1986:4). In Ancient times, a typical suicide was perceived to be an empowered act, that stressed nobility and self-control, for instance Ajax killing himself with his sword. An image of Ajax dying on his sword is, according to Brown (2001), the earliest known suicide in art, from approximately 700 BCE.

In the four centuries immediately following Jesus' death, his crucifixion and martyrdom was viewed approvingly by Christians seeking to emulate his conviction by killing themselves in order to prove their own faith. Upon Saint Augustine's instruction and with reference to the commandment *Thou shalt not kill*, this practice (and with it, self-killing) was banned, as church authorities feared Christianity might die out (Stillion et al, 1989:6-7). However, owing to examples from classical times (such as Socrates and Samson as well as Jesus), and

examples contemporary to Augustine of official killings, (for instance, executions of criminals), his objectors still had room for argument. As the debate continued, so did the occurrence of suicide and its representation in various forms of art (Minois, 1999:88).

Brown (2001) contends that it was during the late Gothic period that suicide in art began to be seen as taboo. Images of Judas being denied passage to Heaven separated his death from that of Jesus, despite compelling evidence to call Jesus' death suicide as well (Minois, 1999:215). Brown (2001) reports that hanging as a suicide method has long been imbued with negative connotations of the sort that the death was not just a bad death, but evidence of a bad person as well (2001:177). This convention pre-dates any reference to Judas and his chosen method of exit, and his subsequent representation, has since contributed to these ideas (2001:25).

In most Western nations, political and legal decrees regarding suicide have softened over the years; for instance in France, attempted suicides were tried in court and 'executed', the last of these occurring in 1732. Often, possessions would be forfeited as well. Suicide cadavers in England used to be dragged through the streets, hanged upside down, burned and then buried under crossroads with a stake through the chest in an effort to secure the soul by confusing it as to which way to go. The fear was that if left 'unsecured', it might attempt to contact (and therefore corrupt) the living. Such barbaric practices were phased out in the seventeenth century, though during the first half of the 1800s, corpses of suicides were still sentenced to (albeit less severe) punishment and attempted suicides were punished up to the First World War (Minois, 1999:297). As we have seen, suicide has been a subject of cultural discussion over many centuries and therefore it is no surprise to find that it is such a prominent theme in the cinema. Having sampled how suicide has been considered in Western art, we will now turn to the ways in which suicide has been understood in social contexts relevant to this research.

### *Cultural context of suicide*

Many books and articles relating to suicide refer to official statistics, gathered from one location (for instance a city or a country) or from a variety (for instance the World Health Organisation's suicide data) and it can be tempting to uncritically cite figures extracted from these data. However, there can be problems with the definition of a suicide between those compiling the information and researchers using it. Douglas (1967), in a classic discussion, posits different types of unreliability in such data, which can significantly affect their usefulness. How is the assumed motive of the deceased to be interpreted? Is there verification of cause of death? And if there are competing and differing official statistics, which should be chosen? Suicides may also be hidden within official statistics at different rates and so affect their overall use in a way that cannot easily be accounted for. For Douglas, only a case-by-case analysis of a fatality can accurately capture whether or not suicide was involved. Atkinson (1971), further developing Douglas' work, separates "suicide" out into a process of three stages: up to and including the act itself; between the act and death (or not); and between death and the categorisation of suicide. Each stage can be influential towards or against a registration of suicide by a coroner or similar official, emphasising the social nature of categorisations of suicide. The findings of Douglas and Atkinson, with regards to social pressures affecting the labelling of deaths as suicide are echoed by Reynders et al (2011) who tested the reliability of official statistics in relation to train suicides across Europe. The researchers found significant discrepancies between countries' rates of suicide by train and attributed these differences to 'registration and coding procedures of the cause of death' (2011:126), procedures which varied greatly between countries. In a similar piece of work, though within the context of Great Britain only, O'Donnell and Farmer (1995) revisited 242 'probable suicides' (1995:458) on London Underground and tracked each case through the system to discover how they were ultimately classified by a coroner. They found huge variations between coroners in the verdicts passed down in almost-identical cases and for male deaths which the researchers felt were suicide, only 50% were registered as suicide by a coroner. For females it was 77%. O'Donnell and Farmer believed that moving away from the current requirement of "beyond reasonable doubt" to a

less severe “balance of probabilities” standard of proof should provide greater accuracy. With these points very much in mind, I have limited the use of official statistics here to a small number of cases where they seem justified, along with other supporting information regarding the relevant social context.

Canetto and Sakinofsky (1998) argue that *cultural script theory* can account for gendered differences between male and female suicides, by showing how socialisation within a community – be it a residential neighbourhood or a military base – can affect a person’s predisposition to, choice of method and likelihood of suicide among a population. Earlier research by Canetto, cited by the authors, shows how successful suicide was seen as a male way of dealing with failure or illness. Conversely, attempted suicide was seen as an acceptable response to a problem for women, but not for men: ‘women and men will tend to adopt the self-destructive behaviours that are congruent with the gender scripts of their cultures’ (1998:17). Rather than attempt suicide, the authors argue, men drink to deal with their problems, owing to a stigma of femininity attached to unsuccessful suicide.

Local cultural scripts can have such a profound effect on behaviour and attitudes that even opposite actions can flow from their influence. The authors cite research from Rothberg and McDowell (1988) which shows that problems in a relationship accounted for 94% of suicides with US Air Force staff, completely at odds with American society at large where such behaviour was felt to be much more appropriate for women rather than men. As Canetto and Sakinofsky conclude, ‘males in the military...have adopted a script of suicidal behaviour that, among civilians, is considered a female script’ (1998:18). Cultural script theory is therefore especially useful to consider when thinking about cinematic suicide: are the deaths following their ‘script’? In this respect the cultural context of suicide, as well as the history of its treatment in diverse cultures, is as crucial as the apparent psychological conditions.

In this context it is notable, for instance, that whereas France had decriminalised suicide by 1791, In Great Britain the same was achieved in 1961. Within a broader European context suicide has been taken as a symptom of a wide range of social ills. In nineteenth century Germany, ‘conservatives used the rise in

suicide rates as a means of decrying the irreligious, whereas socialists used it to highlight working-class poverty' (Healy, 2006:915). In Russia at the same time, suicide was used as an 'indictment of atheism, nihilism, civilisation, and the dissolution of communal solidarity, as well as poverty' (ibid.). For Italy at the turn of the twentieth century, a perceived rise in suicide rates were variously given as relating to 'sexual deviancy, rapid economic development and secularism' (ibid.). Thus we can see how suicide is very much a part of the culture in which it occurs and while the act has meaning for the protagonist, it may also have meaning – potentially unrelated – for others within that society as well. In a recent piece of research relating to French adolescents, van Leeuwen et al (2010) found that individualism was a significant risk factor for suicide, leaving those in question without help from a social network in times of stress or difficulty. Female adolescents were also more likely to experience serious mood swings prior to a suicide attempt than were male adolescents.

There have been a range of claims about suicide as it relates to alcohol consumption, a feature which figures prominently in two of my exemplary cases: *Le Feu Follet* and *Leaving Las Vegas*. The relationship between alcohol and suicide is not simply a matter of how much is drunk, but rather the central foci are *what* is drunk and *how* it is drunk, that is to say the drinking culture that exists for that society. Stickley et al (2011) report that spirits and beer, and an episodic drinking culture, have a closer relationship with suicide than cultures where wine is the preferred alcoholic drink, without the "binge" element associated with spirits and beer. Portugal and France have low suicide rates but high alcohol consumption rates (wine cultures, in terms of Stickley et al's categories), whereas in countries such as Norway and Sweden, an increase in alcohol use is, according to Rossow (1996), closely associated with rises in suicide rates. Rossow (1996) splits cultures out into "wet" and "dry" where wet cultures are those such as France and Portugal and dry are those such as Norway and Sweden, and also Great Britain and USA. It is Rossow's contention that people respond to their problems in different ways: in a wet culture, they drink; in a dry culture, they attempt suicide. If suicide is attempted while drunk, there is often a greater chance of success, 'when intoxicated, people are more likely to attempt suicide using means that have a very low probability of survival' (Sher, 2006:59).

Skog (1991) extends this by linking alcohol and suicide to Durkheim's theories, suggesting that suicide while intoxicated amounts to a form of anomie, where the protagonist is able to act without their usual restraints. *Le Feu Follet* provides a number of vivid examples, where Alain acts on his desires following a drink and also chooses a gun for his suicide method. Similarly, Ben in *Leaving Las Vegas* seems to transform into a completely different person after drinking, acting without constraint and speaking exactly as he wishes, irrespective of others present.

Broadening the discussion of cultural context out towards the USA in the post-war period, Pampel (1998) refers to research<sup>3</sup> which suggests that at this time, female suicide rates increased as working women struggled to adjust to their new surroundings, but in the later post-war period, female suicide rates declined, suggesting that adjustments had been made and assimilation attained. There were initial moments of stress between co-workers and between family members, but with time, these were overcome. Stack (1981) also found that matters of a more personal nature affected the choice of suicide in the post-war period. A rise in the birth rate at this time is interesting as children are often a protector against suicide because people feel more of a purpose by having a child depend on them. However, also at this time, there was an increase in the divorce rate as couples had postponed sorting out their matrimonial difficulties during the war. Research such as this confirms that suicide is often a difficult choice following a complex decision-making process which can then also have different meanings for observers. In addition to matters of home and employment, and as Durkheim so forcefully suggested, religious faith can also impact on suicide. Pescosolido and Georgianna (1989) found that the USA moved from a Protestant view of itself in 1870 to a more wide-ranging 'Protestant-Catholic-Judaism' (1989:34) view in the 1950s and with this change of mind set, came changes in relation to suicide.<sup>4</sup> Partially supporting one of Durkheim's conclusions, Pescosolido and Georgianna (1989) also found that Catholicism affords the greatest protection against suicide.

---

<sup>3</sup> Stack (1987).

<sup>4</sup> Stillion et al (1989) report that in relation to Judaism, suicide is considered wrong, unless it is to end a painful life where death is imminent, or to avoid renouncing Judaism. However, two witnesses are required to attest that the death was suicide, otherwise it would not be defined as such.



However, they split Protestantism out into its various denominational and sectarian branches within the USA and found that, in terms of suicide, some protect their followers (for instance Nazarene and Seventh Day Adventists) but some can be thought of as risk factors (for example, Episcopalian and United Church of Christ). They argue for a more sophisticated approach to religion and suicide which focuses more on the degree to which an individual is involved with their church network as this is the determining factor as to whether the risk of suicide is increased or reduced: 'these attachments, rather than church membership per se, represent a more subtle but significant influence than is often realised' (1989:43).

As we have already mentioned, one of the exemplary films studied in this thesis uses the setting of Las Vegas as a crucial element in its protagonist's journey toward suicide, so research conducted by Wray et al (2008) into the city itself and its relationship to suicide may have some bearing on subsequent analysis. They examined four sets of people and their corresponding suicide rates: residents, temporary visitors, Las Vegans living elsewhere, and non-Las Vegans travelling in other American cities and they sought to discover how risky Las Vegas was in terms of suicide. They found that Las Vegas is a risky place both to live in or to visit in terms of suicide and that this risk is greater for men than women. Over the last fifteen years, Las Vegas has been one of the fastest growing populations in America, which may bring with it, 'social isolation, fragmentation and low social cohesion that have long been identified as sociological correlates of suicide' (2008:1883). They also found that since 1985, moving away from Las Vegas has become less of a protector against suicide than it used to be, possibly, they suggest, because the rest of America has become more like Las Vegas in that time. They believe there to be three areas which could suggest why Las Vegas has a heightened relationship with suicide for residents as well as temporary visitors: ecology - that there is something about the place which encourages suicide; selection - that people, staying temporarily or permanently, 'bring an increased propensity for suicide with them to the city' (2008:1886); and contagion - that people believe others committed suicide there and so they go there too. Although little is given away in *Leaving Las Vegas* itself in terms of background details, it appears likely that Ben is a case of taking his 'increased propensity for

suicide' to Las Vegas, though the film's representation of the city itself may well also impinge on his trajectory toward suicide.

I have outlined a number of approaches to suicide, some classificatory and some more loosely descriptive, from a range of writers in relation to suicide within Western societies. We have seen how the meaning of suicide has ranged from an acceptable act (antiquity), to a sin (Middle Ages), to a sign of mental instability, and to an act of rational forethought (Bille-Brahe, 2000). In all cases it is clear that the meaning accorded to suicide is variably constructed in different cultural contexts, and there is surely no doubt that movie representations of suicide both draw upon and serve to circulate a culture's understanding of the psychological and social genesis of suicide in different times and places. We shall see aspects of that process at work in the case studies which follow. However, before turning to that it is first necessary to examine some of the literature on gender which will also have a significant bearing on this research.

## CHAPTER 2. CONTEXTUALISING GENDER: DEBATES, THEORIES AND APPROACHES

Writers across a diverse range of disciplines have investigated masculinities and femininities in a variety of contexts and those most germane to this thesis are referred to below. A theoretical understanding of masculinity and femininity is required in order to understand their representation in the cinema, which in turn allows us to examine how gender interacts with representations of suicide in film, with specific reference to particular genres and traditions. As mentioned above, suicide researchers use gender within their studies, and combining both suicide and gender with cinematic tradition will further establish a solid framework for the analysis of film representations. Gender shapes characters in film, both in terms of their function within the narrative and also how they are perceived by the audience. As we have already seen, while the relationship between gender and suicide is not a simple one, gender does play a role and in the exemplary films discussed in Part II of this thesis, gender norms – particularly in terms of characters fulfilling or disappointing those norms – play a role in shaping those characters' relationship with suicide. After introducing the discussion by establishing a distinction between sex and gender, notions regarding the social construction of gender are surveyed. Maleness, including some discussion of the notion of a crisis in masculinity is then examined, followed by a section which analyses femininity. At the end of this chapter I draw together those important themes that will require further development in later chapters of this thesis, which are as follows: masculinity and male strength; crises in masculinity and suicide; the hegemony of heterosexuality present across my exemplary films; body imagery for men and women; and finally, stereotypical portrayals of femininities.

### *Sex and gender*

Scholars over the past century have highlighted the distinction between sex and gender. As Jones (2002) states, 'sex differences refer to biological differences between men and women, whereas gender refers to differences that are socially

inscribed' (2002:103). Payne et al (2008) define gender as 'something that is done' (2008:25) and state that 'as men and women do gender in various ways, this defines them as gendered beings, while contributing to social conventions of gender' (ibid.), thus demonstrating the reciprocal nature of being influenced by, as well as influencing, social conventions regarding gender. Barrett (2001) defines gender as 'a social organising principle, a human invention like language, that organises life in culturally patterned ways' (2001:78), while Jones (2002) believes that, 'differences between men and women are assumed by and enshrined within institutional frameworks such as the law, the family, education, employment and the welfare state' (2002:103). To this list, we could also add the cinema, both reflecting and shaping culture as it does. It is in these ways that we will consider "gender" and "sex" in this research, with biology determining sex while culture determines gender.

Within these understandings of gender as an organising principle, notions of difference between men and women play a crucial role. Archer and Lloyd (2002) introduce a series of female-valued and male-valued concepts and test how men and women see themselves and each other; that is to say, what is considered to embody masculinity and femininity. In the female-valued list are attributes such as 'considerate'; 'emotional'; 'gentle'; 'likes children'; and 'tactful'. The male-valued list includes: 'competitive'; 'feels superior'; 'interested in sex'; 'outspoken'; and 'skilled in business'. While some of these notions may seem accurate enough in an unconsidered way, upon further thought it is clear that they also support commonly-held ideological views about men and women and add very little to an understanding of gender roles. Connell (1987) is particularly critical about such studies, stating that to compile results of respondents' replies and reactions to a series of words and phrases and then establish a gendered dichotomy upon that basis is to analyse with little hope of understanding why. However, while agreeing in principle with Connell on this point, I am not so quick to dismiss these findings. Despite the research not revealing a set of results that demand immediate reassessment of gender roles in the western world (but instead merely offer support for the *status quo*), its relevance to my research cannot be ignored. Given the reliance upon stereotypes and common sense assumptions that we all make when negotiating gender roles, this type of study

suggests some of the terms with which a character in a film may be understood by an audience and is therefore relevant here. As Dyer (2002) comments, stereotypes in films are a useful shorthand way of introducing a character to an audience with little effort required. Stereotypes are an exaggerated component of the “type”, a character consisting of a few recognisable traits, ‘which point to general, recurrent features of the human world’ (2002:13) and it is this connection with the audience that allows for immediate comprehension.

### *Sex as a social construction*

Writers from the essentialist side of the argument hold that it is for biological reasons that men and women act the way they do. There is something inherently masculine in all men, even if other influences occasionally marginalise or dilute that masculinity, and likewise with women and femininity. While essentialist views on gender are anathema to many, such ideas have currency with some filmmakers and may well inform an audience’s understanding of the movies that they see. A contrasting set of theories to this can be grouped under the heading of constructionism and here, as we shall see in this section, it is not biology that determines gender, but social, historical and political factors instead.

Resulting from their research into segregation by sex across a number of countries, Charles and Bradley (2009) state that, ‘gender differentiation of life activities reinforces essentialist stereotypes and preferences and establishes boundaries of normative behaviour so that subsequent boys and girls do not perceive a full range of educational, career and life options’ (2009:961). Views such as this are certainly articulated in films of all types, where strong stereotyping of characters occurs repeatedly.

Constructionists hold that gender is a cultural construct and, while built upon sex differences between males and females, is neither inherent nor unchanging, as are the sex differences (leaving aside the possibility of surgery). Writing about gender awareness within groups of Goths and Christians in the UK, Wilkins (2009) writes, ‘among older boys and young men, toughness, athletic prowess,

social visibility, power over others, and heterosexual success are typically key signs of real masculinity' (2009:349). However, for constructionists, these associations with masculinity need not always be accurate. In different cultures and at different times, other sets of traits and indicators may exist.

As Edley and Wetherall (1995) suggest, what is considered appropriate behaviour for males and females is derived and absorbed 'through a combination of observation, imitation, indoctrination and conscious learning' (1995:79), with films, along with other forms of media and art contributing to this learning. In terms of gender differences, Payne et al (2008) state that 'for women social constructions of femininity include family roles and a caring orientation' (2008:30), while for men, 'in Western societies, masculinity is associated with the desire for power and dominance, and men are expected to display courage, independence, rationality and competitiveness, while concealing vulnerability and weakness' (ibid.). Paechter (2006) agrees, saying that, 'while most...of us are men in male bodies and women in female bodies, how we understand ourselves as masculine and feminine varies according to time, place and circumstances' (2006:261).

Lindgren and Lélievre (2009) hold that gender is best thought of as an external exhibition of behaviour, leaving the agent predisposed to issues of conformity as they struggle to match their actions to those around them. Butler (1990) states that gender is 'an act...which is both intentional and performative' (1990:139), that is to say, 'an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylised repetition of acts*' (1990:140). Writing about Butler's ideas concerning gender, Onderdonk (2004) comments that, 'for Butler, there is no ontological basis of gender, but only continually reiterated performances of it, producing not truth, but 'truth effects' - constructed illusions of stable, gendered identity' (2004:288-9). Milestone and Meyer (2012) support this view, writing that for Butler, 'gender identity is the effect, the outcome of performativity rather than its cause' (2012:14). Gutterman (2001) builds on Butler's assessment of gender by widening the scope to include identity, 'the metaphor of performance provides an explanatory framework for understanding the contingency of identity' (2001:60). Whether or not Butler considered performance to be a metaphor or how things actually are, Gutterman believes that further insight is provided by

thinking of performance in metaphorical terms. Elaborating upon Butler's work, Jagger (2008) sums up one aspect of her position by saying, 'it is not that sex and gender produce heterosexuality but that heterosexuality produces sex and gender in a binary form' (2008:1).

Buchbinder (2008) extends Butler's concept of gender as performative to include the notion of 'passing': 'gender behaviour has become...a form of protective mimicry, providing a camouflage for the subject as a social entity' (2008:234). For Buchbinder (2008), such a notion ties in to a perceived crisis in masculinity, for if any gay male can "pass" as straight, there is no detectable element incapable of mimicry that can distinguish a "real" man from a "lesser" man. Buchbinder (2008) believes gendered behaviour requires an audience, 'it cannot be performed in a vacuum of solitude' (2008:235) and that we act as though we are being seen, even when we are alone – a useful way to think about characters in films.

In terms of the process of acquiring gender – in order that one can "do" it – Williams (2002) suggests that girls experience an early stage, 'trying on gender', a 'process of anticipating, experimenting, retreating and resisting' gender (2002:30). Once tried on and comfortable, more public displays can be made. It seems likely that boys also go through such a process. Pyke and Johnson's (2003) research into groups of young Vietnamese and Korean women living in America in the early twenty-first century found that within groups consisting entirely of members of their own ethnic background, the women acted according to Asian stereotypes of quiet, reticent, respectful women. However, when in mixed groups (that is, including white women), they were confident, humorous and assertive, and much more like what they believed hegemonic femininity to consist of: 'the femininity of the white mainstream is glorified as authentic, natural and normal, and Asian ethnic femininity is denigrated as coerced, contrived and artificial' (2003:43). The respondents felt that only when in mixed groups could they be themselves and act naturally, rather than carry out a gender performance when with members of their family or ethnic background.

Studlar (1996) proposes the concept 'transformative masculinity' (1996:4) and what is meant by this is that masculinity is seen 'as a process, a liminal construction, and even a performance' (ibid.), something which ties in with Payne et al (2008) and their contention that being public makes gender 'accountable' (2008:26) and as such, conformity to prescribed behaviour is encouraged. These ideas are germane to cinematic representation in as much as a character's representation of gender can easily be thought of as both a performance and a construction, and their behaviour is public in that an audience is watching from the auditorium: their performance of gender provides models of performance for the spectator. How they act and what they say is accountable to the viewers taking in their performance, just as the audience's own gendered behaviour is performed and accountable to the people they interact with in their everyday lives.

Hearn and Collinson (1994) argue that research which focuses on men and masculinities needs to avoid excluding women and femininities. They suggest a way to achieve this is to think of relations between women, children and men as relations of power. This could help analysis by providing a more appropriate way of considering women, children and men, and this can be further assisted by the pluralising of the word masculinity, so as to encompass the notion of historical change. Their assessment of gender is to describe it as an ideology that people are exposed to as part of their normal lives and this, of course, must be a key element in any examination of gender in the movies.

Paechter (2006) writes that, 'once we understand that not all masculinities are entirely masculine or femininities feminine, we may be able to think of ourselves as humans who construct our identities in various ways, some of which are related to ideal typical forms of masculinity and femininity, and some of which are not' (2006:262) and construction of those identities may be implicated in complex ways in what is seen on the cinema screen and in what preconceptions are brought to the viewing situation by spectators.

Following this overview of sex and gender as a social construction, we now turn to maleness and femaleness in more detail. Firstly, masculinities, structured



around the ideas of Connell, will be looked at and a discussion will be introduced regarding the idea of a crisis in masculinity. Secondly, the focus turns towards femininities and notions regarding ways of being female, both historic and contemporary. For both genders, references will be made to films and suicide where appropriate.

### *Masculinities*

Connell's ideas have become the touchstone from which many later studies of masculinities have developed and as such are crucial in any exploration of the topic. They are particularly pertinent for the study of masculinities in film as themes such as marginalisation, subordination and dominance of one group over another are commonly expressed within the cinema. Connell positions masculinity as ideology and uses Gramsci's notion of hegemony to develop a set of ideas revolving around hegemonic masculinity, subordinated masculinity, marginalised masculinity, and complicity (Connell, 1987). When one type of masculinity is dominant, 'culturally exalted' (2001:38), then that is the prevailing way of behaving in a masculine way. It is the 'accepted' way and is defined as 'normal' (ibid.). Hegemonic masculinity therefore dominates other possibilities of how to behave in a masculine way. The legitimising of patriarchy and the institutionalised domination of women are articulated within hegemonic masculinity. The mass media are particularly important in the maintenance of hegemony, by continually presenting examples for men to follow:

The cultural ideal (or ideals) of masculinity need not correspond at all closely to the actual personalities of the majority of men. Indeed, the winning of hegemony often involves the creation of models of masculinity which are quite specifically fantasy figures, such as the film characters played by Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne and Sylvester Stallone (Connell, 1987:184-5).

Many scholars have built on Connell's work, including Lindgren and Lélièvre (2009) who suggest that among the components of hegemonic masculinity are

'courageousness, risk-taking and the ability to withstand pain' (2009:395), while Bradley (2007) believes that hegemonic masculinity includes the following traits: 'tough, competitive, self-reliant, controlling, aggressive and fiercely heterosexual' (2007:47), all of which repeatedly play a part in film conceptualisations of "maleness".

The alternative to domination is subordination, and in terms of masculinity, Connell cites homosexuality as being a subordinated masculinity. Demetriou (2001) extends this by stating 'gay men are subordinated to straight men not only in terms of social status and prestige but also by a series of material practices, which include political, cultural, economic, and legal discrimination' (2001:341). Weak heterosexual men may be excluded from the culturally dominant perspective too, as not being able to fulfil the type of behaviour required by the hegemonic ideal.

Not only are some types of masculinity subordinated, but some are also marginalised. Connell introduces ethnicity here and cites the situation in America of black sports stars being portrayed as exemplars of hegemonic masculinity while at the same time black men suffer racism in their everyday lives. Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods may have 'made it' as role models irrespective of skin colour, 'but the fame and wealth of individual stars has no trickle-down effect; it does not yield social authority to black men generally' (2001:42). According to Connell, they are marginalised within society. Connell, of course, was writing before Obama's election victory in 2008 (and, indeed, before Woods was involved in a scandal) and the evidence for a positive 'trickle-down effect' for black men in American society has yet to be established.

The fourth concept, complicity, concerns the benefit received by men from the dominance of hegemonic masculinity. These men neither embody the ideal nor challenge the injustices suffered by marginalised groups and women, but instead 'realise the patriarchal dividend' (2001:342) through their silence and acceptance.

Rehling (2007) offers the view that 'while white, heterosexual masculinity's universal positioning has undeniably been a position of great ideological strength,

it also incorporates the anxiety that, as the dominant norm, its very ordinariness renders it a rather sterile, empty identity' (2007: no pagination). Rehling's point here is that as hegemonic masculinity is the pre-eminent position for males in western society, such pre-eminence carries with it a potentially numerical significance – in terms of total number of males following its "guidelines" – and this may result in a collective fear of being commonplace, ordinary, not-special.

Brittan (1989) defines masculinity as the actual behaviour of men, 'those aspects of men's behaviour that fluctuate over time' (1989:3). This includes hair styles, speech, fashions and so on. Underpinning these behaviours is an ideology, 'masculinism' which 'justifies and naturalises male domination' (1989:4). For Brittan (1989), this means that masculinism is 'the ideology of patriarchy' (1989:4). Patriarchy is normalised through masculinism and the prevailing social order is accepted by men and women.

Brittan (2001) further holds that a gendered division of labour, the 'normality' of heterosexuality, and male domination in public and private life are justified and maintained through masculinism. 'Masculinism is reproduced and reaffirmed in the household, in the economy and in the polity' (2001:55). Aronowitz (1995) uses the term 'masculinism' too, describing it in a similar way to Brittan as the 'naturalisation of hierarchy and domination' (1995:314). Aronowitz's point (and to an extent Brittan's as well) is that through the ideology of masculinism, biological facts about men and women turn into assumptions about power relations. There may be problems in considering a class of 'men' as a unified group, but Brittan's ideas direct our attention towards a sharper understanding of western cultures in terms of gender relations. Power relations between men and women in films are often rendered along stereotypical lines, cast thus so as to be easily understood by an audience.

Approaching the situation from a significantly different perspective is Robert Bly. Bly holds that a man's masculinity is rooted deep within him and that, currently, masculinity is experiencing trouble in the modern world. Bly is influenced by Freud and Jung, and he builds on Jung's notions of archetypes as he writes about modern man fulfilling various roles such as 'the Wild Man', 'the King', and

'the Warrior' (1999:passim). Other writers, influenced by Bly have developed the idea of males and archetypes, offering 'Magician' and 'Lover' as well (Moore and Gillette, 1990). Coltrane (1994) warns against essentialist perspectives such as this as, 'they reduce historically and culturally specific myths and practices to universal psychological or biological truths, thereby ignoring the social structural conditions that produced them' (1994:45). Continuing the criticism of these ideas, especially their reliance on equating gender with certain traits, Morgan writes, 'masculinity is not...the possession or non-possession of certain traits. It is to do with the maintenance of certain kinds of relationships between men and women and between men' (See Winlow, 2001:67). However, a commonplace way of thinking about people (in everyday life as well as in the movies) is to consider the kinds of traits they embody, and it is certainly the case that traditionally, masculine and feminine were personified by different attributes. Arguably this is less the case now, but it can still be a relevant factor. Traditional conceptions of masculinity have often focused on aspects such as having a job, keeping a family, hard work, often physical, competitive with other men, domineering, muscular and as will be seen below, changes within societies have impacted on a number of these characteristics. There may also be variants based upon class as well.

Whitehead and Barrett (2001), urge us to think of 'masculinities as plural, changing and historically informed around dominant discourses or ideologies of masculinism' (2001:15). They go on to state,

In this respect we cannot answer, in any absolute sense, the question 'what is masculinity?' The nearest that we can get to an 'answer' is to state that masculinities are those behaviours, languages, practices, existing in specific cultural and organisational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine (2001:15-16).

Roper and Tosh (1991) approach masculinity from a historical perspective and they believe there to be two key propositions: it is a relational construct that needs to be considered as part of the whole of gender relations; and the social

power of men directly affects it, a point supported by Harvey (2005) as well. They are keen to show that history is important when considering masculinity and 'that this history entails a complex interweaving of power with both imagined and lived masculine identities' (1991:19). These points are highly pertinent to the study of representations of gender and suicide in film and will be borne in mind during the analysis.

Whitehead (2002) is keen to stress the historical nature of definitions of gender as well, pointing out that what was described as masculine in Victorian times, differed from Edwardian and Elizabethan times. Indeed, Whitehead goes on to say that studies have shown that what is described as manly or masculine at one time or another can be understood as fulfilling a political or social need, for example to assist the war effort during World War Two.

Hatty (2000) also holds that masculinity has altered across time, with medieval masculinity understood in relation to a scale ranging from heroism to defeat. Hatty proposes a number of recent historical events that may have affected American masculinity in some way, including the following: during the exploration and civilising of the west, the pioneering spirit of the cowboy became a central facet of masculinity, 'the previously rough and dirty herder was transformed into the brave and courageous 'man of the frontier', willing to enter unknown and dangerous territory and prepare it for habitation' (2000:136). Key events for Hatty in the twentieth century include the World Wars; the Depression of the 1920s and 1930s; the civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s; the Vietnam war, 'thwarted by their desire to emulate their fathers, many returning soldiers experienced a profound loss of self' (2000:139); and the 1970s and 1980s have seen the men's movement emerge as well as a resurgence of masculinist ideals and behaviour. In terms of the cinema, film industries have faced these events too and films have dealt with them in a variety of different ways, ranging from entertainment to help audiences enjoy themselves (for instance, musicals) to films that focus specifically on problems of a more social nature.

Paechter (2006) refers to masculinity and femininity as 'slippery terms' (2006:254), commenting that, 'we...become seduced by the 'obviousness' of a particular term...that we fail to perceive the problems it brings in its wake' (2006:254). Other writers are similarly concerned with these problems, for instance McMahon, referring to the literature on masculinity at the time, writes that 'the usefulness of the concept is generally taken for granted, and what is offered is a description, frequently a list of traits' (see Hearn 1996:203). Hearn is critical of the view that masculinity refers to 'the cultural construction of men' (1996:205). Hearn (1996) believes this is unsustainable,

In this view, masculinity is both a generalisable, cultural phenomenon and a variety of actually specific expressions of gender and possible gender identities. In other words, the generalisable cultural form of masculinity may be assumed to pre-exist the culturally specific (1996:205).

I agree with Hearn's theoretical point that the term 'masculinity' is used to cover too many instances, both specific and generalised, but as films use a stereotype which is indeed a homogenising and simplifying process (essential for ideology), it seems a reasonable step to continue to make reference to that concept while noting the concern here.

Hearn (1996) concludes by suggesting that scholars retreat from the word 'masculinities' back to 'men'. In his view the concept has grown so large and undefined that it is hampering, not helping analysis. Hearn would prefer a return to analysis of 'men's practices', or 'men's social relations' or 'men's assumptions' (1996:214). While this might seem reasonable at first sight, it surely depends on what is being discussed, that is, the "individual" or the "social". In an evaluation of a group of estate agents (the sort of characters shown in *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1992)), it would be reasonable to talk about their practices, social relations and assumptions in terms of them being men. However, a piece of research on a carpenter, who happened to be male, would not look like a study that could support an assessment of male practices, social relations and assumptions. Similarly, thinking about a team of female hockey players in terms of the male

practices, social relations and assumptions they hold may not cover the issue thoroughly and may even alienate women by using 'male' as the standard to judge all others by. Masculinity and femininity can still apply to males and females and it is reasonable to expect that people understand what is being discussed. My research is not a study of suicidal men and women in film, but suicidal people exhibiting masculine or feminine traits, set within a number of different film genres. A more significant analysis is achieved by invoking gender – and using masculinity and femininity where appropriate – than by thinking purely in terms of women and men.

Considering the issue in a different way, Paechter (2003a) advances the view that masculinity can be thought of as a 'community of practice', meaning a social space where people engage in a shared practice or shared practices. On this view, within the community people develop from being novices with little or no idea of what is expected of them, through to becoming members of the community who have been involved for a long time - an 'old timer' and 'a central participant with a role in inducting new members' (2003a:542). This understanding of gender, which helps to affirm the "normal" – sometimes irrespective of inherent injustices – elaborates how identities are conveyed and promoted through naturalisation, that is, the classic method of communicating ideology.

Lindgren and Lélievre (2009) write about 'violent obsessive compulsiveness which is sometimes described as a consequence of men's loss of sexual control in late modernity' (2009:394) an observation which resonates with some common cinematic themes. This ties in with Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) rethinking of the dominant form of masculinity when they write that 'in some contexts, hegemonic masculinity actually does refer to men's engaging in toxic practices – including physical violence – that stabilize gender dominance in a particular setting' (2005:840). Aggression, violence and competitiveness are not the norm, but they are incorporated within Connell's conception of hegemonic masculinity. When traits such as greed and sexism are present in the general behaviour of men, for many writers they represent the ugly side of hegemonic masculinity. Writing about maleness in war films, Newsinger (1993) comments

that, 'all war films are tales of masculinity... Violence - the ability both to inflict and to take it - is portrayed as an essential part of what being a man involves' (1993:126). Being told to 'take it like a man' is a familiar trope in the cinema and thus apt for our endeavours with this project. Closely related to this is Paechter's (2003b) definition of *hyper-masculinity* as 'an exaggerated form of stereotypical masculinity, focusing on physical prowess, sexual conquest, hardness and the image of extreme rationality' (2003b:56), all very evident in cinematic representations of masculinity.

In other areas of the world, ethnographers have discovered that while females are thought to be born with everything necessary to grow into women naturally, it is not the same for boys. Across different societies, '*something* must be done to make a boy a man; some proof of masculinity, some achievement, is necessary' (Conway-Long, 1994:68, italics in original). This can vary from sexual activity, to war, to the acquisition of wealth. Undertaking a task of some kind, or getting romantically involved with a member of the opposite sex in order to "become a man" is a familiar trope within films and indeed can be partially witnessed in *The Virgin Suicides* by the neighbouring boys and their obsession with the Lisbon sisters.

The themes of rituals of strength and boys being tested before they become men point the way towards masculinity and the body. This is a popular topic for writers interested in masculinity and film, for some prominent stars and screen heroes seem to literally embody masculinity when onscreen. As Sparks (1996) writes, 'Stallone and Schwarzenegger are not just male heroes: their pumped up bodies signify...'masculinity' as if these days one *showed* masculinity by presenting it in excess - a prototypical, warrior essence' (1996:356, italics in original). The sentiment here is echoed by Winlow (2001), in comments relating to male bouncers in the north of England:

What better way to depict masculinity than by encapsulating it in the body?...Having large muscles immediately illustrates vibrant maleness;...your very physicality is laying claim to the spirit of all that



is masculine and accentuating difference from all that is feminine (2001:98-99).

This is an important issue to consider, namely that obvious physical strength, something male bodybuilders have in abundance, may appear to epitomise a certain type of masculinity, with the emphasis on dedication to hard work, being goal oriented and investing extra effort to be successful. In order to help with the circumnavigation of an essentialist trap, Gorely, Holroyd and Kirk (2003) make the point that muscularity has only a contingent, socially constructed link with masculinity - things could have been otherwise - but that such a link exists at all means it has great relevance to the study of masculinity within film. Branston uses an evocative phrase to describe how issues concerning masculinity within films can focus on the body: 'torso politics' (1995:37). This is similar to Jeffords and her "hard body" / "soft body" masculinity, and concentrates issues relating to manliness upon the physical nature of the man in question.

For theorists working within the constructivist framework, one of the most important developments in this area was Connell's exploration of the ideas associated with hegemony. The resulting analysis offered a detailed description of how masculinities could be understood within a society. After Connell, writers needed to work with his ideas, or reject them, but some kind of engagement was required. Similarly, Butler's ideas concerning performativity proved to be highly influential in the area of gender studies. What these two writers accomplished, along with others, was to underline the plurality of gender concepts, across cultures and history, and this was important as it meant that previously-held intrinsic links between sex and gender were broken and now, gender could be thought of as something much more fluid and changing.

So far in this chapter we have seen how heterosexuality is an integral part of hegemonic masculinity and that there is also a well-established link between masculinity and strength. As will be seen later, both of these points can be developed further in relation to the exemplary films and pertinent genres. For a time, however, it was felt that males had lost their way in the modern world and were suffering as a result. The so-called "crisis of masculinity" – a phenomenon

that could prima facie relate to mediated constructions of male suicide - has received considerable attention in the literature, and also in the cinema, and it is to this that we now turn.

### *Masculinity in crisis?*

Although notions of a crisis of masculinity have been prominent in Western societies for some time, there is considerable disagreement on the causes, effects and significance. One strand of research that has recently been very prominent has focused on the notion of a crisis of masculinity, which some writers, such as Clare (2000), approach from the perspective of how men experience life and death in the modern world: 'in most European countries men account for about three-quarters of the people who kill themselves' (2000:83). The implication is that life can be tough for men and this type of statistic feeds into the general topic of a crisis in masculinity.<sup>5</sup> Buchbinder (2008) writes that when 'rumours about a "crisis" in masculinity started to spread' – and Buchbinder suggests this was in the 1980s – 'men...no longer knew how to behave toward, deal with, or feel about women' (2008:233). Pinkert (2008), however, believes that a crisis in masculinity for German men can be traced back 65 years, 'caused by physical and psychological injuries, economic deprivation, or social displacement related to the Second World War' (2008:133). Greater female involvement in manufacturing, coupled with shortages – even rationing – also contributed to males across Europe feeling unsure about their goals and capabilities upon returning from the theatre of war. This raises the question of whether issues such as these can have an impact on a film character's propensity to choose suicide and will be explored in more detail below.<sup>6</sup>

Rogers (2008) posits that 'central to the crisis are a series of tensions or contradictions characterising Western masculinities: physical strength versus

---

<sup>5</sup> Scourfield (2005:Table 1) summarises the gendered risks of suicide highlighted in recent studies.

<sup>6</sup> Payne et al (2008) believe that women entering labour markets traditionally associated with men may cause an increased likelihood of suicide among men as a result of their violent reaction to the situation.

intellectual capacity, sexual virility versus restraint, and blue versus white collar' (2008:286) and it is within such tensions that men may be caught, confused about appropriate behaviour and opinions. Rogers (2008) goes on to write that, 'the narrative structure often used to articulate the current crisis... is grounded in a period of (mythical) gender stability most commonly represented as "the 1950s"' (2008:286). From the 1960s onwards, within this narrative, gender divisions were eroded through women challenging for jobs traditionally held to suit males more, as well as homosexual and non-white males challenging the privileged position held by white males. The days of a secure job being readily available to males in Western society were under threat.

Winlow (2001), too, discovered a link between employment and masculinity, 'working-class men have been denied the possibility of expressing a measure of their masculinity through manual labour and a considerable number have had their image and self-image further attacked by the relative and absolute rise in unemployment and their inability to find any sort of paid employment' (2001:64). Concerns about a possible crisis emerged following the replacement of manufacturing jobs with ones in the service sector, a change which has been claimed to favour women more than men. Hopkins (2009) notes that the new roles favour 'personal qualities stereotypically associated with young women: sensitivity, care, docility, politeness' (2009:302). Economic and social changes have caused males and females to be offered differing levels of choice in their lives. These new opportunities – especially for women – have led to both sexes questioning gender relations and – on the part of men – the perception of a crisis of masculinity. McNair (2002) considers Michael Douglas to be an actor who, over the last twenty years, has contended with the most obvious onscreen crises in his masculinity.<sup>7</sup> Douglas' masculinity is tied in to the notion of crisis as the characters he portrays reference conventional masculine traits such as those concerned with working and looking after a family. However, his characters are tested in relation to these, through an adulterous affair, accusations of impropriety and loss of his occupation. The films show his characters' responses to these challenges and the effects they have on him and his family's lives.

---

<sup>7</sup> *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Basic Instinct* (1992), *Disclosure* (1994), and *Falling Down* (1994).

Indeed, in relation to *Falling Down*, Grant (2011) suggests that 'D-Fens becomes monstrously violent, using aggression and an assortment of weapons to assert his masculine identity' (2011:156).

For some though, the crisis in masculinity is not given much credence. Levant believes the crisis is merely a 'felt crisis' (see Hatty 2000:179), that is to say, one that has not received much verification from people other than men. However, in response to this, one could point to Thomas' theorem (see Fulcher and Scott 2003:53), which asserts that when situations are defined as real, the consequences of the definition are real too. Thomas' point was that our experience of the world is an indirect one, through ideas and preconceptions that we hold. In relation to Levant's claim then, one could reply that if the crisis is felt and there are repercussions because of this, then perhaps it is not so much 'felt' as 'actual'. Hatty (2000) suggests that 'we are perhaps witnessing a crisis within the construct of masculinity, rather than a crisis between the masculine and the feminine' (2000:181). Hopkins (2009) believes that 'any criticism, weakness or failure directed at men does not necessarily result in crisis, there are many ways of being a man, and masculinities are multiple, complex and fluid' (2009:300), and in relation to this research, this is the position that will prove most constructive. There are films where men fail and some of these men kill themselves as a narrative consequence of this failure, but that should not result in the leap to the suggestion that their deaths were due to a crisis of masculinity.

In terms of trying to establish whether a crisis has really occurred within western masculinity, Morgan (2006) writes that, 'the evidence suggests that it is possible to talk about some sense of crisis here, one largely generated by changes within work and employment and, possibly, within the wider gender order, but one which is always mediated by class and ethnicity' (2006:121).

Connell (2001) argues against the notion of a crisis of masculinity on theoretical grounds, stating that it could not occur because masculinity is not, in Connell's view, a coherent system that can be attacked, but instead is a practice within an already existing set of gender relations. Accordingly, there could be a crisis of gender order as a whole, but not of masculinity, as such. MacInnes (2001)

agrees, noting that there is a problem with collapsing gender into sex and taking the view that as males are suffering in some particular way, then that automatically means that masculinity is somehow under threat as well. It may affect the self-image of the particular man who is suffering, but there is no automatic link.

One of the main arguments for the contention that masculinity has reached its crisis point is that gender roles have drastically altered over the last fifty years and this has left men feeling unsure of themselves and what is expected of them. There is considerable disagreement over whether this is actually the case or not, but some such claims appear in films on a regular basis and are presumably part of the film audience's framework of understanding.

Ehrenreich (1995) makes an interesting point that as technology, the media and economics have played their part in the decline of patriarchy, an associated decline in male protection of females has occurred as well. This has resulted, as far as Ehrenreich is concerned, in a concomitant rise in the 'masculinisation of women' (1995:289). This is described as the situation where women, feeling vulnerable to potential aggressive behaviour from men, arm themselves with guns and seek ways to protect themselves from attack. Ehrenreich (1995) suggests this is turning traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity upside down. 'As men continue to turn away from being protectors of women and become increasingly *predators* of women, women will continue to 'masculinise' themselves, if only for the purposes of self-defence' (1995:290, italics in original).<sup>8</sup>

From this discussion of masculinities and masculinity in crisis, we now move to femininities, where we will attend to the traditional conceptualisation of femaleness and aspects of its cinematic representation – both significant for our film analyses later in this thesis.

---

<sup>8</sup> Jodie Foster's film, *The Brave One* (2007) is an example of this.

### *Concepts of Femininity*

As both Connell and MacInnes above imply, it is important that femininities are discussed along with masculinities. Kirkham (1996) believes there are three issues central to the establishment and portrayal of femininity, namely 'dress, body shape and making oneself attractive' (1996:152). Notions of this sort – particularly the extreme hyper-versions of masculinity and femininity – feed into everyday conceptions of gender in the culture at large and find representation in films and in other texts. Connell's term for hegemonic femininity, *emphasised femininity*, is summed up by Bradley (2007) as including the dispositions, 'soft, submissive, sexually coy, alluring or flirtatious, concerned with domesticity and preoccupied with bodily appearance' (2007:48).

In terms of essentialism and femininity, Birke (1999) declares that, 'some bodily organ or attribute – be that possession of a uterus, the vicissitudes of particular hormones, or inheritance of certain genes – has at some time been seen as sufficient explanation for women's subordination' (1999:24). She goes on to say that, 'it is but a short step to inferring that...men do not do the ironing or that woman are better at housework, because of the way their brains are wired up' (1999:40). Paechter (2003b) comments that *hyper-femininity* embodies 'stereotypical forms of femininity such as softness, helplessness, sexual subordination combined with bodily display, and a strong focus on the home and homemaking' (2003b:56).

Seventeenth and eighteenth century British conduct books focused in minute detail on femininity and precisely how a woman should behave. Modesty, chastity and obedience were seen as the elementary requirements for any woman, but the manuals did not confine themselves just to these issues, but also discussed many other aspects of a woman's life, such as her books, dress, conversation and even dancing. As Tague (2002) suggests, 'once internalised, the rules of a conduct manual would create a completely self-regulating woman, who would always behave as if she were being observed even when she was

alone' (2002:22-23).<sup>9</sup> The muddle that the conduct literature found itself in, though, was that they both averred there were innate components of a woman's personality, for instance modesty, while at the same time spending many chapters telling women how to behave – and this suggests that such traits could be learned after all. As Tague (2002) ponders, 'if feminine behaviour was natural, why would women need to be instructed in it at all?' (2002:32).

Bordo (1997) reports that in the 1950s and 1960s, ideal women were seen as 'childlike, non-assertive...[and]...helpless without a man' (1997:95) and that images of suitable role-models were readily available in magazines, on the television and at the cinema. Before that, 'the nineteenth-century 'lady' was idealised in terms of delicacy and dreaminess, sexual passivity, and a charmingly labile and capricious emotionality' (1997:94). Eighteenth-century gender historians have identified how gender ideals shifted during the Georgian age, especially highlighting the ways in which women moved from being sexually unstable to passive creatures thus reflecting how gender ideals have been culturally constructed in different periods (Harvey, 2002).

### *Representation of Women in Film*<sup>10</sup>

Haskell (1987) researched images of women in the movies up to the late 1980s. It is her argument that films have been used to support patriarchal ways of viewing the world since the very beginning, calling Hollywood, 'the propaganda arm of the American Dream machine...promot[ing] a romantic fantasy of marital roles and conjugal euphoria' (1987:2). If we pause to look over the film roles played by women over the years, we can see that few female stereotypes have been ignored: 'love goddesses, mothers, martyrs, spinsters, broads, virgins, vamps, prudes, adventuresses, she-devils, and sex kittens' (1987:8). According to Basinger, 'in movies about women there are exactly four kinds of mothers'

---

<sup>9</sup> Supported by Buchbinder (2008), as has already been mentioned.

<sup>10</sup> My principal interest is in how the representation of femininity and masculinity relate to the ways in which suicide is represented in film. With this in mind, I do not feel that the body of work influenced by Mulvey's psychoanalytically-inclined perspective is congruent with my approach to this topic and so will not be covered here.

(1993:392), namely 'unwed'<sup>11</sup>, 'perfect'<sup>12</sup>, 'sacrificial'<sup>13</sup> and 'destructive'<sup>14</sup> (1993:392). In terms of the exemplary films in this research, however, there is only one mother to interest us (Mrs. Lisbon in *The Virgin Suicides*), and she certainly falls into the fourth category, that of destructive mother, however protective her intentions.

In the early days of film, women fared more positively in terms of film credits, as Haskell comments that,

back in the twenties and thirties, and to a lesser extent the forties, women were at the centre. This was amply reflected in their billings...[with]...women often billed ahead of men, either singly...or as the pivotal member of a team (1987:12).

Haskell contends that the 1920s also saw a number of films featuring romantically adventurous females using their body and looks to get what they wanted. Greta Garbo and Pola Negri were two such performers. The situation changed in the early 1930s, however, when the Hays Code came into effect, and these kinds of roles were drastically altered, to make the women much more accountable and submissive, whereupon 'sex took cover under veils of metaphor' (1987:91). This found distinctive expression in a role typical for a significant number of films in the 1940s, the *femme fatale* in film noir, typified by Ava Gardner in *The Killers* and discussed as one of this research's exemplary films in Part II. Such characters exhibited bravery and daring, but, according to Haskell, 'she hadn't a soul to call her own' (1987:190). Barbara Stanwyck's character in *Double Indemnity* is another example. The *femme fatale* harnesses a powerful sexuality and exerts great influence over others, notably men. During the course of the film there is often a blurred, shifting understanding of her and her motives, and she is often characterised as an 'enigma' (Tasker, 1998:120). In the 1940s, film noir often used a flashback style of narrative, which Basinger believes

---

<sup>11</sup> *Torch Singer* (1933).

<sup>12</sup> *Dr. Monica* (1934).

<sup>13</sup> *Stella Dallas* (1937).

<sup>14</sup> *Hard, Fast and Beautiful* (1951).



underlines the limited power of the female character by showing that 'all that matters is already predetermined' (1993:198), a device used in both versions of *The Killers*. Another oft-used narrative method was the interior monologue by the male lead, which for Haskell demonstrates that the female 'was deprived of her point of view' (1987:198). In relation to some of the issues raised by these films, Place (1998) argues that 'the attitudes towards women evident in *film noir* – that is, fear of loss of stability, identity and security – are reflective of the dominant feelings at the time' (1998:50). Prior to the analysis of *The Killers* in Chapter 5, further discussion of issues surrounding *film noir* takes place further below. Farrimond (2011) contends that there has been a recent emergence of a teenage *femme fatale*, one keen to advance on her own terms, irrespective of the necessary means required. *Cruel Intentions* (1999) and *Pretty Persuasion* (2005) are cited as showing a teenage *femme fatale*, and we may also add *The Virgin Suicides* as Lux uses her charms to get her own way and also exhibits some self-loathing. At the very least it could be said that her character draws upon the notion of the sexualised manipulative teenager. Even the numerous sexual encounters she initiates suggest boredom or self-loathing, rather than seductiveness or game-playing.

Leading female roles for the 1960s and 1970s are summed up by Haskell as, 'whores, quasi-whores, jilted mistresses, emotional cripples, drunks...[,]...daffy ingénues, Lolitas, kooks, sex-starved spinsters, psychotics, icebergs, zombies and ball breakers' (1987:327-8). It seems as though the range of roles has stayed constant over the years, but with the gradual relaxation of censorship rules allowing more to be seen onscreen. Sheila in *The Killers* and Sarah in *The Hustler* reference a number of these descriptions during their respective films, although they also exhibit other characteristics, as will be seen in the states and traits analyses in the Appendix. As we saw above, Haskell refers to women appearing in films as 'drunks, for instance Sarah in *The Hustler*, and more generally, in relation to alcohol and women on screen, Harwin and Otto (1979) believe that an idea tapped into by the cinema is that 'the woman has lost control of herself, through drinking, and has therefore lost some essential femininity' (1979:48). As will be discussed in greater length in Chapter 4, there is a stark contrast between male and female images of drunkenness in *Days of Wine and*

*Roses* (1962). Joe finds the strength to abstain and prospers from his decision. His wife is unable to do the same and, 'we are asked to see Kirsten as the more disturbed of the two partners, whose future at the end of the film remains highly equivocal' (Harwin and Otto, 1979:40).

During the course of many different types of films, across a variety of genres, women are represented as sexual beings, either voluntarily or involuntarily connected in some way with prostitution (in one of the exemplary films from this research, *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995), the main female character is a prostitute). Even characters that have other professions such as police officers, often find themselves impersonating streetwalkers as part of their job. For Tasker, she believes this is 'suggestive in terms of the perception of a relationship between the terms of women, work and sexuality' (1998:100). Tasker's point can be broadened out to say that in the movies, sex – freely given or paid for – is rarely very far away from most female characters and this can undermine them, making them weaker and more vulnerable than corresponding male characters. As we will see in Part II in relation to *The Hustler*, Bert and Sarah's relationship has hints of this, and to a certain extent so does Sarah and Eddie's relationship as well. Even without subjugation or violence, a woman's role in many films is merely to 'confirm the hero's heterosexuality' (Tasker, 1993:15). In *The Virgin Suicides*, overactive hormones practically flood the screen, with sex featuring in the background – and occasionally in the foreground too – throughout, with a number of characters discussing or engaging in romantic behaviour. The title of the film, of course, also suggests sex (or, the lack of it).

This section has referenced valuable source material relating to the notion of body image and the stereotypical portrayal of women in the cinema. It has also reminded us that masculinity and femininity need to be studied together when embarking on research regarding representation in film.

## *Conclusion*

To conclude this chapter, we have seen that perspectives on gender have ranged through notions of hegemony and subordination, body shape, communities of practice and the acting out of a gender performance. The historicity of gender, in addition to its social and political dimensions, has resulted in the pluralisation of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' that now have widespread acceptance amongst writers on gender. The ethnographer Gilmore proposes that, at a fundamental level, the three main functions of men are to impregnate women, protect family, and provide for any offspring (cited in Jewkes, 2002:49). While this may seem a little unsophisticated, it is a theme that runs through the literature and the films and thus requires our attention. We are familiar with couples sharing an intimate moment on-screen; similarly with seeing a male try to protect the female he cares for; and whether or not it is under threat, the notion of breadwinner remains prominent across different societies and eras. So much is ignored by these three 'functions' but at the same time so much that is familiar is included, and, rightly or wrongly, it often provides the base on which relationships between men and women in films are typically represented.

A phrase used by Whitehead (2002) that is apt to conclude this literature review is that 'masculinity is both illusion and reality' (2002:42). If we broaden the discussion to include femininity as well, we can suggest that it is illusory for the reason that, as argued by social constructionists, the physical basis upon which gender differences are built are so slight, but the social and political effects, as well as life chances, can be astronomical. But whatever one believes about gender, it receives a great deal of attention in film, and requires our focused consideration in order to understand its representations onscreen and how they can be related to suicide and to the various cinematic traditions within which those representations are embedded.

A number of issues arise from the literature reviewed in this chapter which will inform the detailed analysis developed in Part II below:

- In relation to ideas regarding masculinity and the conventional expectation of male strength, we shall examine how this is articulated in both versions of *The Killers* (in varying degrees typifying the film traditions of *Film Noir* and *Neo-Noir*). In the former, Swede is not only a boxer, but in a number of scenes he is shot in such a way as to physically dominate the characters around him. In some contrast, where the equivalent protagonist in the later version is not physically dominant, it is the two hitmen, themselves more prominent in the latter film, who exemplify male force and aggression during their search for the million dollars.
- In terms of the supposed crises in masculinity and their possible relation to suicide, our investigations will range across instances from the alcohol-addiction film, from the French *Nouvelle Vague*, and from the Hollywood tradition of "serious" drama, exemplified by *Leaving Las Vegas*, *Le Feu Follet*, and *The Hustler*, although the two versions of *The Killers* also have some bearing on this issue. When Eddie has his thumbs broken in *The Hustler* and has to rely on Sarah for all kinds of assistance, his sense of assertive masculine identity is severely affected by his sudden inability to earn or even to look after himself. Similarly, in *Le Feu Follet*, Alain's confinement in a respite home, at the expense of his estranged wife, can be read as a demasculinisation of the character, unable to work and financially supported by a woman. Indeed, Swede's and Johnny's behaviour in the two versions of *The Killers*, coupled with Alain's self-imposed exile in the clinic and Ben's actions in Las Vegas may at first suggest that these characters have suffered a crisis in their masculinity, although as we shall see further below, while it is a factor, their gender identity is not represented as a key determining cause of their suicidal behaviour.
- The representation of heterosexuality as hegemonic is as thoroughgoing in the exemplary films as it is in popular cinema more generally, a feature that is to be expected on the basis of the literature surveyed in this chapter. Most cinematic traditions engage with gender relations in primarily heterosexual terms. In some cases, however, particularly in

relation to Ben and Alain in *Leaving Las Vegas* and *Le Feu Follet* respectively, the capacity of our suicidal characters to fully engage in heterosexual relationships is problematised. Alain, who is offered female support, can find no joy in human contact, male or female (and may be suffering from impotency), while Ben is unable to consummate his relationship with Sera until literally on his death-bed. Depictions of unfettered male sexuality they are not, and such concerns have some relevance to their decisions to end their lives.

- Body imagery, for both men and women, is generally significant, of course, but particularly so in relation to the teenpic/high-school tradition that frames *The Virgin Suicides*. The clothes worn and the looks sported by the girls receive frequent overt mention throughout the film, whether requiring shoulders to be covered at the dinner table or specifying dresses chosen for parties. In terms of male bodies, as already observed above, both versions of *The Killers* provide interesting comparisons between Swede's overt physicality that he chooses not to use when the hitmen arrive and the absence of such spectacular physicality in Johnny North.
- And finally, stereotypical portrayals of femininities will be explored in the discussion of so-called "serious" dramas like *The Hustler* as well as in relation to the extensive range of female suicides in *The Virgin Suicides*. More generally, roles such as partner, wife, sister, and daughter feature prominently in these films and have significant links to the films' suicides. Notably, of course, Kitty and Sheila in the two versions of *The Killers* provide a counterpoint to the more conventional female roles in that they play out the more active 'femininity' of the *noir femme fatales* in double-crossing the men that loved them.

## CHAPTER 3. CONTEXTUALISING SUICIDE IN FILM: DESCRIPTIVE CONTEXT

This chapter provides a broad, descriptive context for the detailed film analyses of Part II. This study is based upon 350 films that have been identified using a mixture of sources including *Monthly Film Bulletin* and *Sight & Sound*; online searches; journal articles; film books; and reviews of films. Films have been drawn from every decade of the Twentieth Century and have been included in the research whenever basic details about the suicide could be verified. It should be noted that there are substantially more films in this sample from the 1990s onwards. This is in part due to easier access to detailed information about these films and also availability of the films themselves for viewing. However, those films from between 1910 and 1960 provide a number of interesting starting points for many topics of debate throughout the rest of the research. As a body of evidence, although these 350 films may not constitute a comprehensive set and therefore do not enable any conclusive statistical judgements to be made about suicide across the history of world cinema, they can at least suggest some of the trends that can be found within films featuring suicide – from a predominantly Western perspective. This study is therefore not a complete statistical survey of suicide across all films. It aims rather to give the reader a sense of how suicide has been represented in films and what potential patterns might be identified in the films that have been examined.

Tabulations are used to highlight particular patterns and, for the most part, the films will be grouped together decade by decade, with the exception of the early years where film numbers are much lower and comparison would make little sense. Over the course of this chapter, several points of interest regarding the films containing suicides<sup>15</sup> are highlighted. After introducing gender and suicidal method to the discussion, a distinction relating to narrative is introduced. This research suggests that it is useful to distinguish between two types of suicide

---

<sup>15</sup> For the text to flow more easily, in this chapter, 'suicide' refers to both suicide and attempted suicide, unless otherwise stipulated. 'Suicidee' means the person committing suicide. Percentage figures are rounded up to the nearest whole number.

narratives: where suicide drives the narrative, with suicidal intentions highlighted and comprehensively explored (in essence, the films are *about* suicide), these will be termed narratives involving **Melancholic Suicides**; and where suicide is but an element of the plot, with a character committing suicide with little or no motivational information provided (in essence, the film merely *features* suicide), such film suicides will be termed **Occasioned Suicides**. A third group, including films already captured by the first two categories, can also be discerned, where the aftermath of a suicide is featured in considerable detail. In the final section, I shall show how these ways of organising the films will be used for the exemplary film analyses in Part II. The categories have been drawn from patterns apparent in the data and thus sort the films according to distinctions between the ways in which the suicides are represented. These categories are then cross referenced with other features introduced in this chapter, for instance gender and method of suicide. Firstly, though, the data is examined simply in terms of gender of suicidee.

### *Gender of suicidee*

Out of all the films identified that include a suicide or attempted suicide, 30% feature a female suicide or attempt; while 70% feature a male suicide or attempt.<sup>16</sup> Across a century of films, the spread of females and males dying or attempting to die by their own actions began in low numbers and ended significantly higher. It is interesting to note that in the 1950s, there were very few movie suicides or attempts, before a sharp increase in the following decade. Numbers have risen rapidly since the 1990s, such that more suicides and attempts have been recorded since 1990 than in all of the previous decades added together.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> 37 films contain both a male and a female suicide or attempt and five films contain non-human suicides: *The Never Ending Story* (1984) features a horse suicide (it loses faith in the 'Swamps of Sadness' and allows itself to drown). An injured alien warrior, defeated in battle, blows itself up in *Predator* (1987). *Stealth* (2005) shows a hi-tech, quasi-sentient fighter plane give its 'life' in a heroic fashion in order to save two humans. *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991) and *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003) both feature suicidal deaths by the benevolent terminator sent to help the humans.

<sup>17</sup> 59% since 1990, compared to 41% up to 1990.

Table 1. Films featuring attempted suicide and successful suicide, by gender, by year groupings, by % proportion of the total

Years	F Att. %	M Att. %	F Suicide %	M Suicide %	Total %
1910-1949	1	1	1	4	7
1950s	1	0	1	1	3
1960s	0	1	2	4	7
1970s	0	2	2	6	10
1980s	1	2	2	5	10
1990s	4	4	6	11	25
2000s	2	4	8	23	37
Total	9	14	22	54	99 <sup>18</sup>

Attempted suicides range from serious attempts that were unexpectedly foiled (*The Full Monty*, 1997) to minor or humorous incidences, such as Allen's character in *Hannah and her Sisters* (1996), who confesses to perspiring so much while holding the gun to his head – at the thought of what his parents would say about his suicide – that it slipped off just as he pulled the trigger.

The spread across the years is notable for a marked increase from the 1980s to the 1990s. Before the 1980s, suicide attempts occurred in low numbers in each decade, but from 1990 onwards, their rate increases, up to the point where over 60% of all movie suicide attempts occur between 1990 and 2010. This, furthermore, is at a time when overall totals of films distributed in the UK have decreased compared to the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. The biggest discrepancies between male and female attempts occur in the 1970s, 1980s and 2000s, where there are significantly more male attempts than female, and this generates two points for discussion.<sup>19</sup> There is a consensus among suicide researchers that suicide attempts vastly outnumber successful suicides and that females try to kill themselves much more often than males do.<sup>20</sup> However, neither of these trends are reflected in representations of suicide in the cinema, where we find more incidences of successful suicides than suicide attempts *and* males both try and succeed more than their female counterparts. One could speculate that

<sup>18</sup> Total equals less than 100% due to rounding.

<sup>19</sup> The difference is greater when one considers the raw data, for instance in 2000s there were 7 female suicide attempts and 18 male suicide attempts. The difference is most marked in relation to the Occasional Suicide category, introduced later in this chapter.

<sup>20</sup> For instance, McIntosh (2009) and Clare (2000).



filmmakers believe that a serious suicide attempt, that is, one committed with the intention of death, is more tragic but also more straightforward an act than an attempt and progresses the narrative more quickly. In terms of men featuring more than women in suicidal situations, this relates to men having traditionally been more centrally placed within films, playing more of an active role and as seen in Chapter 2, there is a well-documented imbalance in terms of the representation of gender roles in films (for instance Haskell, 1987 and Tasker, 1998). Repeated features of films, such as the prominence of particular character types or situations can often suggest what fears/beliefs exist in the minds of the audience and in their culture at that time. Thus, if patterns are identified in popular cultural texts, such as films, it is not unreasonable to suggest that such ideas have a degree of significance in the culture in which they are produced and/or consumed. Such patterns can be symptomatic of changing views within society and can be tracked over time.

### *Method of Suicide*

This section highlights the ways in which characters have brought (or, at least, tried to bring) their lives to a premature end and analyses the various ways in which choice of method interlinks with other factors relevant to this study, such as gender, narrative characteristics and film release date. Across the spread of films, 18 different methods can be discerned, but for clarity, some have been grouped together. This can be displayed as follows:

Table 2. Suicidal Methods, by gender, by % proportion

Method	F %	M %	Row total %	Overall Total %
Gun	11	89	100	28
Poison <sup>21</sup>	58	42	100	18
Jumping	42	58	100	17
Cutting/Stabbing	35	65	100	11
Hanging	22	78	100	11
Miscellaneous <sup>22</sup>	19	81	100	10
Drowning	58	42	100	6
Total				100

Even allowing for the expansive category of 'poison' including several ways of dying, it is still only the second most popular suicide method in the movies, after the gun. Death by gun accounts for 28% of suicides and the vast majority of these are by men. There are two ways in which film characters kill or try to kill themselves with a gun: overwhelmingly, they shoot themselves in the head (for example *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *Lemming* (2005)), but in a few films, the suicidees shoot themselves in the heart (for instance, *Le Feu Follet* (1963) and *Amen* (2002)). There are also a small number of films where the actual shooting is done by a second person, so although the suicidee wishes to die and takes steps to achieve this, in these films, they themselves do not pull the trigger. *Falling Down* (1993) is an example of this, but it also occurs in *The Killers* (1946 and 1964), *Bulworth* (1998) and *Minority Report* (2002), among others. Suicide by gun is the most one-sided method in terms of gender of suicidee with over seven times as many male suicides by gun as female suicides by gun. This type of suicide is usually decisive, carried out in anger or frustration and with a will to succeed in achieving death. Crime is also often involved with either the victim of a crime killing themselves, for example *The Pledge* (2001), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) and *Redbelt* (2008), but more usually, the perpetrators of some unpleasant/illegal/immoral act shoot themselves, for instance *Piccadilly* (1929), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *Man on Fire* (2004).

<sup>21</sup> Poison also includes suicide by pills, gas, exhaust fumes, asphyxiation, drugs and alcohol.

<sup>22</sup> Miscellaneous includes explosion, crucifixion, starvation, exposure to freezing temperatures, exposure to daylight, fire, burning by acid, electric shock and suicide by vehicle.

Suicides using pills or poison are mainly the prerogative of female characters<sup>23</sup>, and often occur after upsetting news, for instance *Trois Couleurs: Bleu* (1993) and *House of Mirth* (2000). Romeo and Juliet are famous poison suicides, of course, and there are many film representations of them, as well as film deaths inspired by them, for instance *Robin and Marian* (1976). The other possibilities within this overall method, gas, exhaust fumes, asphyxiation, drugs and alcohol are split evenly between men and women.

Jumping is often chosen where a character is worried about something, for example two female characters in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) and *The Game* (1997). Jumping accounts for 17% of all film suicides, but only represents a tiny proportion of actual UK and USA suicides as reflected in official statistics. One reason might be that such a method can be made to look liberating, for instance *Thelma and Louise*, or emotional, for example George Bailey's bridge scene in *It's a Wonderful Life* and therefore pleasing to the eye and so attractive to film-makers. It turns into a messy method of suicide if, however, the landing is shown (for instance, *In Bruges* (2008)), but that need not be included, and, indeed, rarely is.

The typical female jumping suicide is a leap away from something, for instance danger, as seen in films such as *Last of the Mohicans* (1992), *Broadway Musketeers* (1938) and *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1956). These are spur-of-the-moment acts, making use of whatever means are available. Films featuring a female jumping suicide which can be categorised as a Melancholic Suicide are rarer as female characters in that category tend to choose other methods, usually of an indoor nature, such as poisoning (*Million Dollar Baby*, 2005) and cutting (*In Dreams*, 1999).

It is interesting to note the significant discrepancy between suicide statistics and suicide in films, particularly in relation to hanging and jumping. In both the UK and the USA, hanging is a frequent form of suicide but this does not hold true for films, where it accounts for only 11% of the total – in a dataset that is dominated

---

<sup>23</sup> For example *Citizen Kane* (1941); *Sunset Boulevard* (1950); and *Apartment* (1960).

by American and British films. As with drowning, hanging is often chosen by film characters after receiving a piece of profoundly bad news, for instance by characters in *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001) and *The White Ribbon* (2009).

Cutting/stabbing is a popular method of film suicide following relationship breakdown, for instance *Rules of Attraction* (2002). A closer look at the method reveals that while both males and females cut themselves equally in their wrists or necks, there is a marked difference between movie females and males when stabbing themselves, with men using this method much more.<sup>24</sup> These findings support conventional ideas concerning 'active' and 'passive' and underline the view that males tend to use methods that are more lethal and destructive to the body. Women tend to use methods that do not have such an immediately destructive element, a point also made in the suicide literature (Brock and Griffiths, 2003; McIntosh, 2009).

Out of the suicide methods grouped together under the heading of 'miscellaneous', suicide by explosion is the most numerous, occurring in films such as *I Am Legend* (2007), *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991), *Core* (2003) and *Sunshine* (2007) (all examples of science fiction films). An explosive end is the most popular form of heroic suicide, owing to its dominance in relatively modern sci-fi films and the consequent availability of suitably explosive materials and scenarios in order to carry it out. Here, generic conventions and expectations directly affect the type of suicide method chosen a feature which is also found in the war film. However, explosives are rarely the method of choice for those in the Melancholic Suicide category (with Griffon's explosive death in *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) being a rare example), underlining the fact that the availability of method is an important factor in any suicide.

After a painful life or final humiliation, drowning is an oft-chosen method of movie suicide, for instance *The Piano* (1993) and the first-suicide-that-was-not in *Vertigo* (1959). It is interesting to note that, in the movies, while drowning has a standard range of precipitating causes – to end one's own suffering or to believe

---

<sup>24</sup> Female suicide by stabbing: 5% of this category. Male suicide by stabbing: 23% of this category.

one's death will end another's suffering – it rarely features in the types of suicide chosen by people unmasked as criminally or morally at fault. Titta, allowing himself to be drowned in concrete in *Consequences of Love* (2004), provides a rare exception, though his actions are revealed to be heroic in terms of providing an elderly couple with a significant sum of money to enjoy. Those who are revealed to be at fault and consequently wish to kill themselves tend to take more decisive action than locating the nearest open stretch of water and then diving to their deaths. A gun, rope or knife is the favoured method for these characters.<sup>25</sup>

Out of the films that include suicide by gun, only 15% of suicides using a firearm feature an unsuccessful attempt, thus underlining the presumed extremely lethal nature of this method, and in fact, none of the failed attempts actually involve a bullet entering an organ vital for life in the human body. Almost all of these unsuccessful attempts by gun are by men (only two films in the sample include females trying but not succeeding to kill themselves with a gun: *Mad Love* (1995) and *Rapture* (1991)). A similar pattern can be detected for hanging, where only 14% of films that feature a suicide by hanging include an unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide (and all unsuccessful hangings are by men).<sup>26</sup> The same is true, though to a lesser extent, for jumping, where 27% of films with suicide by jumping include unsuccessful attempts by this method. Again, men make up the majority (58% of all films with a suicide by jumping). This emphasises the conventional expectation of lethality of these two methods of suicide, as opposed to methods such as poisoning by pills or gas where, in the movies at least, there is often a reasonable chance of survival.<sup>27</sup>

There is a steady, but rising, rate of occurrence throughout the decades for all methods, with sharp increases for suicide by gun in the 1990s; poison between the 1970s and 1990s; jumping in the 1980s; explosions in the 1980s; and

---

<sup>25</sup> For example *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943), *The Great Gatsby* (1974) and *Hard Candy* (2006).

<sup>26</sup> *Bedazzled* (1967), *Pain in the Ass* (1973), *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), *Hanging Garden* (1997) and *Cast Away* (2000). In fact, *Shawshank* and *Cast Away* feature characters merely considering suicide by hanging – not actually going through with it.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, *Full Monty* (1997), *Rosetta* (1999), *Apartment* (1960), and *Citizen Kane* (1941).

hanging in the 1990s. Female suicides by gun are more sporadic, with one in 1939 (*Lady of the Tropics*) and then not another until 1978, *Death on the Nile*, and interestingly the circumstances of the suicide are the same in both films: a female kills her male lover and then herself. Interestingly, there are no film suicides by firearms in the 1950s. Suicide by firearm features again in the 1960s and beyond and it is no doubt the case that America's relationship with the gun – unlike most of Europe's relationship with weapons – accounts for the preponderance of gun suicides in this study.

In general terms, the cinematic traditions and genres from which the films emerge appear not to heavily influence the method used, except perhaps in a small number of cases. For example, Swede's and Johnny North's fated inaction in the face of death in *The Killers* is consistent with themes of trouble, resignation and fatalism in *film noir* and *neo-noir*. Heroic suicides, which occur in a number of genres contexts especially those revolving around action, are also unlikely to be achieved through especially morbid methods (like those in, for example, *The Virgin Suicides*). Thus, while generic conventions *can* affect suicide methods depicted in films, there does not seem to be a particular strong pattern to the nature of suicides in relation to the genre or tradition within which the films fall, though as we have seen in this chapter, patterns do indeed alter over time regarding typical methods of film suicide.

### *Suicide in Film: Narrative Themes in Exemplary Films*

As we have already noted, the films in this research can be classified in two main ways in terms of the narrative context of the suicide. The first group concerns those suicides which do not come as much of a surprise to the viewer, given the explicitly laid out circumstances in the film and the overt behaviour of the character concerned. Despite its finality, suicide here is presented as being an intelligible step and consistent with our understanding of the narrative so far. I have labelled these **Melancholic Suicides** and they often involve a character who suffers from depression; or is generally melancholic; or one who makes multiple attempts to kill him/herself. There is usually a 'backstory' to the situation

presented in the film which provides some explanation of the downbeat, lacklustre character seen onscreen. In these films it is the suicide that drives the narrative.

In contrast, where somebody takes their own life in an act that seems out of the ordinary, given what has been presented about them at that point in the film, then we can classify this as being an **Occasioned Suicide**, that is to say, based on circumstances 'thrown at them' in the film. Often here the suicide is merely one element in the narrative rather than its focal event. Note that while there may be some blurring between these two analytical categories, all the films in this research can be unproblematically ascribed to one or the other.

Finally there is a group of films in the dataset which primarily focus on the aftermath of a suicide event charting the various consequences for the living. In these cases, although the act of suicide itself is certainly important, its narrative significance lies ultimately in the actions and repercussions that it precipitates.

These three groups of films will each be exemplified by two case study films which are given detailed analysis in subsequent chapters but will be introduced here in general terms.

*Melancholic Suicide: Le Feu Follet and Leaving Las Vegas*

The first category is composed of those films where suicide is the major theme in the film with a central character determined to take his or her own life. Two films have been chosen to exemplify the films within this category: *Le Feu Follet* and *Leaving Las Vegas*. In the former, Alain (played by Maurice Ronet) ends up taking his own life after scorning his old drinking friends and being unable to warm to them without alcohol. The film is a study of one man's drift away from a culture he was once a part of, towards a lonely (non-) existence. In the latter, Ben (played by Nicholas Cage) swaps life as a Hollywood writer for Las Vegas and drinks himself to death, despite building up a close relationship with a prostitute called Sera in the last weeks of his life. Both films track the final days

of these characters who are tired of life and making preparations for an early death.

This is the smallest of the categories and there are few examples until the 1970s.<sup>28</sup> Only 19% of films fall into this category, and as will be seen during the analysis of the exemplary films below, it is nevertheless a group of some importance, including films such as *The Hours* (2002) and *Sylvia* (2003), both featuring fictionalised accounts of notoriously depressed writers Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath respectively; *Syriana* (2005) showing the radicalisation and fervour for suicidal death of young men in the middle east; *The Isle* (2000) deals with a character who rents a holiday home with the sole intention of killing himself but, in the end, decides against it; and *Le Jour se Lève* and *A Single Man* (2009) both portray males who have lost someone close and decide that suicide is the best option for them. Interestingly, in *A Single Man*, though the planning for his suicide is meticulous, at the point where he decides against carrying it out he suffers a fatal heart attack and dies anyway<sup>29</sup>. Within this category, the most popular suicide method is the gun, but most other methods are also employed, though in small numbers. There is a gradual increase in frequency of this type of movie suicide from the early part of the twentieth century up to the early part of the twenty-first century, such that over half of the films including a Melancholic Suicide were released from the 1990s onwards.<sup>30</sup> There are more films with male suicides of this sort than females, with a split of 74% to 26%, though female characters in this category do not appear in great numbers until the 1990s.

Interrogating the data in relation to Melancholic Suicides, two distinct themes are evident: firstly, a deep frustration or dissatisfaction with one's lot; and secondly, melancholia or depression-like symptoms within a character. *Control* (2007) is a

---

<sup>28</sup> *The Petrified Forest* (1936) and *Le Jour se Lève* (1939) are isolated early examples of this category.

<sup>29</sup> There are similar occurrences in other films too, for instance *Japon* (2002) where a man who spends the majority of the film whiling away the hours before a suicide attempt, changes his mind and then dies in an agricultural traffic accident; and at the very beginning of *Magnolia* (1999) a man jumps from a building but is accidentally shot by a stray bullet on his way down and the police not only decide he was dead before he hit the pavement, but also that he was murdered.

<sup>30</sup> 74% of films released from 1990 onwards.



distinctive example of the first theme, as Ian Curtis struggles to balance the success his band experiences with the epilepsy and associated medication he needs to take to manage his condition. As will be seen in Part II, Ben in *Leaving Las Vegas* also displays such characteristics as these. *Syriana* (2005) and other films dealing with suicide bombers<sup>31</sup> examine the ways in which dissatisfaction can manifest itself politically and thus have suicidal consequences.

The second major theme to emerge, depression or an air of melancholia within a suicidal character, is common throughout cinema history and as early as 1937 we see it portrayed in *The Stage Door* (1937) where a depressed, struggling actor kills herself. In *Peeping Tom* we witness Mark Lewis' depressive suicide which, we learn indirectly, has been preceded by disturbing childhood which has led to psychopathy. Over the course of the film his descent into despair quickens in pace. Alain, in *Le Feu Follet* similarly dwells on his deteriorating mental health throughout the film, before ending his life with a bullet to the chest. Fiona, who tries to take her own life in *About a Boy* (2002), suffers from depression-like symptoms and the blacklisted writer, Albert Jerska, in *The Lives of Others* (2007) also struggles to see any quality in his life and hangs himself.

#### *Occasioned Suicide: The Killers (1946 and 1964)*

The second category focuses upon films where a significant character commits suicide, though without the prolonged determination to do so seen in characters of the first category: suicide here is a significant element of the narrative but not the main one. Rather than an *internal* motivation, here, it is for *external* reasons that suicide is sought. Such a suicide may elicit a response from the viewer to the effect that the 'easy-option' has been chosen. Rather than suffer the pain or embarrassment of remaining alive to explain what has happened, death in this way – within the context of a fiction film – can appear to be selected lightly and rapidly, for instance Mr. Blue's death by high-voltage electricity in *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* (1974). He chooses death within seconds of being

---

<sup>31</sup> Such as *The Dancer Upstairs* (2002) and *Paradise Now* (2005).

caught, without any attempt to escape. This overall category is by far the largest, accounting for 81% of all the films and there is a fair spread of such films across the decades. As with the other categories, the gun is the most popular method of self-extinction, but every other method features here as well. Males outnumber females in every decade except the 1950s where there are twice as many female characters in this category than males, though numbers of films are low for this period and therefore this figure should be treated with care. It could be argued that a combination of the Hays Production Code prohibiting suicide except in very specific circumstances and peacetime mentality following World War II contributed to this situation.<sup>32</sup> In this dataset, numbers increase as the decades progress, such that nearly half of films with an Occasioned Suicide in them appear from 1990 onwards.<sup>33</sup> The percentage split between male and female occasioned suicides is 85% male and 15% female.

A clear division can be detected in this category between films where characters kill themselves in consequence of hurting others and films where the person who has been hurt decides to kill themselves. As an example of a film where a character commits suicide after hurting somebody else, *Piccadilly* features a man who felt guilty for the maltreatment of a woman he was fond of and kills himself because of this. A common theme within this sub-category sees suicide occurring following a confession about an act (perhaps deviant or criminal). A prime example of this is Lt. Col. Markinsen's in *A Few Good Men* (1992), notable also for his dressing up in full military regalia before killing himself. An example of suicide after a confession by a female character appears in *The Black Dahlia* (2006), in which Ramona Linscott kills herself after confessing to some unpleasant family secrets. Here, the character shows regret for covering up the incident at the time and decides that she cannot bear to live with the knowledge of what she did any longer. 28% of all the films in the dataset fall into this sub-

---

<sup>32</sup> Applying between December 1938 and March 1951, suicide was discouraged on moral grounds from appearing in films unless 'absolutely necessary for the development of the plot' (MPAA, quoted in Bresler, 2000:174). From March 1951 onwards, in addition to the earlier guidelines, suicide was not to be included in a way that glorified the suicidee or the act; that was in any way justified; or in a way that allowed normal legal procedures to be avoided.

<sup>33</sup> 56% of films with an Occasioned Suicide have been released since 1990, though there are more films in general in this data that were released post-1990.

category, where a person who is guilty of something kills themselves. The male/female split here is 83% male, 17% female, one of the most divergent splits across all the groupings (except for heroic suicides).

The second sub-category refers to films where a character commits suicide after they have experienced something unpleasant, be it learning bad news or experiencing a physical assault. An example of the former is *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001), where Doris cannot bear to live any longer after discovering that her husband is a murderer and a blackmailer. An example of the latter is *Scum* (1979), where an inmate is attacked by a guard and kills himself in his cell. 44% of all the films in the dataset fall into this sub-category. The male/female split is much closer for these films, with 56% male and 44% female.

Another feature of this category is where a person commits a murder and then immediately kills him/herself as well. Such behaviour can occur without a close physical relationship (for instance *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *Full Metal Jacket*), but most often occurs in relation to love triangles, such as *Stolen Holiday* (1937), *Lady of the Tropics* (1939) and *The Getaway* (1972). The number of films featuring this type of situation increases if one widens the definition to include films where a man has an affair which causes the wife or girlfriend to take her life, or at least try to do so.<sup>34</sup>

It is also within this overall category that we find the subset of films that include heroic suicides (9% of all the films in this research), such as *El Cid* (1961), as Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar ('El Cid', played by Charlton Heston) sacrifices himself so that his troops are stirred to fight for their country and honour; and *Armageddon* (1998), which portrays Bruce Willis's character (Harry Stamper) sacrificing his own life, not only so that Earth avoids destruction by a colossal asteroid, but also so that his daughter may marry her beloved (who had drawn lots and "lost", thereby meaning he was supposed to detonate the bomb manually and thus die). Although most heroic suicides are by male characters, there are a small number of female cases, for instance *Blade* (1998) features a heroic female suicide by a

---

<sup>34</sup> For instance *Flower of the Arabian Nights* (1974), *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Lemming* (2005).

character who allows herself to be bitten so that a crusading character can continue the fight against the enemy; *The Descent: Part 2* (2009) where a female potholer sacrifices herself to enable another female to escape the clutches of the cave-dwelling creatures that pursue them; and *Final Destination II* (2003) includes a character who believes her death by drowning will help to save others, though in the event she is resuscitated and does not die.

The films chosen to exemplify this overall category are the two versions of *The Killers* (released in 1946 and 1964, respectively). They use the same source material – a short story by Ernest Hemingway – but the films are very different in their setting, narrative and discourse and an interesting comparison of the elements surrounding the suicide can be made. They have been chosen as exemplary films as they feature strong male leads who, following extensive interaction with significant female characters, are eventually humbled and broken by these experiences. I gave consideration to the idea of including a film from the heroic sub-category as an exemplary film but decided against the idea on the basis of a lack of textual richness of such films. In short, a drastic situation arises, somebody opts to die helping others, and then the film moves on. This is in stark contrast to the intricacies and depth of *The Killers*, not to mention the possibilities in being able to compare and contrast the films given their identical starting point.

#### *Consequences of suicide for others: The Hustler and The Virgin Suicides*

Where the consequences of suicide for those left behind are a primary focus for the narrative, such films are exemplified here by *The Hustler* and *The Virgin Suicides*. These films involve characters dealing with the aftermath of suicide by someone very close to them, with varying results. Within this category are films where a character *develops* significantly following another's suicide (as in *The Hustler*, in this case the film's protagonist, Eddie); and films where those left behind are baffled or angered by the suicide (as with *The Virgin Suicides*, in this case, the young male friends from the same neighbourhood as the suicidal Lisbon sisters). Films such as *Victim* and *Morvern Callar* (2002) feature in the

former group, while *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) fall firmly within the latter.

Films which reflect on the consequences of suicide for others are spread quite evenly across the two main categories of this research.<sup>35</sup> Poisoning, including suicide by pills and gas accounts for the largest number of suicides in this group (29%), but using a gun (24%) and cutting/stabbing (21%) are also regularly chosen. The split between females and males is 45% female, compared to 55% male, but there are few female suicides until 1999.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter the gender of the suicidee in each of the films has been considered. Trends across decades have also been tracked. Various methods of suicide that occur in the movies have been referred to and discussed, particularly in relation to their popularity of use. The concepts, Melancholic Suicide and Occasioned Suicide were then established, with films featuring consequences of suicide for others highlighted as well. This was followed by an introduction to the main categories used in Part II to determine the groups for the exemplary analyses. There may be some overlap close to the boundaries of each of the two categories but the groupings are analytically robust enough to highlight a significant number of central and uncontroversial examples pertinent to this research.

To sum up this introduction to the categories that organise Part II of this thesis, males dominate almost every aspect of each category, though numbers are closer to being even in the sub-category that focuses on characters who kill themselves in order to escape harm, and films that show the consequences of suicide for other characters. In terms of the hypothesis that a crisis of masculinity in recent decades has impacted upon movie representations of suicide, the raw data reveals no decisive conclusion on this matter, though the small recent rise in

---

<sup>35</sup> 56% melancholic suicide / 44% Occasioned Suicide.

female heroic suicides may well make sense in the context of the literature regarding an increase in women being portrayed as actively involved in areas traditionally associated with males.<sup>36</sup> The findings reported in relation to Occasional Suicides underline the unsurprising frequency in film drama of harm being caused to others, though there is the faintest of trends which suggests that male characters are shown as less able to cope with this situation and thus choose suicide.<sup>37</sup>

A number of thematic emphases have been identified which are prominent across a wide range of the films examined. Concerns with home and family life and relationship problems occur regularly. These are frequently represented on screen by instances of emotional conflict, infidelity, physical assault, or other difficult situations that characters have to face and which often lead to suicide. These themes have been historically and stereotypically associated primarily with women and with ways of being female and this connection is borne out by the data, though with a number of small exceptions.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, problems associated with work, culture and economy are all present in these film narratives, often represented in a negative way, for instance involving corruption, crime, war, murder and obsession. Such themes as these have been historically and stereotypically associated with men and masculinity and once again, there are a large number of male suicides in the films which are related to these issues.

This chapter has set the scene for this research, then, by introducing topics which will be explored in more detail later on and by providing an overview of suicide across a century of films. The end of this chapter therefore brings with it the end of the first section of this thesis – the fundamentals, providing the base upon which the research is founded – and we can now turn to Part II – the analysis section – which provides interpretive analyses of six exemplary films, in order to examine in more detail the ways in which these film texts typically represent suicide, its causes and its consequences.

---

<sup>36</sup> Payne et al (2008), Atkinson (2008).

<sup>37</sup> For instance, *Talk to Her* (2002), *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006) and *The Mist* (2008).

<sup>38</sup> For instance, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), *The Constant Gardener*.

## PART II: EXEMPLARY FILM ANALYSES

Part II is split into three chapters, each dealing with a specific type of suicide and exemplified by two key films per type. Each exemplary film is also representative of a particular cinematic tradition, the established conventions of which are also discussed. Details relating to 350 films involving suicide have been collected and grouped together for discussion and analysis. The films have been categorised initially in two ways: firstly, as to whether the cause of the suicidal act is something internal to the person (for instance, entrenched melancholia) or whether the cause is external to the person (for instance, they are being threatened with harm by an assailant). Chapter 4 discusses the former, while Chapter 5 focuses on the latter. In addition to these two categories, there is a third group of films which can cross-cut the others in that it focuses on the ways in which films may also deal substantially with the consequences of suicide for those left alive. Examples of such films are analysed in Chapter 6.

Specifically:

- Chapter 4 examines the category of Melancholic Suicide where suicide itself is a central theme, often with a main character determined to take his or her own life, as exemplified by *Le Feu Follet* and *Leaving Las Vegas*. To contextualise the analysis of these two films, I also explore aspects of the French *Nouvelle Vague* and of films which focus on alcohol addiction as well as assess the manner in which these films portray the relation between gender and suicide.
- Chapter 5 focuses on the category of Occasioned Suicide, where a main character is suicidal and the reasons for that state of affairs emerge during the course of the film. The films in this category, which, as we shall see, can be further divided into three sub-categories, are the most numerous within this research. The exemplary cases here are two films with the same title, made eighteen years apart and inspired by the same source material: *The Killers*. The movie traditions within which these films feature, *film noir* and *neo-noir* respectively, are also examined for their

treatment of suicide and gender, including, as they do, the *femme fatale*, a character of great importance within these generic conventions.

- Chapter 6 examines those films where the consequences of suicide for the living are explored (and these films can be split into two further groups to aid analysis). The exemplary films in this chapter are *The Hustler* and *The Virgin Suicides*. Robert Rossen's reputation as a director of 'serious' drama is considered in relation to *The Hustler* and its representation of gender and suicide. Teen movies – the cinematic tradition from which *The Virgin Suicides* emerges – are also examined for their depiction of gender and suicide. The suicides in both of the exemplary films are by females, but their effects are wrought on males and we explore how the effects can be different.

Formal scrutiny of the exemplary films is achieved through interpretive analysis that, using a standard framework clustered around the tri-partite system of *story*, *setting* and *discourse*, allows a systematic examination of the film to be made. The analytic framework treats films as multi-dimensional texts and is designed to capture as much detail as possible about each film, allowing analysis and exploration of trends across the source material. This analytic framework helps to maintain consistency of analysis within this study and ensures that the key elements of each film are described and explored. Under the heading *setting*, I look at both the physical and the social attributes of the film's world. Within *story*, I analyse the events of the film, making use of a detailed sequence analysis, and also explore the central characters' "traits and states". When examining *discourse*, I consider formal elements such as camerawork, editing, lighting and sound to complete our account of the film as a multi-dimensional text.<sup>39</sup> Finally, and within this context of analysis, the specific issues of representation of suicide and gender are addressed. My approach is mainly derived from Tudor (1974) and Rovisco (2003), though several other authors have contributed to my

---

<sup>39</sup> All of the exemplary films are conventionally structured in terms of causality, character motivation, space and time. Editing, sound, camerawork, and lighting are all – within broad definitions – standard for films of this type, that is to say, technique is not foregrounded, and conventions regarding eyeline matching, the 180-degree rule, shot/reverse shot, glance-object cut and crosscutting are adhered to.



approach to analysis, for instance Chatman (1978), Tudor (1989), Bordwell and Thompson (1993), Smith (1995) and Monaco (2000). However, my approach is not a direct application of any other, but rather an amalgamation of methods which I believe best suit my source material.

The sequence analysis tables along with the initial trait and state analyses, which provide the basic data for the evaluation of each exemplary film, are provided in the appendices, while all the other information has been included in the main body of the text.

## CHAPTER 4. MELANCHOLIC SUICIDE: THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH

This chapter explores films where the central character's determination to commit suicide is a core theme and derives from an internal source, specifically here a grave dissatisfaction with life. The suicidal intention in each film performs the role of driving the narrative forward as the main characters progress towards death. In both films, death is at the very end of the film and, in *Le Feu Follet*, does not precipitate any further narrative consequences and has only a very limited effect in *Leaving Las Vegas* (causing Sera to shed a tear as she reminisces about her time with Ben, though we see this only briefly). *Le Feu Follet* and *Leaving Las Vegas*, the two exemplary films for this category, will be closely examined and as a way of aiding the discussion, they will be set within the context of their relevant cinematic traditions, namely the French *Nouvelle Vague* and alcohol addiction films. In the first part of this chapter, I briefly examine a number of films with similar elements to the exemplary films and I ask whether these elements, including their mode of representation of gender and suicide, change over time. The methods of suicide chosen seem appropriate for their respective genre backgrounds, namely a decisive choice for Alain; and a protracted decline for Ben. Towards the end of this chapter I look more closely at the representation of suicide within the two exemplary films in order to highlight similarities and differences.

### *Melancholic Suicide: Historical and Generic Context*

This category of Melancholic suicide includes several films where characters have suffered a devastating setback and because of this, they do not care whether they live or die. They have been inured against the normal human concerns of avoiding pain and death and instead confront such contingencies, often initiating those situations themselves. Durkheim ([1897] 2002) refers to such suicides as, 'connected with a general state of extreme depression and

exaggerated sadness' ([1897] 2002:10). Freud ([1917] 2005) remarks similarly, that such people have experienced, 'an overcoming of the drive...which compels everything that lives to cling to life' (2005:206). Here we can place JB Books (played by John Wayne) in *The Shootist* and Mel Gibson's Riggs in *Lethal Weapon* (1987). Books has been diagnosed with cancer and has little time left in order to settle old scores, while Riggs has lost his wife very early in their relationship, which has left him free of conventional worries about self-preservation. They have lost interest in life – or at least with any prolonged continuation of it – and their often reckless or dangerous behaviour further suggests this is the case. Books arranges a final gunfight with three men as a way of providing an alternative to the slow death that his cancer might entail. Riggs, meanwhile, strides across a children's playground to get a better look at a gunman's position despite bullets hurtling past him as he does so (one of several incidents where he ignores serious danger in the film). More recently, *A Serious Man* features a US college professor, played by Colin Firth, who plans his suicide following the death of his partner in a car accident. Though he holds himself together in front of friends, colleagues and students, behind closed doors it is clear that his grief is considerable.

*Le Jour se Lève*, *Ratcatcher* (1999) and *Head On* (2004) also fall within this category. The former focuses on Francois, played by Jean Gabin, whose girlfriend has been corrupted by another man, whom Francois then kills, before also killing himself. Prior to shooting himself, he ruminates on the events that have led to his predicament and the film focuses on his final few hours as he reminisces about the life he knows is about to end. Even before the unpleasant situation with his girlfriend, Francois was a morose, downbeat character, able to see the downside in most things and so not unlike Alain in *Le Feu Follet*. This is markedly different to the representation of suicides that we will see later in Chapter 5 (suicide by a significant character which is explicable within the context of the film) where, for instance, murderers kill themselves rather than face capture with such a decision taken in seconds. Alain and Francois consider their lives in almost forensic-like detail before ending them with a gunshot. Except for the flashbacks involving Françoise, his beloved, *Le Jour se Lève* takes place in Francois' claustrophobic attic room and provides an intense atmosphere,

commensurate with his musings prior to death. In *Ratcatcher*, a young boy feels guilty about the death of a friend – although he was not strictly to blame – and drowns himself at the end of the film. His friend's death came about unintentionally but the young boy struggles with his predicament before opting to kill himself in the way his friend died. In *Head On* we see two suicidal characters who are thrown together in a relationship which flounders as they attempt to adjust to one another. Their initial fatigue with life and families – the drivers for their suicide attempts – abates towards the end of the film, though their inevitable separation from each other is not reversed.

*Delicatessen* (1991) and *Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself* (2002), in keeping with the films from this group, also feature characters who wish to end their life for reasons that do not hinge on a particular incident or event, but rather, are an accumulation of sadness and malaise over an extended period. In *Delicatessen*, death is achieved, but in *Wilbur*, the eponymous character survives owing to a blossoming relationship with a woman; she manages what Sera in *Leaving Las Vegas* cannot and keeps a would-be suicidee alive. Things are not quite so straightforward, however, as the woman was in fact married to Wilbur's brother, and it takes his death by overdose (following a diagnosis of inoperable cancer) for Wilbur to give and receive affection in a way which ultimately saves his life.

If we consider this group of films in terms of whether the conventions and similarities that bind them together change or remain constant over time, we find many issues continuously represented across the category. Jean Gabin's brooding, introspective character appears in many different guises throughout the body of films (*Le Jour se Lève*, *Le Feu Follet*, *The Shootist*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Delicatessen*, *Leaving Las Vegas*, *Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself*, *The Hours*, *Sylvia* and *Head On*). Profound unhappiness or a deep dissatisfaction with their status in life afflicts the suicidal characters in these films. Striving to kill themselves, they believe that they have a good reason to do so and in the majority of cases,

they succeed, despite the often strenuous efforts by others to cajole and divert them away from an early death.<sup>40</sup>

The two case-study films for this chapter, *Le Feu Follet* and *Leaving Las Vegas*, strongly exemplify films that feature Melancholic Suicide, where characters struggle to retain their optimism for life or a firm connection to those around them. As in these two cases, the majority of such characters are male, with only a small number of melancholic female suicides, such as Virginia Woolf in *The Hours* and Sylvia Plath in *Sylvia*. Both these women suffer from depression that pervades their every waking moment and from which they cannot escape – even despite, for both of them, blossoming artistic careers and – for Woolf – strong familial support. A characteristic feature of these films, then, is a forceful, single-minded determination to die. While perhaps not quite Kierkegaard's religiously-inspired despair, there is often profound despondency and a deep fatigue with life and relationships. In a number of cases, Plath, Woolf and Alain Leroy (*Le Feu Follet*) included, we could say that the characters exhibit behaviour commonly associated with depression. Stillion et al (1989) declare that 'depression is the most common pathological symptom of suicidal individuals of all ages' (1989:100) and when one considers that it tends to originate in potentially stressful events, such as divorce, job loss, illness and other unexpected changes in circumstances, it is clear that such a condition features frequently in film. Characteristics of depression may include negativity, anger inwardly expressed, hopelessness, reliance on drugs or alcohol, feelings of isolation, and sexual dysfunction (Stillion et al 1989:42). A significant number of films referred to in this section feature characters struggling with these and similar traits and states which are variously seen to impact upon potential for suicide.

Suicides of this sort in the cinema were rare until the 1970s when they began to appear in greater numbers, with men and women suffering from a variation on Alain's *ennui*, as seen in *Le Feu Follet*. This rise ties in with a greater awareness of depression amongst the public and the medicalization of this condition in

---

<sup>40</sup> Characters do not often change their minds on account of their involvement with others but, as already noted, this can occur. *Scent of a Woman* (1992) is another example.

Western cultures at around the same time. Filmmakers were more able than before to articulate notions of deep sadness and boredom with life and so more characters, constructed to portray the effects of such a condition, were seen in the cinema.<sup>41</sup>

Though they evidently share a concern with melancholic protagonists, *Leaving Las Vegas* and *Le Feu Follet* emerge from very different cinematic contexts which merit some consideration here. In the case of the former, there is a significant tradition of films which feature alcoholics and alcohol addiction if not always connected to suicide, and although they range across a variety of cinematic styles and genres, they also share a number of distinctive features. As drinking amongst adults in films is routine, drinking to excess is therefore usually represented as being brought about by a problem or difficulty faced by a character who, in trying to cope, cannot manage long without a drink.<sup>42</sup> However, occasionally it does not happen like this, for example in *Days of Wine and Roses* (1962) when Kirstie, after being tempted by the taste, can no longer face her world without having a drink first. Sober, she feels the world is a dirty, unpleasant place but after drinking, she no longer worries about that. In this film there is a stark contrast between male and female images of drunkenness. Joe finds strength to abstain and prospers from his decision. His wife is unable to do the same and Harwin and Otto (1979) believe, 'we are asked to see Kirstie as the more disturbed of the two partners' (1979:40). Despite numerous requests and offers of help, she declines Joe's proposals to sober up and resume life as a family again. Harwin and Otto (1979) suggest that, in relation to women and drinking, an idea often tapped into by the cinema is that, 'the woman has lost control of herself, through drinking, and has therefore lost some essential femininity' (1979:48). While not subscribing to the view that there is any kind of 'essential femininity', it is clear that such a position may be articulated in films. I would add to this that there can be gendered implications for men as well, as it will be seen below in the discussion of the two exemplary films in this chapter, where the effects of alcohol on Alain and Ben do serve to compromise their

---

<sup>41</sup> *Picnic at Hanging Rock; Taxi Driver* (1976); *The Shootist; Interiors* (1978);

<sup>42</sup> This appears to be the situation with Ben in *Leaving Las Vegas*.

masculinity, by affecting their relationships with others and, in Alain's case, by resulting in his stay in a private clinic.

*Harvey* (1950) features James Stewart as Elwood P. Dowd, a lush who spends much of his time frequenting bars, along with his (invisible) companion, a giant white rabbit called Harvey. As far as his sister and niece are concerned, such an association – and unashamedly public as well – brings nothing but embarrassment and notoriety their way. A plan is hatched to incarcerate Elwood in a mental hospital and the film explores notions of friendship and forgiveness in this context. While Elwood is portrayed as a man with a serious drinking problem, we hardly ever see him actually drink. Instead, the link is maintained through numerous references to bars and Elwood's belief that his lagomorphic friend is real. There are elements in *Leaving Las Vegas* which play upon themes seen in *Harvey*, for instance the geniality, friendliness and sappy-faced expressions of Elwood are referenced by Ben forty five years later. In *The Lost Weekend* (1945), another and rather darker film focusing on an alcoholic, we see Ray Milland's character, Don Birnam, suffering from writer's block and successfully escaping the watchful eye of his brother in order to drink the weekend away. Towards the end of the film Don considers suicide, trading his typewriter in order to acquire a gun, but he is talked out of it and instead, feels able to start writing a book about his exploits over the previous few days. A woman, Helen, tries to look after him and is responsible for keeping him from killing himself, something Sera cannot achieve in *Leaving Las Vegas*. Although suicide does feature in the film, it only makes an appearance towards the end and, even then, drink is not seen as a potential way of dying.

*Le Feu Follet* is best contextualised not in terms of a particular narrative emphasis (as with drinking in *Leaving Las Vegas*) but, rather, in relation to its place in the highly distinctive cinema of its period, that of the French Nouvelle Vague. Newport (2007) suggests that when the phrase French *Nouvelle Vague* is used, it can actually be partitioned into three discrete groupings. Firstly, five directors who also wrote for the journal *Cahiers du Cinema*: Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer and Truffaut (and for Monaco (1976) these five *and these five alone* constitute the French *Nouvelle Vague*). Secondly, three directors also

associated with 'left bank' politics of the time: Marker, Resnais and Varda. Thirdly, peripheral directors who nevertheless made important films in France at that time: Demy, Pollet, Rozier and Malle.

These directors were able to begin making films at this time because a change in policy at the French Ministry of Culture in 1958 brought with it new funding rules which offered financial support, previously unavailable to emerging talent. Nowell-Smith (2008) suggests that although some prominent *Nouvelle Vague* directors did not raise funds this way, the rule change, 'greatly eased the birth pangs of the new movement by opening up the field to new producers and directors' (2008:142). In addition to the funding changes, Monaco (1976) also highlights a number of technological developments that aided the emergence of the *Nouvelle Vague*, including, 'fast film-stocks, lightweight cameras, new lighting equipment, and the liberation from the Hollywood set' (1976:10). These allowed the *Nouvelle Vague* directors to get on the streets, with cameras rolling, and start making films. Most film historians see a change in the kinds of films made as well, for instance Rachlin (1993) writes, 'the *Nouvelle Vague* saw a shift in films away from historical treatments and classical literary adaptations and toward a depiction of the life of by-and-large young, contemporary figures' (1993:432). In terms of the body of films produced by *Nouvelle Vague* directors, it is certainly true that Malle is a peripheral figure. He did not write for *Cahiers*, and instead his introduction to filmmaking was much more conventional: film school, assistant director (to Bresson), co-director of a documentary film, and then finally director of his own feature film. Nowell-Smith (2008) describes Malle as being 'a pioneer in the sense that his two films from the late 1950s, *Lift to the Scaffold* (1958) and *Les Amants* (1958), can be seen as paving the way for the *Nouvelle Vague* proper, but who, when the *Nouvelle Vague* came along, went off in various...directions' (2008:145). A film which is close in style to Malle's *Le Feu Follet* is Varda's film, *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962) which follows a young woman around the streets of Paris while she passes time before a hospital appointment. She goes to a bar, she meets and talks with people, she sings, she visits a park and finally she receives bad news from her consultant (confirming the tarot reading at the beginning of the film). We can instantly note the emphasis on street-filming and the focus on a young protagonist, as well as a more 'left bank' concern with



introspection and existential contemplation. Following this outline of the analytical and cultural backgrounds to the exemplary films, we can now begin the in-depth analyses.

## *Exemplary films*

### *Le Feu Follet*

*Le Feu Follet* charts the final few days of Alain Leroy's life. He is a recovering alcoholic who decides to kill himself once he has visited a number of friends to say goodbye. The narrative drive is supplied by Alain who leaves the cosy confines of his clinic in Versailles to stalk the streets of Paris wishing old friends *au revoir*. Along the way he discusses life and love but is not swayed from his goal of suicide. The film progresses from Alain deciding life is not worth living through to him committing suicide by shooting himself. A sequence analysis of *Le Feu Follet*, giving details and timings for each scene of the film, is included in Appendix A.

The settings in this film can be categorised as:

- Functional: taxi, bus, bank, art gallery, market, bookshop, cafés and streets
- Domestic or quasi-domestic: hotels, clinic, Dubourg's flat, the commune, and Lavaud's house.

The action takes place across a relatively narrow range of settings and the various places are used in a broadly conventional way. The use of such settings is in no way a surprise as it would almost be expected for a French film from the early 1960s, given the emergence of the Nouvelle Vague and the film-technological developments that contributed to it, to have scenes set in an art gallery, a bookshop, a hotel, cafés and outside on the street. Although cafés and streets appear in the list of functional settings, they are more significant than that

may suggest. The first time we see Alain in a café he proudly asserts the length of time since his last alcoholic drink and he seems unlikely to revert back to his old ways. The second time in a café he hitches a ride to Paris in order to reacquaint himself with his old friends and the third time he meets up with some friends from the army and takes his first drink for four months. Similarly, the streets allow more than a simple route from one place to another, but allow Alain to reflect both with Dubourg and with Eva about matters highly relevant to him in the final hours of his life, namely love and existence: topics of conversation which he also has in the domestic settings with some of his other friends. Filming on the streets also underlines links between this film and other French cinema of the period. The overwhelming number of public, impersonal settings seen in this film also underlines our sense of Alain being a wanderer, with no place for him to settle in this world. He literally has no place to call home and this greatly contributes to our understanding of his situation.

*Le Feu Follet* focuses on a privileged social world where Alain is a patient at a private clinic in Versailles for alcoholism. In more than one sense, he is a 'kept man' – not only living under strict rules at the clinic but also in relation to his estranged wife, Dorothy. As he and a girlfriend, Lydia, talk she says, 'I'll ask her what she has planned for you' (6m22s). It later transpires that Dorothy pays Alain's fees at the clinic. Consistent with his privileged social world, Alain has an impressive range of clothing and accessories to choose from as he dresses for his final trip to Paris. He is a gentleman of leisure: he plays chess with his doctor; he writes; his friends are 'intellectuals', that is to say, a poet, an artist, an Egyptologist; and Cyrille Lavaud and Solange live in a vast house, lavishly decorated and furnished, exhibiting an almost decadent level of affluence. Even the Minville brothers seem a slightly better class of criminal than the average Parisian thief. Frey (2004) describes the film as being 'set among[st] the bored ... and mundane lives of the social elite' (2004:68). By virtue of mostly showing the more salubrious sides of Versailles and Paris, the film underlines Alain's serious suicidal intent, as we see a "comfortable" life ended early rather than a "struggling" existence brought to a premature end.

### Character<sup>43</sup>

Maurice Ronet plays Alain as a man with a constant eye for a woman nearby, though without the energy or drive to act on any flirtatious look returned. His good looks, combined with a serious expression fit in well with the narrative, that is to say, attractive to women romantically and often, maternally. Women who have been in a relationship with him offer assistance and warmth as he wanders once more into their lives, but it seems that they do so in a caring, rather than a passionate way. He is woken on the morning of his sojourn to Paris by one of the nurses at the clinic stroking his hair, having brought in his breakfast and fetched his dressing gown; she acts like a mother might in such a situation. The opening shot of this sequence is filmed in close up showing Alain's head and a hand stroking his hair. It is disorientating for the audience, as well as Alain, as we are not sure where he is or who the hand belongs to. Later, a young female at the café where he drinks for the first time in four months tries to catch his eye but Alain either avoids her, or is so wrapped up in his personal difficulties, that he does not see her. It is at this moment that he is most in need of rescuing but as he sits isolated from those around him, it is to a shot glass that he turns, rather than another human being.

The traits and states that Alain displays mostly fit together coherently but conflict appears when the traits are seen against the backdrop of the situation Alain finds himself in. For instance, early in the film we see him at pains to keep Lydia in his life, but utterly resistant to travelling with her to America.<sup>44</sup> Dubourg and Eva both offer him a place to stay while he gets his health back and when talking with the clinic's doctor, Alain simultaneously wishes to stay as a patient and insists he will leave by the weekend. When rehearsing his telegram to Dorothy it is unclear whether he intends to write that he was cured, or that he is still in need of treatment. His proposed telegrams swing from one position to the other. The contradictory nature of Alain, divided as he is between positive and negative traits

---

<sup>43</sup> A detailed breakdown of Alain's traits and states throughout *Le Feu Follet* is provided in Appendix A.

<sup>44</sup> This resistance to visiting America may be read as a slight distancing from the French *Nouvelle Vague* by Malle and their enthusiasm for the USA.

and states, is set out early in the film and raises with the viewer the issue of how these will be reconciled. The resolution comes in the form of suicide, with Alain unwilling to shake off the negative emotions and urges that he experiences. Thus, after the silent credits, the film opens with an intense close up of physical intimacy between Alain and Lydia. He looks at her and we hear his thoughts as he does so. She seems contented but Alain does not. He looks as though his mind is elsewhere and the extreme close ups of his anxious-looking face, coupled with slow piano music, emphasise this.

The moment that Alain renders his watch instead of a conventional tip to the maid at his and Lydia's hotel can be seen as the first indication of his self-harming intentions. While he may simply have no change but several other watches back in his room to replace the one given away, the exchange seems more significant owing to the importance of time, especially for a self-confessed admirer of order within his life. It is only a few minutes later when, in the busy café, Alain tries – but fails – to tell Lydia something which seems important to him at the time. Perhaps he was going to tell her what he was considering. Perhaps not, but in only a few hours' time he would be in his room, handling his gun, complaining that life moves too slowly for him. This reluctance to tell may suggest that the notion of suicide within a film such as this had controversial undertones which needed to be addressed carefully. His penchant for affixing newspaper clippings to his bedroom mirror is also a curious activity, given the nature of the stories – 'Tragedy! 5 year-old tried to fly' and 'Dying husband found beside wife's nude body'. A morbid fascination with stories such as these immediately suggests a dark side to Alain's character and it is this which prevails in the end.

The strong tone of the suicide note, particularly the wish to leave 'an indelible stain' on somebody, presumably Dorothy, at first seems out of character but actually, the signs are there from early on in the film. His comment to the doctor that he will be 'gone by the weekend' is spoken in an aggressive way, as though it will be somebody else's fault if he does indeed leave by then. At the commune, Alain can scarcely control himself and his disdain for people he once knew (and presumably was amicable with). As he paces about, ranting at the group and their beliefs, it becomes clear there is some anger bubbling away inside Alain but

he leaves before it spills out in their company. During his meeting with the Minville brothers he again adopts a loud, hectoring tone while trying to convince them to change their behaviour. He resorts to name calling: a long way away from the smooth, persuasive Alain who hitched a ride to Paris despite being told 'no' in the first instance by the mail van drivers. In Solange and Lavaud's house he criticises their 'security and well-being' and then struggles with self-discipline during the dinner party. Despite all the offers of kindness – even love from Lydia – and affection from male and female friends during his visits with them, and despite Dorothy's financial backing for four months in a private clinic at Versailles, his final note specifically refers to the effect that a suicide can have on those left behind (an idea developed further in Chapter 6 below), but in a cold, brutal, and unfeeling way. It is hard not to think he has taken his personal grief too far and foisted it on an unsuspecting Dorothy, with added malice.

The visits to his friends are more than *adieu*, but also to judge 'their lives for their worthiness' (Granger, 2004:78), and in fact, the question is whether '*life itself ...[is]... worthwhile*' (ibid.). The gunshot to the chest would suggest Alain answers in the negative. Granger's (2004) belief is that Alain cannot endure the situation, as he finds it, that 'at its best, life only offers us the infinite forms of mediocrity that result from the compromises of adulthood' (2004:85).

Alain hints at a number of strong masculine traits and states, such as sexual potency, soldier and hard drinker, but as we encounter him, he is a mere shadow of such a man. Impotent, a writer (though we see him working only once in his room) and receiving treatment for alcoholism, in terms of traditionally understood ideas of masculinity there is little that is positive here. Alain is childless and spurns a number of opportunities to consolidate relationships with women in the film, instead preferring the isolation of his clinic. From his conversation with the Minville brothers we can detect that he was an effective soldier, but the Alain seen in *Le Feu Follet* does not appear proficient at any job, skill or task. He is defined by his condition of "recovering alcoholic" and given that he relapses, that is not something done well either. In terms of traditional ideas regarding masculinity, he struggles alongside some of the other males he encounters, for instance Dubourg and Lavaud, both of whom seem successful in their fields and

with women. His inability to confide in others about his feelings may, as we have already seen in this thesis, considerably elevate his risk of suicide.

### *Narrative and Discourse*

Straightforward continuity editing is used in the film to ensure that the story unfolds intelligibly, though occasionally there are extended gaps in the time between scenes and it is difficult to know how long has elapsed, for instance in the final section of the film after Alain has shaved and then finished reading a book. Mostly, *Le Feu Follet* does not rely on rapid editing but quite often allows its characters time to deliver their lines in one shot, as if we were watching people talking in real life. There are occasions where the speed of cutting increases, most notably at the dinner party where Alain talks about how women intimidate him. The shots change from one to the next in a jumpy, almost haphazard way, emphasising his intoxicated state and how it affects his thought process and selection of words.

Typically for non-anamorphic French films of this period the aspect ratio of *Le Feu Follet* is 1.66:1 and often the focus of our attention is not shown at the very centre of the shot, but may be off to one side or the other. As Alain moves about his room he walks in and out of the shot and we variously see him on the left or on the right (though he does not pass “behind” the camera). As Alain looks at himself in the vast mirror in his room, and we look at him doing so, there is an element of depth used sparingly during the film, such as out on the street and in Lavaud’s house at the dinner party. While the majority of the guests are eating, Alain refreshes himself with a glass of water and some stomach settlers in the bathroom before joining the party. The dinner table sits within an enormous hall and as Alain descends the stairs he becomes more visible to us and to the guests, causing them to cease talking and stare at him.

Mostly, the camerawork is not foregrounded but instead allows the story to be told and the characters to develop. The camera follows Alain about, including the travelling between venues, and this wandering through the streets with Alain not

only underlines his lack of a place within the world, but also underlines how this film shares some similarities with conventional documentary style. We see much more than one scene on a film set, followed by another scene on a film set and so on. Here, we are with the character as he visits his old haunts to offer his goodbyes. Malle confirmed some years later that, 'everything was shot at real locations' (quoted in French, 1993:40) emphasising the connection to the French New Wave movement and to the documentary style via naturalistic lighting and locations already referred to.

The very first shots we see at the start of the film are of Lydia and Alain in bed together in close up and extreme close up. A number of scenes are seen in medium shots, for instance in the clinic and in his friends' houses, while long shots are mainly used for street scenes. On a number of occasions, the mirror in Alain's room is used to frame him, with the date of 23 July (written on his mirror in what looks like lipstick or marker pen) incorporated into many of the shots. This could be the date he has chosen to kill himself, thus further indicating he has planned well ahead in this regard, though there is no indication in the film as to what this date refers to, or even when the film is set. A pack of cyclists race by as he leaves the clinic on his way into Paris, and the viewer immediately thinks of the *Tour de France* but there is nothing in the film to corroborate this notion.

The lighting is mostly naturalistic, that is to say, appropriate to the location of the scene. After drinking at the café and stumbling through the rain, Alain hears church bells and as he sees the church, steps from darkness into light. Up to this point, and indeed, after it, the film is silent in terms of religion, but this scene suggests that salvation is available if Alain chooses to accept it. At the very end of his last full day alive, Alain talks with a friend from the dinner party about being in love and for the final moments of the scene his head is shrouded in darkness, with only a small part of the left side of his face lit at all. This gives him the sense of a man suffering and coming to the end of his patience with life. In an interview some years later, Malle observed that he shot the first two days of filming in colour before swapping for black and white. He considered the colour of the scenes 'distracting' (French, 1993:40) and so they reshot the first two day's scenes and continued in monochrome.

The film does not make use of a weighty musical soundtrack, but rather music is applied quite sparingly. Extracts from two Erik Satie pieces are used (*Gymnopédies* and *Gnossienne*), and the sound is both plaintive and thoughtful. It is heard as Alain and another are in conversation, for instance with Lydia in the hotel room, or while talking on the terrace at the clinic. The music is also heard when Alain is on his own, brooding about his existence and how unfulfilling life is to him. As he holds his gun for the second time in the film, the music accompanies his murmurings about how slowly he feels life moves. The film also makes effective use of silence by stopping the music abruptly in order to focus all of our attention on what has just happened. For instance, the music sounds for a few minutes before Alain drinks at the café, while he watches the women walk by and the old man steal something from the table in front of him, but then once he has taken a drink, silence. Alain staggers upstairs to wet his face and as he does so, there is a disorientating series of sounds coming from just outside the washroom, where a young girl speaks very quickly into a telephone about her experiences in Paris so far. It is an effective use of sound because it conveys how confused things are in Alain's head by having this incessant and distracting noise force its way into his consciousness. Other sound effects are used to sustain verisimilitude, such as in the café scenes or the street scenes or on the bus after the dinner party. Though there are numerous silences, it is still quite a talkative film and it is through the dialogue that we come to understand how Alain feels about his condition. The conversations with his friends and the doctor, as well as the lines he speaks to himself, allow us to appreciate Alain's tragic situation.

### *Representation of Suicide in Le Feu Follet*

A detailed examination of the build-up to Alain's suicide highlights a number of narrative as well as gender issues. After waking up the day after drinking alcohol for the first time in nearly four months he, and his room, are in a bad state. The messy room serves to emphasise his inner turmoil. We see Alain in bed in medium close up. After being asked about breakfast, Alain ensures his morning will be without interruption from the clinic staff or other patients by giving the maid



some money to leave him undisturbed until noon. Immediately after locking the door, he begins to pack and we watch him move about his room, tidying his belongings away. The telephone rings and he answers. Even though he had been much more honest and explicit about his suicidal intentions to Dubourg, Alain was not able to be as forthright with Lavaud and Solange the night before and once again, with Solange on the telephone reminding him about their offer of lunch, Alain insists he will be there. He has no time for small talk and hangs up curtly, then carries on packing away his personal things, such as photos and clothes. He puts everything in suitcases and then shaves, as we watch him do so in the mirror. He even splashes on some aftershave. These aspects of his behaviour are seen in shots of around 10 seconds each, meaning that the camera often follows Alain around his room as he packs. Following his shave, there is a slow dissolve from that scene into the next, where we see Alain lying on his bed, finishing reading a book, *The Great Gatsby* by F Scott Fitzgerald. Though we can only speculate as to the significance of the choice of book, its themes of refusing to grow old as well as feeling discontented with one's lost youth might suggest reasons for its appearance in the mise-en-scene. The fact that it is an American book ties in with the French *Nouvelle Vague* and also its inclusion of a suicide by a man following an outburst of violence is echoed here once the suicide note is shown. The dissolve from one scene to the next tells the audience that a significant period of time has elapsed and so we can believe he has read the book from cover to cover, or at least a substantial amount of it. His thoughtful expression following the completion of the final sentence also suggests he has read it all and after putting the book and his glasses down, he reaches for his pistol. He picks a spot roughly where he thinks his heart is, takes a deep breath, and pulls the trigger. He slumps back against the headboard. It is then that we see his suicide note, as it appears on the screen; up until that point the audience was not aware he had written one.

This final section of the film makes use of the classic technique of deferral and tension building about whether Alain will honour his avowed intention, by drawing out the sequence to include routine activities like packing, tidying, shaving, reading and so on, only for the actual lethal gunshot to happen in almost no time at all. After apparently spending all morning taking his time over many little tasks,

he fires the gun into his chest within just a few seconds of picking it up. This protraction of tension and then sudden fatal action leaves the viewer with a heightened sense of despair after perhaps thinking he had changed his mind after all and was going to leave the clinic to stay with a friend. This feeling is exacerbated when the text of the suicide note appears on screen and its harsh language is comprehended:<sup>45</sup>

I'm killing myself because you didn't love me, because I didn't love you. Because our ties were loose, I'm killing myself to tighten them. I leave you with an indelible stain.

Throughout this entire section of the film, lasting 7 minutes and 6 seconds, there is very little dialogue or other sounds and no music. There is nothing to distract us from watching Alain try to provide a neat ending to his foreshortened life. In this final scene, there is no one and nothing to prevent him from leaving this world.

There is no obvious explanation as to why Alain packs his cases and tidies away most of his possessions. We could speculate that such acts are an extension of his tidy ways (his clothes were impeccably stored around the room), or an attempt to prevent people rummaging through and perhaps stealing anything he had left out on display.<sup>46</sup> Whatever the reason, it reinforces the words he spoke to friends earlier in the film about him leaving, and wishing to say goodbye before he goes. An interesting twist to the well-stocked bedroom in terms of Alain's personal effects is that Malle provided a lot of the possessions himself: 'the shirts, the suits, the ties, everything. Even the gun was mine' (French, 1993:43), suggesting how personal the story may have become for the director.

In terms of feeding expectations on the part of the viewer, Alain makes his intentions known early in the film as we see him caress his gun while alone in his

---

<sup>45</sup> The note includes Durkheimian overtones, specifically the reference to loose ties.

<sup>46</sup> Arguably, there may also be a link between Alain's behaviour and that by other suicidees in this research, where dressing up formally is carried out before dying, for instance Lt. Col. Markinson's suicide in *A Few Good Men* and Sgt. Shaw's act of wearing his recently-won medal just prior to shooting himself in *The Manchurian Candidate*.

room. Previous to this, we had seen him give away his watch to a hotel maid *in lieu* of a tip. In the conversation with his doctor, he declares he will have left the clinic by the weekend and 33 minutes 35 seconds into the film, Alain utters the words, 'tomorrow, I'll kill myself'. It is with these events in mind that the rest of the film is seen and how the character of Alain is understood. The rather haunting piano music – the only music used in the film – contributes to the tone of melancholy, culminating in Alain's successful suicide.

The plausibility of Alain's suicidal behaviour is different to suicides in many other films where the suicidee has committed a crime or believes s/he have no other choice to make. Here, Alain is financially looked after by his estranged wife, receives offers to accompany friends to New York or Egypt and is generally met with a warm and positive reception from whomever he meets. He is thought of with great affection by a number of different women and men. Nobody actively forces Alain to abandon hope and the friends he meets one final time keep telling him that he should remain with them, but in spite of this, he leaves them behind.

If it is true that Dorothy has filed for divorce (as one of the guests at Lavaud and Solange's party reports), but it is news which Alain learns after his decision to end his life. While it is not news that might reasonably change his mind, it was clearly not the initial trigger. He is so dismayed by life that seemingly no amount of pleading or persuasion by his friends will divert him from his objective of an early death. The intended recipient of the suicide note remains unstated; the audience may believe that it is for Dorothy or perhaps, in a much more general sense, that it is addressed to the world: both readings fit with our understanding of Alain and his state of mind during the final few days of his life. A commonly used way of telling the audience what has been written in a suicide note is to have a character read it aloud, as at the beginning of *The Hours*. However, *Le Feu Follet* employs a different approach by showing it onscreen, allowing its rather abrupt language to be read directly and thought about by the audience. We can also add here that in deciding his own fate, rather than waiting for others to decide it for him, Alain's behaviour is consistent with the frequent French *Nouvelle Vague's* emphasis on freedom of individual choice.

Ultimately the audience is left in some doubt concerning the specific reasons for Alain's dissatisfaction with life, though references are made throughout the film to his alcoholism, separation from his wife – and subsequent request for divorce – and money troubles. However, the reasons for his melancholia seem much more profound than this and, arguably, the film never offers a very satisfactory answer. We can see his inner turmoil though, as it manifests itself in his pained facial expressions and wistful looks off-screen. Indeed, it could be said that a feature of films in this category is that doubts remain as to the ultimate basis for a character's suicidal intentions. Melancholia here is a kind of residual category, a state of being that leads to suicide without any clear explanatory structure; what in the nineteenth century was sometimes described as 'obscure melancholia'. Thus, we may feel that Alain lacks a significant enough reason to want to end it all, given that he is an ex-soldier, writer and lover (past and present) of a number of attractive women. In order to convey the despondency weighing down on Alain, the film follows him as he goes about his business and we see little positive emotion but, rather, substantial amounts of pain and hurting. Despite making an effort to say goodbye to his friends he passes the hours without feeling the need to rein in his acerbic comments. Throughout the film, there are cues that prime the viewer to infer Alain's inner state and so – at least partially – understand his situation. These cues include the dialogue, for example his conversation with his doctor who tries to cheer Alain up with the words, 'life is good' only for Alain to respond, 'tell me why, doctor'; the photography, such as the austere lit shots out in the street and in the commune of his artistic friends; and the music, for instance the repeated use of a piano which provides a sombre mood to the film. But even so, his determination to kill himself does indeed remain 'obscure'.

## ***Leaving Las Vegas***

*Leaving Las Vegas* is about two people, thrown together on the streets of Las Vegas, who form a relationship that provides them with some temporary stability. Despite their closeness and obvious affection for one another, they do not deviate from the paths chosen for themselves, namely prostitution for Sera and suicide for Ben. They had both left LA for Las Vegas, Sera to escape her pimp and Ben to drink himself to death with his settlement money from the film studio that fired him. In the film, we experience their highs and lows as they struggle to connect with each other amidst the turmoil occurring around them. A sequence analysis of *Leaving Las Vegas*, giving details and timings for each scene of the film is provided in Appendix B.

The bulk of the film is a prolonged flashback of the two characters' brief life together in Las Vegas, as recounted by Sera whom we see talking about the events during a quasi-interview with an unseen questioner; several scenes from this quasi-interview appear throughout the film. There is a developmental, linear progression to the story as we witness Ben's steady deterioration and eventual death.

The settings in *Leaving Las Vegas* can be grouped together in the following ways:

- Neutral public places (supermarket, bank, film studio, restaurant)
- Public places, often associated with risk (bar, hotel, motel, casino, pawn shop)
- Domestic setting of Ben's home and Sera's home
- Consulting room-style space for Sera's confessional talk

*Leaving Las Vegas* focuses on the unglamorous side of Las Vegas – prostitution and alcoholism – as characterised by Sera and Ben, respectively. This film is about their relationship and their, albeit quite restricted, social world. Ben interacts with bartenders, hotel and casino staff, while Sera mixes with her pimp

and her customers. She lives in a gated community of stylish apartments, but is asked to leave once it becomes clear how she pays the rent. Las Vegas itself is presented as an impersonal city where meaningful relationships are rare, thus emphasising the special – if only fleeting – nature of Ben and Sera's time together. The first hotel that Ben stays in is called 'The Whole Year Inn' but as he stares at the sign, the name changes to 'The Whole You're In', which causes him to laugh ruefully, and sets the tone of the film.

### *Character*<sup>47</sup>

Ben's character fluctuates so wildly that one is tempted to say he does not live his life but rather, he clings on to the rollercoaster as it careers up and down the track, fuelled by seemingly endless quantities of alcohol. There is little development in Ben's character throughout the film as his moods swing in time to the sound of spirits out of their optics. He is capable of the same sort of behaviour throughout and while physically weaker towards the end of the film owing to his desire for fast-track alcohol poisoning, he can still please or displease Sera, smile or frown, talk coherently or incoherently, depending upon how much he has recently drunk. His death means that there is a significant change from opening scene to closing scene, but that change is not seen in the character traits exhibited during the film. When confronted with something that can be taken to excess, be it drink, gambling or women, Ben's addictive personality takes over and controls his behaviour until his body shuts down. In fact, Ben drinks at the same time as trying to do many other things such as driving, showering, watching a stripper, even swimming, so that it begins to look as though the drinking is a substitute for the other activity, emphasising the appeal which alcohol has for him.

Ben fails at his job through not making the appropriate achievements within his career, which, within a competitive American culture such as Hollywood, has the effect of undermining his masculinity. In conjunction with this, he has also lost his

---

<sup>47</sup> A detailed breakdown of Ben and Sera's traits and states throughout *Leaving Las Vegas* is included in Appendix B.

family. It is reasonable to assume that his alcoholism is to blame, and though the audience may be familiar with notions of the “exploited artist” struggling within Hollywood, Ben does not enjoy lasting success. If we compare Ben with the movie executives he meets and tries to borrow money from early in the film, we see that they are confident, powerful and easy in the company of women. Ben, on the other hand, stammers, fidgets, looks unwell and begs: hardly a prime example of hegemonic masculinity. Ben tried to find success, but failed in his pursuit of the American dream and as a breadwinner. The audience understands his situation and we pity him.

Owing to the fact that we see Sera both during her time with Ben and afterwards – via the “confessional”, talking-to-camera shots – there is a sense in which we get a more rounded picture of her than of Ben, and as it turns out, she is just as damaged though without the desire to kill herself. There is little character development for Sera either, other than a profound sense of loss when recalling her love for Ben. However, despite this, as we shall see later, her role is an unconventional one given Ben’s eventual demise. For many of her scenes she may have seemed like the ‘tart with a heart’ but in the end, she cannot stop Ben from successfully drinking himself to death, despite the pain that this causes her.

As I have already observed, at several intervals during the course of the film, Sera appears to be talking about the events with Ben to an unseen person, possibly a doctor or analyst. Such scenes are common within alcohol-addiction films, as a loved one talks about the pain that their partner’s drinking is causing, serving as they do to provide seemingly privileged insight into the dynamics of alcohol addiction. She looks different in these scenes – without make-up and in simple, functional clothes – compared with her appearance in the other sections of the film, suggesting that time has passed since Ben died and that maybe even Sera has moved to a new life, away from Las Vegas.

## *Narrative and Discourse*

The film alternates between scenes from 'now' (Sera giving what looks like a series of responses to questions from a doctor or an analyst) with scenes shown in flashback dealing with Ben and their relationship. The six scenes of Sera talking to her unseen interviewer are separated out across the course of the film so that her answers either introduce or comment on action seen from the story involving her and Ben in Las Vegas. This does not mean that the narrative is restricted to Sera's point of view or even to scenes that include her, as we see Ben in LA long before he had moved to Las Vegas or met Sera. As Sera talks about Ben's death, we can infer the interview took place sometime after his death. The rest (and indeed, the bulk) of the film can be seen as the final few weeks of Ben's life, beginning with an outline of the failings in his life and his reasons for being in Las Vegas, and ending with his self-inflicted death. The film uses continuity-editing to tell the story intelligibly, whether in the present or in a flashback. The present-day shots are distinctive by virtue of their mise-en-scene and occasional use of voiceover. Sera either sits or lies during these scenes and is viewed in close-up or extreme-close-up. We can see part of a settee and a vase of flowers and little else, emphasising the neutral environment of an office.

During the scenes where Sera talks to an off-camera interviewer, particularly at 35mins 55secs, the editing is quite rapid but not to accentuate movement or speed but rather to give the impression that Sera has been speaking about an issue and then gone off at a tangent before returning to the original issue. What we see is a few words, then in a different shot, a few more words, then in a different shot, a few more words and so on. What at first seems like one extended shot of Sera talking is actually several short sections spliced together.

The scenes from Los Angeles and Las Vegas are seen without any rapid cutting, although the cutting does vary in speed according to what is seen on screen. During the strip club scene early in the film, as Ben drinks and drinks and drinks, the cutting speeds up to intensify our sense of his condition. He swallows a considerable amount of spirits without pause and looks in poor health afterwards. The editing during this segment accentuates his excessive condition by



intercutting the stripper removing layers of clothing with Ben imbibing a colossal quantity of drink. The car journey from LA to Las Vegas is seen super-fast, suggesting Ben cannot wait to reach his (final) destination. Many of the scenes filmed on location have little cutting as the action is allowed to play out in a small number of shots, particularly in the street scenes where Ben and Sera intermingle with passers-by on the busy boulevards. Mostly, the camerawork is not foregrounded but instead allows the story to be told and characters to develop, although during the scene of Sera's attack, we see some of the action through the lens of the home-movie camera one of the attackers was using at the time, thereby heightening the uncomfortable nature of the scene even further. By introducing a grimy, low-budget element to the scene, the audience is harshly reminded that they are watching a cruel assault on Sera and thus encouraged to feel even more sympathy for her situation.

There is a typical mixture of close-ups and medium shots for the interior scenes, conventionally posed in bars, motels, restaurants and the like. There is a considerable number of long shots, particularly outside and on location, where a character such as Yuri is seen trying to cross a busy road, or Ben and Sera walk down the street together during a night out, or Sera sits despondently by the side of the road as traffic speeds past. These scenes appear to take place while the rest of Las Vegas goes about its business, unaffected by the presence of the characters. Vehicles intervene in the shot and temporarily block our view of the characters, other pedestrians similarly impede our line of sight, but only momentarily and if there is any talking, the soundtrack continues whether we can see the actors or not. Framing within scenes is done in a standard way, concentrating the spectator's viewpoint on significant events on screen. The aspect ratio for the film is 1.85:1 and in some of the street scenes already mentioned, although there is a lot of activity in each scene, only the main characters are in focus while the rest is left blurred and peripheral.

Lighting is mostly naturalistic, that is to say, the sort of lighting one might expect in a hotel room or a casino and so on, although the video camera scenes (mentioned above) are shot in a quasi-nightlight mode which sets them apart from the rest of the film and gives the attackers a wild, feral appearance – well-

suited to their behaviour. Harsh neon lighting, commonly associated with Las Vegas, is prevalent in a number of scenes, especially where the filming has actually been done on location. This bolsters the film's verisimilitude by turning streets and bars into a film set and acting out scenes in amongst non-actors.

The soundtrack consists of an original score (by the director) as well as previously recorded music, in addition to dialogue and verisimilitudinous sound effects. Any music that is heard appears to be non-diegetic although it is possible that in some of the bar or hotel scenes the music may have been playing diegetically. Music is present in the majority of scenes throughout the film, though there is a difference in what is heard depending on the type of scene: for instance loud, upbeat music during the fun scenes such as Ben shopping for drink and softer, jazz-like sounds during the emotional scenes, such as Ben and Sera's final moments together. Sera's words in the interview segments are crucially important as there are no other sounds contributing to the story, except in the final confessional scene, where music plays as well, increasing the emotion as she talks longingly about Ben.

### *Representation of Suicide in Leaving Las Vegas*

Let us now examine Ben's suicide in detail. As death by alcohol is a much slower process than shooting oneself or jumping off a bridge, there is no single scene in *Leaving Las Vegas* to analyse as the 'suicide scene'. Instead, Ben's health gradually declines over the course of the film until, bed-ridden and weak, he finally runs out of energy and expires. To emphasise his dependence on drink, Ben does not eat anything – except for an ice cube – during the entire film. Most of the time he does not have access to any food, but there are occasions when he does, for instance when he and Sera go out for a meal, or when Sera cooks a rice dish, but even then he drinks but does not eat. This further underlines his desire for death. The final shots showing Ben dead in bed and then Ben looking healthy (or at least, as he did when he first met Sera in Las Vegas) serve to underline the drastic degeneration he experiences. Released thirty-two years later than *Le Feu Follet*, and with a different target market, *Leaving Las Vegas* is

able to focus directly on Ben's intended suicide for the majority of the film, but it also softens the experience a little by providing the audience with a more palatable *memento mori* than Ben's recently-deceased body.

The film begins with Ben living an atypical life – shopping for drink only, begging for money from an old acquaintance, drinking vodka while driving and being oblivious to the passing motorcycle police officer, paying for sex with a prostitute, unable to hold a pen still enough to sign a cheque and feigning work despite making an obvious, and comical, error with the unplugged telephone (holding it upside down and pretending to have a conversation).<sup>48</sup> The opening twenty minutes, shot in montage-style to show numerous aspects of Ben's life quickly, reveal Ben to have a problem and sets him up as a character who will struggle through life in a drunken blur. Then, into his life, comes Sera, whom he twice asks later in the film whether she is 'an angel'. She fulfils a number of aspects of a traditional female film role, by caring for and loving Ben. She is a positive influence, often rescuing him, either from himself or others, but she does also break her word by asking him to see a doctor about his deteriorating health. This creates a barrier between them, which has repercussions for both of them in terms of their temporary separation. Sera then only sees Ben twice more before his death.

In terms of playing upon expectations on the part of the viewer, *Leaving Las Vegas* confounds convention by contriving to have Sera and Ben fall in love, but then having Sera fail to rescue Ben from his self-imposed path of destruction. Even the 'love of a good woman' could not prevent his descent through illness and to death. The fact that Sera cannot save Ben makes *Leaving Las Vegas* all the more poignant and prompts the viewer to question Sera for her failure as well as ponder Ben and his death-wish.

---

<sup>48</sup> As with *Le Fe Follet*, real life events found their way into the fictional film, for instance, the writer of the novel (John O'Brien), from which the film was adapted was an alcoholic. The scene with Ben in the bank closely mirrored a situation where, on the day that contracts were to be signed, O'Brien had the shakes and was unable to sign the contract without steadying his writing hand with his other hand (White, 1996:18). O'Brien also managed to get himself beaten up in a bar (an experience Ben also endures) and just two weeks after filming began, O'Brien committed suicide.

The question of why Ben acts as he does receives a partial answer in those first twenty minutes, although it is not articulated for the audience to hear until Sera asks him why he has moved to Las Vegas (at 31mins 30secs). It is impossible to assess whether his guess of his prolonged suicide attempt taking 'four weeks' was accurate as it is difficult to keep track of how much time (for Ben and Sera) passes during the film. His response, 'I came here to drink myself to death' contextualises his earlier drastic behaviour of burning his possessions and leaving his home in LA. From his precise answers to Sera's enquiries, the audience is primed to believe that Ben has given the idea of committing suicide-by-alcohol considerable thought and that he is unwilling to abandon the scheme he has so meticulously planned for anything, not even Sera. Ben's death, and indeed, his declining condition, appears to upset Sera badly. She behaves as kindly as she can while essentially acting as his carer and though he responds in an affectionate way, his drinking makes him vulnerable to others while his faculties are dulled. Sera is tearful in the final interview scene as she reminisces about her short life with Ben, leaving us hoping that she managed to get her life back on track after he had gone.

Ben's actions seem eminently plausible within the situational logic of the film. As far as we can tell, his life has been adversely affected by drink, so what better place to move to, if one's aim is to take alcohol to lethal levels of excess, than Las Vegas – a place of fantasy and wish-fulfilment; the "perfect" location for his self-destructiveness? From the very first glimpse of Ben, we are primed to expect excess from him. His dance – wearing an inane grin – through the alcohol aisle of a supermarket, accompanied (diegetically) by his own tuneless whistling and (non-diegetically) by a slow, emotional song, sung by Sting, tells us that this is a character to be pitied, lost as he is in his own drink-fuelled world. Sounds from the supermarket and the music score intertwine to present a confused world, much the same as how it must seem to Ben when under the influence of so much drink. A moment of comedy – created by a close-up – comes when Ben briefly pauses at the water section and reaches past all the detoxifying liquids to grab one final bottle of alcohol – just out of shot – to go with the enormous trolley-full already in his possession. Witnessing the "lush" obtain his/her next drink features often in the alcohol-addiction film, be it from a conventional bar, a mini-

bar or a supermarket and further ties this film in with its predecessors. In another encounter with Ben, soon after our first, we hear him – albeit it through a drunken slur – confess to not knowing whether he started drinking because his wife left, or whether it was his drinking that drove her away. Once he has lost his job with the film studio, it takes him very little time to destroy his Hollywood life and head inland to Las Vegas. Although we have not witnessed the loss of his family, inside twenty minutes we have seen him abandoned by his friends and lose his job. He manages to collect himself for the trip to Las Vegas and a little later, he confesses his aim to Sera with a cheery nonchalance, which nonetheless conveys his intention to die. He even has an idea of timescales and potential cost involved, thus underlining how much thought he has given it. Meeting Sera, however, was not part of the plan.

Through conversations he has at the start of the film, we are led to believe he has been deteriorating for a while beforehand and so the trajectory from beginning (sacked) to end (death) can, once the end has been reached, be said to play out with little deviation. However, from the audience's perspective during the film the complicating factor is Sera. The possibility arises that her relationship with Ben, rocky as its foundations are, might save him from self-destruction and oblivion. Friendly overtures coming to the aid of a degenerate or desperate, suicidal character is a familiar film trope. Consider *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) where James Stewart's character totters on the bridge considering his last thoughts, only to be steered away from such an abrupt end to his life by being shown the lacuna he would leave in many families' lives were he to jump. More recently, Tom Hanks' character in *Cast Away* (2000) almost decides to hang himself, but ultimately the thought of his wife waiting for him proves to be a strong deterrent. However, *Leaving Las Vegas* is unlike these rather more optimistic films. Here, it is as though there is an internal imperative which drives the character on, unaffected by external factors or human emotion: as we have already seen, this is integral to notions of melancholia. A prominent feature of the alcohol-addiction film is the pursuit of drink *at all costs* and *Leaving Las Vegas* extends this determination to include suicide as well. In another type of film, Ben could move to Las Vegas to drink himself to death but instead he meets Sera. They fall in love and soon she stops being a call girl and he quits his drinking and they live a

long and contented life together in a different city. However, this is not the *Leaving Las Vegas* way. Even after moving in with Sera, Ben reiterates his desire to die on a number of occasions and she can do nothing to prevent it. Though her continued dalliance in prostitution begins to rankle with Ben, with him failing to make any concessions regarding his own vice, there is little incentive for Sera to stop. Clearly concerned by his shakes and frailty, Sera cooks them a meal and asks him to see a doctor about his condition. Not only does Ben refuse, he also suggests he should perhaps move out, with the air of someone affronted that a loved one would make such an 'unacceptable' request of him. As Sera gets more and more upset, with the camera focusing mainly on her and her obvious pain, Ben sits sulkily avoiding the food cooked for him in favour of a solitary ice cube. Thus in the traditional sense there is no 'will he/won't he' moment regarding Ben's alcoholic demise, but it is reasonable to assume the audience brings such generic expectations with them to the film and this has the effect of enhancing and further dramatizing the events on screen. It is the classic 'redemption' narrative that is referenced and subverted in this film, particularly as there are a number of generic cues, such as the degenerate hero Ben falling in love with a beautiful woman; her looking after him and buying him gifts; them living together; and holidaying together. In another film, these incidences might be enough to save a character like Ben from death, but not here: Ben remains unwavering in his determination to die.

### *Le Feu Follet* and *Leaving Las Vegas*: Similarities and Differences

*Le Feu Follet* and *Leaving Las Vegas* are very similar in their construction of suicide. The most salient comparison is Alain and Ben's alcoholism. Drink dominates their lives, or, more precisely, problems arising from drink. For Ben, it is the next drink that is most desired, while for Alain – recovering from his addiction – it is the temptation to relapse which grips him. Once he does relent, he too wobbles from one drink to the next. In keeping with the conventions established in the alcohol-addiction film, one drink becomes several drinks becomes drunkenness for characters like Alain and Ben.

Coupled with this alcoholism is a diffuse air of malaise – including intense introspection for Alain – that surrounds and ultimately consumes both characters as they pursue an early death. Both have significant others trying to call them back from the abyss but neither heeds the call, which helps to emphasise another similarity between the films which is the single-minded determination exhibited by Ben and Alain to achieve their aims. They both have plenty of opportunities to reconsider their decisions but decide instead to ignore such options. In the end, their deaths are both low-key, private affairs, without any fuss or histrionics. Though their premature deaths are anticipated within the context of the films, and in great part relate to the *ennui* felt by the characters, there remains an element of uncertainty about the specific reasons for their suicides. Ben's situation is perhaps slightly easier to understand as he had lost his wife and child, job and health and so any despondency or sadness seen in him can be easily attributed to a number of factors. However, there is no unequivocal reference in the film to these being the cause of his alcoholism and consequent suicide, and his determination in the face of the positive alternatives offered by Sera suggests a deep-seated suicidal impulse deriving from an ill-understood proclivity for melancholia. Alain, on the other hand, seems to be capable of living a normal life, except that he chooses not to. Instead, he displays a diffuse existential angst, a well-established theme in European cinema, and indeed, European thought of the period. Specific reasons for his suicide are less clear, and both deaths contain some ambiguity given that the characters have numerous chances to turn things around and continue with life. Malle, the director of *Le Feu Follet*, later reflected on Alain's choice with the words, 'you could say the main reason why he decides to kill himself is because he just simply refuses to become an adult... it's not that he cannot do it, it's just that he decides that he's not even interested' (French, 1993:42). Once again we can hear echoes of contemporaneous concerns about disillusion, alienation and anomie among European youth, concerns that found expression in a number of French and Italian films in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

In *Le Feu Follet*, Alain decides on his suicidal course of action after experiencing a number of extreme emotions: heartache, romantic ennui, love/hate and passion. He takes control of his situation and ends something he is unhappy with

by forcefully rejecting life. Ben's situation in *Leaving Las Vegas* is different in that he gives up on life after failing to hold on to success. He, too, makes a decision to end his life, but chooses a much slower method. Frustration at or melancholy with one's lot in life is a common factor in these movies and others exemplified by them. Alain experiences his final few days in conversation with numerous friends, old and new, but generally, he remains quiet about his intentions. Similarly, Ben desires a private death, though he does confide in Sera about his plans very early in their relationship. Ben and Alain deliberately choose their suicides and, despite having plenty of opportunity to 'abort mission', carry on to their deaths. In a number of ways, their deaths are represented as selfish in that both had significant others trying to pull them back, but Alain and Ben continued, without much, if any, concern for others.

Alain and Ben end their lives in a similar setting. Both remove themselves from the traditional-family home in favour of a de-individualised space that, although occupied by them, they do not own, and this further underlines their wish for a quiet death. Alain longs for the isolation of a rather grand-looking private clinic and Ben swaps a Hollywood suburb for the sleazy glamour of Las Vegas and a succession of motels. Though both suicidees die in their beds, the deaths are of a very different kind. Alain's life ends suddenly with a bullet to the heart while Ben expires not long after consummating his love with Sera. They die alone, insofar as Sera is asleep and unaware of Ben's passing until she wakes later in the morning, while Alain is on his own, having ensured a few hours of uninterrupted peace in which to carry out his plan by paying the maid to stay away.

The reciprocal involvement of a significant other is perhaps the key difference between Alain and his American counterpart thirty-two years later. Alain has a string of people who seem to value his friendship and implore him to soften his resolve and stay with them. Alain, however, has other ideas and rejects their offers in favour of ending his life prematurely. He never appears to waver on the subject, despite offers of travel as well as the chance to stay in a number of locations in Paris. He resists every overture, instead favouring his chosen path of suicide and, in fact, he refuses them with force and, occasionally, hostility. In



general, research suggests that the greater number of social contacts one has, the less likely suicide will be (Baudelot and Establet, 2008:133). The character of Alain is thus an anomaly here, further underlining his unwavering determination to die an early death, but as Pescosolido and Georgianna (1989) suggest in their research into church communities, perhaps more relevant is the involvement one has with one's social contacts, rather than simply the total number of those contacts.

Though both films feature a character who has decided to kill himself, they are constructed very differently, exhibiting a contrast of styles in terms of characterisation, discourse and setting, and are both very much films of their time. *Le Feu Follet* is filmed in a bleak, quasi-documentary style and offers an austere treatment of alienation, displacement and existential angst, echoing conventions found in some French cinema of the period. Not only does Alain behave in a manner which supports this, the surroundings he wanders in confirm this reading as well. The grainy street shots and the impersonal locations show the world at large to be Alain's problem. Within such an inhospitable environment, he feels he has no choice except to die by his own hand. Alain, in self-imposed isolation, is suffering at the thought of getting old. His, rather drastic, response is to shoot himself. His decisive, violent reaction is aimed at the distaste he feels for the world. The film generates little pity for Alain from the audience by its detached mood and deliberately ambiguous elements, such as Alain's disquiet with life and enthusiasm for committing suicide. Alain has many potentially positive aspects to his life and yet still prefers to end it prematurely. Unlike some suicides highlighted in the next chapter, where action is often taken quickly, with little planning or thought, this is not the case here. In classic existential terms, Alain has brooded on his situation (a lot of which is seen in the film) and decided his life can never amount to much so death is the better option. Adhering to the nihilistic, disheartening tone, he sticks to his conviction and dies soon after announcing his decision.

*Leaving Las Vegas*, however, offers a rather more romanticised view of the "lovable lush" – the Elwood P. Dowd character – where the audience is sympathetic towards Ben, owing to his tough luck in life. His deterioration is

easily understood and we are encouraged to feel sorry for him. He wishes to die, but at the same time (unlike Alain), he wishes to 'live' – in terms of enjoying his last few weeks alive. Here, coupledness is allowed and we are drawn to both characters as we witness them forming a relationship and, despite the conditions insisted upon by Ben regarding his stated intention of death by alcohol, try to make it work, however temporarily. The richly coloured hotels, casinos, apartments and streets further sustain the warmth the audience feels towards Ben and Sera. When Ben does finally succumb to the punishing routine he has been exacting on his body, the film leaves us not with a brittle cadaver, wasted away through alcohol abuse but with a rather romanticised image of Ben as he once was: successful, charming, warm and attractive. In this film, the world is not the problem, but rather, Ben's individual issues are the problem and therefore the audience can empathise much more with his character. In addition, sympathy for Ben is created because his choice of suicide method is a little indirect. In many ways, it is the behaviour of somebody who has dropped out of the normal life experiences of those around him and reveals what a tragic creature he has become. Appropriate for a man incapable of the simplest of tasks, when living in Las Vegas, to choose drink, in copious quantities and wait for fatal health problems to occur. Given the slow decline he prepares for (compared with several other more immediate suicidal methods), Ben, even more so than Alain, has plenty of opportunity to rethink his strategy and begin rehabilitation. However, he has travelled so far along the path to death that he is unwilling to turn back. When confronted with an addict, the (non-addict) film viewer is liable to ask, why not simply stop? In *Leaving Las Vegas*, this sentiment is magnified owing to the introduction of Sera to the story and by virtue of the fact that Ben does not stop his decline – even after she falls in love with him – and this demonstrates the depths to which he has fallen, and the audiences' sympathies are elicited. Ben's is a tragic case of individual circumstances contriving to spoil a man's life and such a situation is more intelligible to an audience than that of Alain, allowing them to engage more directly with the character and the narrative.

In terms of Canetto and Sakinofsky's (1998) cultural script theory of gendered behaviour, Ben in *Leaving Las Vegas* makes an interesting case study. Unlike Alain, he conforms to a gendered reading of the situation, but with a variation.

Seeking solace in alcohol, as mentioned in Part I above, is a particularly male response to dealing with problems, but as Canetto and Sakinofsky (1998) note, drink is often turned to *instead* of suicide, as an unsuccessful suicide attempt brings with it feminine associations. One might expect to see reliance on alcohol begin as an avoidance of a problem, before becoming part of the problem; whereas in Ben's case, drinking is seen as part of the solution.

For Alain in *Le Feu Follet*, alcohol is already part of the problem and his treatment at the clinic is part of the solution. Here too, the situation is more complicated as, in a similar way to Kirstie in *Days of Wine and Roses*, he does not like what he sees with sober eyes and determines that he will not linger in such an imperfect place. His choice of method, gun, and unpleasantly worded suicide note, conforms to gendered expectations when something drastic happens and the result falls below his threshold of satisfaction.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

Granger (2004:76) calls Alain's progress in *Le Feu Follet* a 'philosophical inquiry', in that the very foundations of his beliefs come under intense self-analysis. In a similar vein, though without Ben providing much vocalised introspection, *Leaving Las Vegas* allows the audience to experience his descent while wondering if he could – or even *should* – reconsider his situation, and act, differently.

Alongside other men, Alain and Ben struggle in their company. There are indications of masculinity in crisis in both films; Alain, impotent and lifeless around women, is further de-masculinised by his receiving treatment for alcoholism, paid for by his estranged wife. Ben similarly struggles to hold on to his family and job and eventually succumbs to his alcoholism, despite Sera's involvement with him. However, as we have seen, there is more to both suicides than these gender issues.

---

<sup>49</sup> I refer here to ideas regarding 'toxic masculinity' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Kupers, 2005).

*I have considered a number of films that feature a strong, single-minded main character given to melancholy and introspection who decides that suicide is preferable to life. The suicides exemplified in this category can usefully be termed Melancholic Suicides. These characters show a firm determination to die, often irrespective of love or kindness showed by those close to them, as in the case of the two exemplary films. Alain's traits and states fluctuate throughout the film from needy, to generous, to introverted, to angry and so on, as he edges closer to his death. For Ben, he too has a mixed set of characteristics on display, from manic to morose, extroverted to embarrassed, in love and immature. Both men suffer personal setbacks and opt out of any further participation in their lives, withdrawing to the hotels and casinos of Las Vegas for Ben or an exclusive detoxification clinic near Paris for Alain. Alain's abrasive manner distances him from the audience and underlines his loneliness. This is not the case with Ben, who has his moments of fun which cause the audience to feel sympathy for him.*

There are a number of ways in which the stylistic innovations of the French *Nouvelle Vague* play a part in *Le Feu Follet*, such as the many street scenes, the introspection and self-searching conversations between characters and the black and white, location cinematography. On this basis, we can suggest that while characters talking about life and death and considering the possibility and significance of suicide fits within the conventions of the period, portraying a protracted suicide-event does not. Alain talks and thinks for a long time but acts lethally in a very short amount of time. Over thirty years later, and drawing upon many of the conventions of the American alcohol-addiction film (such as drinking to excess, pain caused to loved ones by the need for drink and conversations about treatment), *Leaving Las Vegas* spends most of the film showing a man actually drink himself to death. Personal tragedy befalls him and from then on, his choice is made – and unwavering. His descent is followed throughout the course of the film and his death marks the end of his fleeting relationship with Sera. Thus, although both he and Alain are portrayed as profoundly melancholic, the regimes of representation through which they are portrayed are distinctive products of their particular cinematic and cultural contexts.

## CHAPTER 5. OCCASIONED SUICIDE: NO WAY OUT

In this chapter, I look at the category of films where a significant character commits suicide, usually shortly after the reasons for that decision have been revealed. This is a popular trope, for both men and women. I have restricted the parameters to a *significant character* in order to eliminate films that include suicide of a peripheral character that has little or no impact on the story: this provides a richer and more coherent body of films for analysis and discussion. This chapter begins with a discussion of films that include general suicides of this sort and is followed by analyses of two exemplary films, *The Killers* (1946), and *The Killers* (1964), both films deriving from the same short story by Ernest Hemingway. In order to further situate the exemplary films within the cinematic traditions within which they operate, examinations are also made of *film noir* and *neo-noir* respectively. This allows a greater understanding of the cultural background of the films and how this affects and is affected by constructions of gender and suicide in these cases. It will be seen that prominent themes within these cinematic traditions, such as alienation, corruption and betrayal, play a significant part in the circumstances leading to suicide. This chapter will also examine the role that suicide plays in the narrative and it will be seen that in both cases suicides are central to driving the investigative narrative forward. Though different types of characters actually investigate, it is their enquiries that lead the audience from one plot point to the next and both investigations begin with the need to understand why a character accepted his own death in such a calm manner.

### *Occasioned Suicide: Historical and Generic Context*

Throughout the history of the cinema, there have been a multitude of film suicides where the reasons for those deaths are explained in the narrative. Such suicides I shall refer to as having an *external* cause, as distinct from those suicides discussed in Chapter 4 which resulted from an *internal* cause. Within this overall category, there are two sub-categories that relate mainly to whether the

*perpetrator* of an act kills him/herself or whether the *victim* of a situation kills him/herself. To put it another way, does the person guilty of something commit suicide or does the victim of some act hasten their own death? In addition, there is a related but distinctive group which belongs in this overall category, that of suicide carried out in order to allow someone else to live – heroic suicide. After outlining the distinctions between the sub-categories in relation to the exemplary films, I will briefly discuss other examples of each.

Though the fact that neither Swede (in *The Killers*, 1946) nor North (in *The Killers*, 1964) inflicts injury on themselves directly is unusual for a movie suicide, it is not unheard of (for instance *Falling Down* (1989), *Igby Goes Down* (2002) and *Consequences of Love* (2004)). By far the most numerous category of movie suicide discovered during this research relates to a scenario where Person A does something (usually harmful or wrong in some way), which is then discovered and as a direct result of this discovery Person A kills him/herself. A variation on this theme is where something happens (usually unpleasant) to Person B and they commit suicide because of it, often to escape the associated pain. This can be thought of as a sort of self-inflicted mercy-killing. As will be seen, both versions of *The Killers* embody elements of each.

One of the earliest cinematic examples of the sub-category where suicide occurs as a consequence of a character committing an act (usually a criminal one) is *Piccadilly* (1929). In this film, a man starts to feel guilty about his shabby treatment of a woman he was fond of, who ended up being murdered, and so he shoots himself. For this type of suicide, the model provided in 1929 is repeated again and again. *The Man with a Golden Arm* (1956) features a supposedly wheelchair-bound female character and what she lacks in warmth and kindness, she more than makes up for with scheming and dishonesty. When confronted about her real intentions, she runs from her chair and leaps straight off a balcony to her death.

Along with *The Killers*, *The Manchurian Candidate* has two filmed versions using the same source material (1962 and 2004) and also includes a male suicide in each. In the earlier version, once Raymond Shaw is made aware of his

murderous behaviour, he kills those responsible and then kills himself. In the later film, Shaw asks to be shot in order to stop him killing others in the future, though he does not die on this occasion.

In *Spellbound* (1945), *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946), *Peeping Tom* and *Great Gatsby* (1974) a character kills him/herself after murdering others, while in *Talk to Her*, *Tell No-One* (2007), and *Hard Candy* (2006), the suicidee is a character with a dark, unpleasant secret that has recently been revealed. *Little Children* (2006), portrays a paedophile who cuts off his private parts in a desperate attempt to atone for his behaviour, though his self-harming is also prompted by news that his dotting mother, and the only other person in his life, has died. *The Taking of Pelham 123* (1974), *Bourne Supremacy* (2004) and *Downfall* (2005) all feature suicides of characters who have committed crimes but have no intention of facing a trial for what they have done. In contrast, *In Bruges* (2008) shows a man who kills himself after accidentally shooting an innocent bystander and another character who considers suicide for a similar reason. It will be noticed that this sub-category includes characters that are regretful of their behaviour as well as those who are unrepentant, but it is the fact that they initiated the action that accounts for their inclusion here.

Also in this category are films that feature women challenging traditional female roles, such as *Baader-Meinhof Complex* (2008) which includes two women as part of the original Red Army Faction (Ulrike Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin), both of whom commit suicide while incarcerated. *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), features a female sniper who, upon getting shot herself, asks to be put out of her misery by American soldiers. These women operated in traditional male-dominated spheres and when captured, chose suicide rather than live with the consequences.

However, not only those who have been deemed 'guilty' commit suicide in films: it is also used as an escape for victims. *White Fawn's Devotion* (1910) provides an example of an attempted suicide, a trope recurring often across the cinema, that of spurned partners trying to remind their loved ones why they should not be cast aside. Here, the female fears she may lose her husband and so cuts herself with

a knife to prevent him from leaving. *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and *Fatal Attraction* both employ a similar tactic, with a woman harming herself to try to keep her loved one close. *Le Temps du Loup* (2003) features a female character who stabs herself after being assaulted, a frequent occurrence in the cinema.<sup>50</sup>

*Anna Karenina* (1935), *Splendor in the Grass* (1961), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *Open Water* (2003), *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* (2003), and *Goodnight and Good Luck* (2006) all include characters who take their own lives because they have lost someone or something hugely important to them and without them see no reason to keep on living. *The Pledge* (2001) features a man who, having been accused of a killing a child, steals a gun and shoots himself. He suffers from learning difficulties and is not able to resist the pressure exerted by the investigating police officer. In *Doomsday* (2008), the British Prime Minister contracts a deadly virus and within seconds of discovering his illness, and subsequent quarantine, shoots himself in the head in order to deal with the problem.

This category, then, constitutes the majority of films examined in this research, and, in most cases, reasons for premature death are explored in some detail. With a film such as *Pepe le Moko* (1936), the issue of criminality may confuse the situation, as one might therefore suppose that the guilt associated with being the perpetrator of a crime is reason enough for suicide, but there appears to be a clear distinction between the two sub-types here. By way of illustration, consider *The Shawshank Redemption*, a film which features both types of suicide. On the one hand is the prison warden's suicide, a hastily performed gunshot to the head (just prior to his imminent arrest for crimes including embezzlement of public funds and mismanagement of his jail) and on the other, Brooks Hatlen's hanging once he has realised that his existence outside of prison will consist only of demeaning employment and social isolation. Hatlen has no pressing reason to die immediately (unlike the warden, so averse is he to the idea of being incarcerated in a jail like his own) other than the recently acquired knowledge that without friends in such a situation, struggling on with life does not seem worth the

---

<sup>50</sup> For example, *Mouchette* (1967), *Once Were Warriors* (1994) and *Lilja 4-ever* (2002).



effort. One is the victim of circumstance while the other is solely responsible for his predicament.

To further examine the features common across the diverse films under discussion in this section, we can begin by looking at their use of genre, setting and narrative. Films within this category fall broadly into two areas: crime/thriller films (for instance *Spellbound*, *Peeping Tom* and *In Bruges*) or domestic drama (*Splendor in the Grass*, *Open Water* and *Trois Couleurs: Bleu* (1993)). Given these generic contexts, levels of verisimilitude are generally high in an attempt to make audiences believe the situations and associated emotional tones are credible. The stories and characterisation act in tandem with this general commitment to verisimilitude in order to provide engagement, tension and pleasure for viewers. The suicide of a character within a film, especially one where the reasons for the self-inflicted death are explored, can often be a moment of high drama, as in *Consequences of Love* or *Hard Candy*.

Women trying to challenge traditional male environments are significant in this sub-category, of which *Thelma and Louise* (1991) is a striking instance in which the two title characters who struggle to stay ahead of the police who are monitoring their – increasingly criminal – progress across America. What begins as a weekend trip for two friends escalates into a litany of serious offences perpetrated by the women as they attempt to hold on to their hard-won freedom. When finally cornered, their choice to avoid arrest once and for all by plummeting to the bottom of the Grand Canyon emphasises their strength and determination not to return to lives of domestic drudgery and disappointment.

This general category also includes a variety of heroic suicides and the most numerous of these in the modern era fall within the sci-fi genre, often involving attempts to save the world. *Sunshine* (2007), *The Core* (2003), *Deep Impact* (1998) and *Armageddon* (1998) all involve missions with just such an objective though it is important to stress that narratively these films do not signal their ultimate heroic suicide from the beginning. The crews involved are aware of significant risks associated with their assignment but they all harbour thoughts of returning home, as indeed some succeed in doing in each of the films mentioned,

except for *Sunshine*. There is some variance in their heroic deeds, from a scientist in *The Core* remaining with a damaged part of the ship to manually jettison it from the main section of their craft, to the depleted crew in *Sunshine* steering their bomb-packed ship into the sun in order to coax the sun back to life with an explosion. The crew in *Sunshine* began the mission believing they were delivering a nuclear arsenal which they would despatch and leave to do its job as they returned to Earth, but events conspire against them on the journey. A similar situation occurs in both *Star Trek: Wrath of Khan* (1982) and *Event Horizon* (1997), that of unseen events causing damage which require fixing by heroic human intervention. In both of these cases, crewmembers resolve the problem, but lose their lives in the process. In *Armageddon*, Bruce Willis' character chooses to manually detonate an explosive device on a meteor, in order to split it apart and spare Earth a potentially cataclysmic impact, after the technology they took with them to do the job cannot be used. Along with saving millions of lives, by swapping places with his daughter's boyfriend and sending him back to the space ship, he also acts to ensure his daughter's happiness and offer his acceptance to a relationship he had previously tried to disrupt. What all this demonstrates is that film heroism, particularly in a sci-fi setting, requires personal intervention and getting one's hands dirty to carry out the job, a theme also found in *I am Legend* (2007). Will Smith's character, Robert Neville, experiments on captured former humans rendered bestial by an airborne virus that has wiped out the population of New York (with the exception of Neville and a tiny number of other people as well). He is immune and tries to synthesise a cure from his own blood. At the end of the film, he finally succeeds and in an attempt to allow his newfound companion and her daughter a chance to escape with the antidote, and their lives, Neville kills himself and a number of marauding creatures at the same time.

Another variation on the heroic suicide film can be seen in a number of historically based stories, where it is not Earth itself that is at stake, but individual lives of people living on Earth. *Spartacus* (1960), *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and *The Last of the Mohicans* all include suicide where the specific aim of the suicidee is to save the life of another person. His fellow convicts will not allow Spartacus to give himself up, even though it means crucifixion for them. In a

complete reversal of the situation that Heston's eponymous character in *El Cid* finds himself in, a man with a knife in his heart (but a slight chance of survival) in *House of Flying Daggers* chooses to remove it in order to protect his loved one. El Cid, of course, chooses to ride into battle with the arrow still in his heart, simultaneously galvanising his troops to fight and causing his heart to stop working. The heroic suicide in *The Last of the Mohicans* concerns a character who, up to this point, has struggled to gain many friends, and in the process of translating between warring parties gives false information about himself so that he is taken captive and his travelling companions (including the woman he cares for and the actual last of the Mohicans) survive. After the initial shock at his behaviour, there is then much warmth afforded to him, both by those now indebted to his bravery, as well as by the fire in which he burns.

Committing suicide to free somebody else is a theme that appears in *A Star is Born* (1954) and *Grace of my Heart* (1996). The male protagonists in each film come to realise they are sapping the energy, and talent, of their more successful female companions and so they step aside to allow life to flourish for their loved ones. Related to this, but without any husband/wife link are a number of films where a character gives up life for what can be called paternalistic reasons, often an older male sacrificing himself on behalf of a younger person. In *Three Godfathers* (1936), rather than hold up the transportation of a child to civilisation, an injured man chooses death in the desert instead. More recently, Clint Eastwood's character in *Gran Torino* (2009), Walt Kowalski, encourages his shooting by local gang members so that two youngsters in his neighbourhood will be free from them, once they are in jail. Earlier in the film we see Walt cough up blood and we infer that he is suffering from a life-threatening illness. Arguably, for a character played by Eastwood, it is this illness which allows him to accept death rather than adopt the usual 'tough-guy' approach the audience might expect.<sup>51</sup> In *Sin City* (2005), after coming to the conclusion that his very existence is a threat to a woman of whom he is protective, Willis' character kills himself so that she will be free of this danger.

---

<sup>51</sup> In a similar way to John Wayne's character in *The Shootist*.

A final group of films identified within this category relate to suicide for money, specifically, a financial reward on the event of a death. This mostly refers to an insurance pay-out, seen in *The Petrified Forest* (1936), *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Airport* (1970), *Falling Down* (1993), and *Minority Report* (2002). In each case, a character reasons that they are worth more to somebody else – their beneficiary – if they are dead rather than alive. With the exception of *It's a Wonderful Life*, in each case they achieve their aim, either by explaining their predicament truthfully to their would-be killer or by pretending to shoot back and thus provoke a lethal response (in *Falling Down*, D-Fens draws a water pistol but is shot before the police officer can see it is not a dangerous weapon). More recently, *The Consequences of Love* has shown that this strand is far from extinct by having an associate of the mafia steal a huge amount of their money and give it to an elderly couple in his hotel. Rebuffing all the mafia's powers of persuasion, he does not confess to his crime and the couple are left with the money and the freedom to leave the hotel for a better life.

Have the conventions of this category of films changed over time? For the most part, no, but *In Bruges* adds a twist to the suicide based on friendship. Brendan Gleeson's character, Ken Blakely, throws himself from the top of a Bruges church in order to alert his friend – waiting at the bottom of the church – that a man is on his way with a gun in his hand and murder on his mind. Such gallantry allows his friend to escape, which at least fulfils the aim of the jump. One commonality amongst these films – though *Blade* (1998), *Turtle Beach* (1992) and *The Descent: Part 2* (2009) do not conform to this – is that it is usually men who give up their lives on behalf of a younger man or woman. Films that include a heroic suicide have a similar mix of standard situations and variation, and one such that has arisen recently has been in the area of sci-fi/horror films. *Blade* and *Let the Right One In* (2009) both include an unusual form of heroic suicide, that of a character willingly allowing a vampire to drink their blood. In both films, the vampire in question is in desperate need of sustenance and these offers are quickly – and thirstily – accepted.

Let us turn now to the distinctive cinematic contexts that inform the two versions of *The Killers* which will be examined in detail in the remainder of this chapter.

The earlier version of *The Killers* (1946) is widely regarded as a prime example of *film noir*. It was not one of the five films cited by Nino Frank in his original coining of the phrase but its themes, characters and styling all point to *film noir* being the most appropriate cinematic background.<sup>52</sup> Neale (2000) points out that unlike genres such as the Western or Gangster film, *film noir* was never used contemporaneously by audiences, critics or the film industry and was applied retrospectively on the basis of critical examination.<sup>53</sup> However, *noir* does exhibit generally agreed narrative and stylistic conventions including plots that are derived from hard-boiled American fiction, the presence of the distinctive figure of the *femme fatale*, disjointed narratives incorporating flashbacks and, often, voice-over narration, with the visual style of German Expressionism influencing framing and lighting (Sobchack, 1998). Place and Peterson (1996) suggest that within *film noir*, there is a '*mise-en-scene* designed to unsettle, jar and disorientate the viewer in correlation with the disorientation felt by the *noir* heroes' (1996:68) and Place (1998) refers to *noir* storylines as being 'predetermined by the past' (1998:51), all of which sums up a number of central features of the first *The Killers*. For Schwartz (2005), social influences on *noir* included post-war disillusionment of men returning from WWII to face employment problems, or their having been replaced by women in the work-place. As we saw in relation to the *Nouvelle Vague* above, technical advances were key to *film noir*, as Jarvie suggests, 'throughout the thirties, black-and-white film stock was improving, as was deep focus, so that by the time *noir* began to gel ... the only limits were the imagination of the director and the skill of the cinematographer' (2006:170-171). Schrader (2003) holds that television, 'with its demand for full lighting and close ups gradually undercut the German influence and colour cinematography was ... the final blow to the *noir* look' (2003:240). The 1964 version of *The Killers* was made for television and was released in colour but incorporates a number of other elements seen in the first version and for this reason can be thought of as

---

<sup>52</sup> The five films were: *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), *Laura* (1945), *Double Indemnity* (1945), and *The Woman in the Window* (1946).

<sup>53</sup> To underline the uncertainty regarding genre identification, in terms of a contemporary reading, Jancovich (2009) believes that at the time, *Double Indemnity* (1944) was 'clearly understood as part of the 1940s horror cycle' (2009:163), described at the time as 'a spine-chilling film...[that was]...plainly designed to freeze the marrow in the audience's bones' (2009:164).

inspired by *noir* but made in a different era and with different priorities, and so, perhaps, can be usefully understood as a neo-*noir* film.

Erickson (1996) holds that 'neo-*noir* is ... a contemporary rendering of the *film noir* sensibility' (1996:321) and that although *film noir* may have ended in the 1950s, its influence continued into the 1960s and 1970s via television programmes such as *Dragnet* and *The Fugitive*. In the 1970s, owing to 'motion picture retrospectives, cable television, premium movie channels and home video' (1996:311), demand for additional films revitalised interest in *film noir* amongst producers and critics. In addition to particular iconography, plotlines, characters and themes of corruption or double-crossing, Erikson (1996) believes that a neo-*noir* film must also be 'self-conscious and well aware of its heritage' (1996:323) marking a distinct difference to *noir* in the 1940s, which 'was an innocent, unconscious cinematic reaction to the popular culture of its time' (ibid.). Original *noir* filmmakers believed they were making gangster films, or horrors, or melodramas and only subsequently has their output been considered part of an overarching group. More recent filmmakers, aspiring to invoke themes and ideas present in *noir*, approach their projects with a cultural knowledge not available to their cinematic predecessors and with this knowledge comes self-conscious intent. Silver (1996) extends this by suggesting that as many original *noir* productions were low budget and shot quickly on existing locations, so too are many neo-*noir* films. Silver (1996) continues, pointing out that the violence, sex and action that are shown in neo-*noir* films translate well into foreign (i.e. non-English speaking) markets, which, again, replicates prominent themes from original *film noir*. Schwartz (2005) contends that neo-*noir* began with *Psycho* (1960) and 'continues into the present, showing the dark side of American life and dreams' (2005:xi). According to Schwartz (2005), public pessimism and scepticism concerning political leaders have provided fertile ground for neo-*noir* films to flourish.

Tasker (1998) holds that in neo-*noir* films there is often still a seductive *femme fatale* who exerts influence over others, notably men, but that in addition, there has been a greater representation of sex. In relation to the later version of *The Killers*, I would add that along with sex, levels of explicit violence have also

increased, as they did in Hollywood cinema more generally during this period. This can certainly be seen in the later *The Killers*, from the assault on the blind in the opening scene to Sheila being hit and dangled from a hotel window later on. In the move from *noir* to *neo-noir*, Tasker (1998) contends that the *femme fatale* has changed from being a gangster's moll/ambitious wife to a businesswoman. As such she is able to wield power over others through legitimate means (workplace hierarchies) or illegitimate means (seductiveness and sex appeal), opening up new possibilities for causing male characters to experience pain and confusion. Accordingly, quite often in *The Killers*, Sheila looks – and acts – like a successful businesswoman, while Kitty in the earlier version is represented much more as the typical gangster's moll.

## *Exemplary films*

### *The Killers (1946)*

*The Killers* is about an insurance investigator, Jim Reardon, trying to find out why a man was killed in a quiet town by two professional hitmen. During the course of his inquiries, the investigator discovers that the victim had been part of a gang that successfully robbed a hat factory of \$250,000 and that some of the gang members had been double-crossed and denied their share of the money. The film takes the form of an inquiry-narrative and the momentum is supplied by Reardon, who interviews a number of characters associated with the deceased and uncovers what really happened to the heist money and why the murder took place. The structure is mainly linear with eleven flashbacks included along the way.

The settings of *The Killers* can be grouped together in the following ways:

- Public: (Brentwood, diner, boxing match arena and surrounding streets, party, café, cemetery, snooker hall, outside the Adelphi Theatre, hospital, train, Green Cat bar)

- Anonymous, quasi-domestic: (guesthouse, hotel, jail cell, farmhouse)
- Domestic: (home of Lieutenant Lubinsky and wife, Colfax's apartment and mansion)
- Employment-related: (police station, mortuary, garage, insurance office, Colfax's building merchants, Prentiss Hat factory)

Reardon's pursuit of answers to the mysteries surrounding Swede lead him to a variety of places and settings, most of which fall into the first and fourth categories. A short time is spent in domestic settings, while a number of important scenes occur in the anonymous, quasi-domestic settings of hotel rooms, the guesthouse and the farmhouse meeting place. The public and the anonymous are, of course, classic settings for gangster and thriller movies, contributing to our sense of a threatening, unstable, problematic underworld from which the protection of domestic environments is largely absent.

*The Killers* focuses on a small number of people involved in the criminal underworld of New Jersey and the surrounding area, where robberies, double-crossing and even murder are commonplace. Despite his friendship with Lieutenant Lubinsky, Swede gets involved with stolen goods and ends up in prison. This followed his career as a boxer. Insurance investigator Jim Reardon enters this world, first to pay out a life insurance policy, then to discover why a murder took place and finally to trace the whereabouts of \$250,000. Though he has little problem in talking with members of Swede's former social world, he requires Lieutenant Lubinsky's help when matters become dangerous.

The physical and social settings show that the film conforms to the thriller and standard *film noir* conventions of anonymous, public places often used by characters at night for shady dealings and double-crossing. We will see further below how elements of the story and discourse also contribute to this sensibility. McArthur (1972) describes *The Killers* as 'the raking over of time and memory to reveal obsession and betrayal' (1972:112) and Robert Siodmak, the director, was firmly planted within Hollywood as a filmmaker who regularly invoked themes and



styles from his early career in Germany.<sup>54</sup> Writing about Siodmak and *film noir*, Walker (1992) suggests that, 'his films helped define and shape the preoccupations and development of the cycle' (1992:110) and Hirsch (1999) refers to *The Killers* as 'noir royalty, an untouchable' (1999:37). In slightly less favourable terms, in his survey of directors and under the heading of 'expressive esoterica' (1968:123), Sarris (1968) describes Siodmak's films as involving 'a torturous conjunction of an attractive actress ... with perverse subjects and expert technicians all whipped together with a heavy Teutonic sauce and served to the customer as offbeat art' (1968:138).

### *Character*<sup>55</sup>

To aid our detailed understanding of the main characters, Kitty Collins and Swede have been analysed in terms of their development throughout the film. This has taken the form of identifying and tracing *traits and states* displayed. Though there are other, strong performances in *The Killers*, they have little depth to them and fulfil 'stock' roles alongside the unpredictable Collins and Swede. Burt Lancaster brings his build and distinctive muscularity to the role as Swede and this adds to the audience's comprehension of the character. A convincing boxer, he does not call upon his physical strength when danger approaches, and this binds the audience into the story as we want to find out why. His chiselled good looks, combined with a slightly brooding expression fit in perfectly with this *film noir*, enabling us to accept the fact that he gets the girl (albeit briefly), while offering something deeper when he loses her. Ava Gardner also gives a powerful performance as Collins: knowingly attractive and self-assured, she is convincing as the 'double-crossing dame' that not only breaks the hero's heart but uses him to get herself and her partner rich as well.

---

<sup>54</sup> 'Darkness, cruelty, obsession, betrayal and death are the hallmarks of Siodmak's work' (1971:112).

<sup>55</sup> A detailed breakdown of Kitty Collins' and Swede's traits and states throughout *The Killers* is provided in Appendix C.

'I did something wrong. Once.' In *The Killers*, Swede believes he is going to die for the brief affair he enjoyed with Kitty Collins and the even briefer fight he had with Colfax the night before the robbery. Or, he may have thought that Collins had decided to have him killed to further insulate herself from redress after absconding with all the money from the robbery. Of the sub-categories introduced at the start of this chapter, then, it might seem that Swede fits into the first more than the second (where a perpetrator of an act kills him/herself), but, knowing more than he does about the overall circumstances surrounding his death, we can see how it is more likely that he falls into the second type, where a victim kills him/herself because something untoward has happened to them and they do not want to continue living.<sup>56</sup>

Swede starts from a position of depression but is then buoyed by his relationship with Collins and even when she leaves him for another man, her existence seems to be enough to keep his mood from dropping again. However, this does finally change when Collins escapes with the money after the robbery. There is nothing in the film to suggest Swede knew that she had returned to Colfax and so his life in Brentwood was simply the result of her leaving. We can only wonder what his reaction might have been had he come to understand the exact nature of the double-cross. As it is, he was low before he found Collins and he is low after he loses her, but he had some extremely high points when they were together. Swede rarely initiates acts himself, but instead relies upon others to make recommendations, which he then follows. This susceptibility to suggestion allows Collins to manipulate Swede into acting how she wants him to. In conjunction with the social and physical settings identified above, this confirms Swede as a classic *film noir* fall guy, controlled by a duplicitous *femme fatale*.

Swede, appropriately enough for an ex-pugilist, takes a disproportionate number of knocks to his self-esteem throughout the film, with only flashes of pleasure to offset the pain. It is a measure of his devotion and passion for Collins that Swede

---

<sup>56</sup> As we saw in the first chapter, theorists such as Barry (1994) and Fairbairn (1995) both define suicide by including 'omission' as well as action, and Fairbairn (1995) also includes the possibility of an other person's involvement, '...and whether performed by himself or others' (1995:84).

accepts each new ordeal while remaining focused on the girl he yearns for. Even three years in prison on Collins' behalf, coupled with the fact that she went back to Colfax in Swede's absence, do not dilute his feelings for her, though as Charleston notices during preliminary discussions about the hat factory robbery, Swede's judgement has been clouded by Collins' charm. Once Swede realises that getting involved with the robbery will mean he can spend time with Collins again, he readily accepts, with almost no concern for the scale or risk of the proposed heist. It is this unquestioning attachment to Collins that she and Colfax manipulate in order to deny any of the spoils of the heist to the rest of the gang. Swede is their 'fall guy' and as Lieutenant Lubinsky notes towards the end of the film, 'you might say Kitty Collins signed his death warrant.'

Kitty Collins' traits play out in conventional *femme fatale* fashion. To begin with, Collins enjoys the attention she receives from Swede (while Colfax was away in prison) and forms a relationship with him. She is grateful that Swede went to jail instead of her for a jewellery theft, but not grateful enough to keep in touch while he was there. From the moment Swede steps into the room where the plans for the hat factory robbery were going to be discussed, he is under her spell and ultimately it costs him his life. When Reardon correctly accuses her of leaving Swede and taking the money, her shrug of the shoulders while smoking her cigarette reveal her true feelings towards the man that worshipped her. As she says during that sequence, she has become accustomed to a certain way of living and, for her, it is all about the money. There are also contradictory traits at work here as we can see a number of positive traits (such as feisty, independently-minded, confident and caring) set against a number of negative traits (such as manipulative and self-centred) which further underline Collins' status as a *femme fatale*. Although it appears as though she is in love with one man, she is actually in a relationship with another, while ultimately out for herself. Porfirio (1996) refers to Kitty as the film's 'principal locus of moral ambiguity' (1996:182), underlining her importance, not only to the narrative, but also in terms of her status as a central component of the *noir* cinematic tradition, and one responsible for pushing Swede towards suicide.

## *Narrative and Discourse*

The camerawork and lighting contribute to the *noir* style discernible in the film and time is manipulated by the use of flashbacks. The film alternates scenes from the film's 'present' with scenes shown in flashback, as Reardon attempts to uncover the truth about Swede's murder and the missing money from the robbery. As he interviews people who knew Swede, the retelling of the scenario in question is then shown on screen.

The film uses standard continuity-editing to maintain intelligibility, whether in the present or in a flashback. The flashbacks are highlighted for the audience in one of two ways: mostly, the person introducing the flashback continues talking as the new scene begins, but for the two flashbacks connected to the fevered mutterings of Franklin on his deathbed, there is a slow zoom in on his face but no speech during the first few seconds of the new scene. In every case, the first shot dissolves into the second shot. *The Killers* is not distinguished by rapid or elaborate editing but quite often allows its characters time to deliver their lines in one shot. The most striking example of this is the hat factory robbery, shot as a single sequence lasting 2mins 2secs. Such a sequence-shot does not feel out of place within the film as cutting is orthodox and transparent throughout.

Mostly, the camerawork is not foregrounded but instead simply allows the story to be told and characters to develop. The hat factory robbery sequence is seen in a crane shot, which follows the gang through the factory gates, sees them climb the stairs to the cash office, watches through the windows while the robbery takes place and then watches them escape with the loot. Discussing the extended sequence shot of the hat factory robbery, Porfirio (1996) contends that this 'reinforces the underlying concept of a chaotic universe, prone to unexpected and deadly eruptions of violence' (1996:181-2). This is achieved by the camera giving a bird's-eye view of proceedings and showing, in a floating, detached way, how violence can seem to strike randomly, or at least, in a non-uniform way (some escape unharmed, while others are injured). A number of other scenes make use of panning shots, allowing characters to move about while the camera follows them, for instance in the Green Cat bar when Collins goes to 'powder her

nose'. Group shots of characters talking to one another also feature in the film, as in the diner where the hitmen talk to the owner, cook and customer, without using shot/reverse shot.

Light and dark, as ever in *film noir*, play a significant part in the film, helping to construct mood and atmosphere, such as the funeral scene, which takes place under a thunderously dark sky. In particular, Collins and Swede are lit to accentuate their emotions. The lighting is generally bright for Collins until the final scenes when she is revealed as a double-crosser. The lighting is very dark at the beginning for Swede and it is only after seeing him lying on the bed for a full minute in the shadows before we see his face. A minute later and he is dead. The lighting of particular scenes – hotel rooms, boxing match and jail cell – is typical for a *noir* film, utilising high key lighting and low fill lighting, to create the standard *noir* effect, though shots inside the police station, insurance office and at the hat factory are lit in a naturalistic way. For interior scenes, props and the set provide framing within each shot, emphasising the claustrophobic existence that Swede must have experienced for the last six years of his life.

There is plenty of depth of focus to a number of scenes allowing the audience to follow different strands of the story within the one shot, for instance in the Green Cat bar. As Reardon and Collins sit and talk, we can see Jake the Rake, who followed them in, walk round the bar checking it out, before returning to the door to hasten the entry of the hitmen. We follow his progress directly, over the shoulders of Reardon and Collins, and indirectly, in the huge mirror hanging above their table.

Miklas Rozsa composed the music for *The Killers* and, having already scored the music for *Double Indemnity*, we can see now how important he was in terms of *film noir* music. He also composed the music for *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950). Non-diegetic music occurs regularly throughout the film, most notably at moments of tension or emotion. For instance, when Collins goes to see Swede in his hotel to tell him about the planned double-crossing, the music plays in the background while they talk, only to peak when Swede holds her and they kiss. Similarly in the Green Cat bar, when the two hitmen take their places before

launching an attack on Reardon, the now-familiar theme music plays before erupting as the shooting begins. During the scenes in the formal environments such as insurance office, police station and mortuary there is no music to be heard. The audience has to focus on speech alone here. This underlines the fact that the moments of high tension or emotion are played out in other types of settings, such as hotel, bar and home. Given the nature of the film and its investigatory narrative, essential plot points are often spelled out in the dialogue between the characters, helping to make sense of the complex story.

### *Representation of suicide in The Killers (1946)*

Let us now examine in detail the attempted suicide and death of Swede. While we see his death before we see his attempted suicide, chronologically it is the attempt to leap from a hotel window which takes place earlier, and so I will start with that. The attempted suicide unfolds as part of May-Ellen Dougherty's description of the mess and distress she discovered in Swede's room six years before and is shown in flashback. The scene begins at 22mins 39 secs. As the maid enters the hotel room we follow her at close range in a 38 second sequence shot, interrupted only by the sight of Swede taking out his frustrations on the furniture. This allows the viewer to appreciate the damage done to the hotel room and begin to understand Swede's state of mind: the broken hotel room as a metaphor for this broken man. As the maid looks on, he finishes off the destruction of a chair by kicking it to pieces and then uses another chair to smash the window pane before trying to leap to his death. As we watch Swede, in extreme close up and in absolute anguish, teeter on the window ledge above the ocean, the maid begs him to reconsider, 'please don't mister...you'll burn in hell 'til the end of time'. He then consents to being pulled to safety. Music – the film's main theme – plays in the background of the scene, building to a crescendo and then abruptly stopping as Swede utters the words 'she's gone'. The music then continues, building up once more until quietening down as the maid placates Swede with her strongly religious views. Swede then throws himself on the bed to writhe in despair over his loss. He has unkempt hair, an unshaven face with some perspiration on his brow and no shirt over his vest and his appearance

further underlines his disturbed state of mind. Believing him now safe, the maid takes her leave and the film continues by moving back to 'present' time and following Reardon's investigation into the case.

There are both similarities and differences in the composition of the attempted suicide to the scene when Swede is murdered by the hitmen. His death comes at 12mins 40 secs into the film. Once the three men from the diner untie themselves – having been bound by the hitmen – and Henry says, 'you'd better go and tell Swede', Nick Adams dashes through Brentwood to try and save Swede's life. As he runs, the film's main theme accompanies him, building to a climax as he bursts into Swede's room. Then there is an abrupt silence as he quickly explains the imminent danger to a prostrate Swede, lying on the bed, his face hidden in the shadows. As with the scene of his attempted suicide, the camera tracks Adams as he enters the room and walks towards Swede. The room here is much darker and it is almost impossible to discern any personal belongings. There are a few objects dotted about which the viewer presumes are Swede's, rather than guesthouse fixtures and fittings, but it is not obvious. Having lost a quarter of a million dollars and the girl of his dreams seems to have affected any materialistic inclinations Swede may once have had. As Adams talks to Swede, the lighting suggests how Swede will die as his bed is visually overwhelmed by Adams on one side and Adams' shadow on the other, both looming over him. The music soundtrack returns as Adams is thanked for his concern and he leaves. A single violin plays a melody, signalling sadness, and then the music turns into a foreboding sound of horns playing a single note as the would-be killers close in on Swede in his room. The music reaches a crescendo and as the door bursts open and gunfire begins, the music is brought to an abrupt halt.

In terms of feeding expectations on the part of the viewer, by starting with Swede's death the film withholds a number of salient pieces of information from the audience. The questions of why Swede died as he did, as well as discovering who was double-crossed and by whom, receive answers throughout the course of the film. It is not long before we see how breaking up with a woman has affected Swede and soon after that we see who the woman was. At the

party we are invited both to observe the effect of Collins on Swede and also view her ourselves, which strengthens audience comprehension of the situation in the film. Krutnik (1991) writes that a song, such as the one sung by Kitty, is a common element within the “tough” thriller (the style in which Siodmak felt he was working) whereby the *femme fatale*’s singing causes her “victim” to be “hooked”. Other prominent films from the period where such a trope occurs are *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) and *Gilda* (1946).

In terms of the suicide, the viewer spends time gradually accessing Swede’s mind-set, coming to understand why he so readily accepted death rather than struggle on with life. Swede’s death is not treated like suicide by the other characters in *The Killers*. They want to know why he was murdered, rather than why he did not try to escape. However, it is legitimate to consider his death as suicide. He was warned that two dangerous men were on their way to kill him. He had time to escape (Nick Adams evaded the hitmen after giving the news to Swede) but chose not to. Perhaps without May-Ellen Dougherty there to remind him of her religious views, combined with the fact that, in the eyes of the law, his death will be treated as murder, Swede felt that enough was enough and stayed in his room as death approached in the corridors outside: ‘I’m through with all that running around’.

The plausibility of Swede’s actions takes time to become clear. Such insouciance in the face of death is a jarring beginning to the film – and the viewer’s first encounter with Swede – given the warning and his physique. Film audiences might have expected a fight to ensue between the hitmen and Swede and when this does not take place, a burning question presents itself, demanding an answer. As it turns out, the question of why Swede so readily accepts death is not as straightforward as it may at first appear. After being told that gunmen are on their way with the expressed intention of killing him, Swede acts as though he has been expecting them. However, he faces his imminent demise on the basis of a false belief: he believes Colfax has ordered his death as retribution for double-crossing the gang after the hat factory robbery and escaping with \$250,000. In fact, Colfax knows that Swede did not enjoy a single dollar of the stolen payroll money as their mutual love-interest, Kitty Collins, relieved Swede of



the money not long after the initial hold-up. It is the collusion between Kitty Collins and Colfax that Swede is unaware of and he dies knowing only half of the double-cross that was perpetrated against him. As Colfax later confesses to Lubinsky and Reardon, once Swede had been discovered in Brentwood, Colfax was duty-bound to dispose of him lest he start to wonder why not and discover the truth about the robbery. Colfax and Collins' marriage was known by the other gang members and if they ever met Swede, they might be able to figure out that they had all been duped. This is the ultimate irony of the film.

### ***The Killers (1964)***

*The Killers* is about a heist and, some years later, a murder and the connection between the two that is gradually revealed over the course of the film. The narrative drive is supplied by Charlie Strom and Lee, two hitmen who interview a number of characters associated with the deceased and uncover what really happened to the heist money and why they were hired to kill Johnny North in the first place. There are three flashbacks in the film, all of substantial length, where information vital to the plot is revealed. These flashbacks fit within an overall inquiry-narrative of a neo-*noir* film which progresses over a period of approximately three days.

The settings in this film can be categorised in the following manner:

- Functional: train, café, karting track, nightclub, hospital, restaurant and gym.
- Domestic or at least quasi-domestic: hotel rooms, apartments and Browning and Farr's mansion.
- Employment-related: home for the blind, workshops, race tracks and Browning's office.

The action takes place across a range of settings and the various places are used in different ways by the characters. Sheila Farr and North have some tender moments in their apartments, but hotel rooms also result in severe injury

for them both later in the film. Strom and Lee conduct their enquiries across a relatively narrow spectrum of settings but what they fail to experience first-hand is made available to them by the people they question – and for the viewer – by flashbacks.

There is a distinct difference between the social worlds of North and Farr, aptly demonstrated when they first meet. Farr wears an impeccable yellow dress and her hair looks as though it was styled that morning. North wears a less-than-flattering set of overalls, with oil on his face and wind-battered hair. He looks completely at home at the race circuit, while she looks utterly out of place. At various points during their courtship, North himself recognises the disparity between their social contexts, ‘you have money written all over you, so why me?’ While he may not fully believe her response to this question (she is attracted to winners), he is sufficiently intrigued by her not to let it get in the way of a blossoming relationship. He and Sylvester have grown up in workshops, dressed in scruffy boiler suits, worked hard to prepare for races, and therefore it takes a little time for him to get used to having such a beautiful and wealthy woman fall in love with him.

If North and Sylvester belong to one social group, Browning very definitely belongs to another. He dresses smartly. He can afford to pay over the odds for North’s killing. He occupies a spacious office overlooking the city below and his house is comparable in size to the school where North is found at the opening of the film, though it is much more expensively furnished. It is Strom’s view that ‘the only people that don’t worry about a million dollars are the people that have a million dollars’ and the more we see of Browning, the more this label applies to him.

Lee and Strom, though they have money and are able to spend it with ease, do so in cash and for basic necessities only such as food, drink, travel and a hotel room. They may move between North and Browning’s social groups, but they are rooted in North’s. As Strom says on the train, ‘my feet are sore and I’m tired of running. Now, if I had a half a million bucks, I wouldn’t have to run’. It is this yearning for money to provide a comfortable retirement, as well as the burning

desire to know why North accepted his fate, that drives Strom and Lee to track down those that knew North and to question them.

The film was actually made to be premiered on television but this was not how it ended up being released. In an interview with Alan Lovell, Siegel stated that, 'it was completed shortly after President Kennedy's assassination, and the studio thought it was too violent' (1975:57), so it was given a cinematic release instead. Siegel also remarked that in making the film he wanted the viewer 'to feel the intelligence, the coldness and the cynicism of the killers' (1975:56) which explains the approach and manner of their investigation. Writing about the director of this film, Don Siegel, Sarris interestingly includes him in the same category as Siodmak, that of 'expressive esoterica', where directors are defined by their involvement with 'difficult styles or unfashionable genres or both' (1968:123), and whose work may exhibit 'irritating idiosyncrasies' (ibid.) as well. Whatever the validity of that last thumbnail judgment, it is certainly true that in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s Siegel demonstrated a remarkable cinematic intelligence in a series of hard-edged, stylish and sometimes controversial thrillers.

### *Character*<sup>57</sup>

To aid our detailed understanding of the main characters, I have analysed Johnny North and Sheila Farr in terms of their development throughout the film. Cassavetes plays North in a very different way to Lancaster's Swede. His boyish good looks and huge self-confidence combine to create a character assured enough to dote on Farr, but one aware enough of their relative social differences to keep asking questions about her motives. Angie Dickinson also gives a compelling performance as Farr: beautiful, and comfortable with life at the margins of legality. As with Gardner, she is convincing in her role as the 'double-crossing dame'.

---

<sup>57</sup> A detailed breakdown of Sheila Farr's and Johnny North's traits and states throughout *The Killers* is provided in Appendix D.

Johnny North is a very able, confident man who is highly skilled in the two closely related fields of car maintenance and racing. He falls in love with a beautiful woman who then tears his life apart in an act of betrayal. Such an experience must have knocked him back badly given the location of his final employers. To go from a loud, messy, dangerous car racing fraternity with all its 'alpha male' associations to a sedentary school for the blind gives the viewer an insight into the effect that Sheila Farr had on North. He is a man who, in a reversal of their first meeting, ends up being the one taken for a ride and it is this occurrence which leaves him waiting for death to call and he welcomes it when it does. That is not to say he does not enjoy his teaching: it looks very much as though he does and that he is respected and liked by his students. The difference between where he had been and where he ends up is so marked that it allows the audience an insight into the effects of Farr's betrayal, but not a complete answer. North's move from the egoistic world of racing to a rather more generous world of teaching the blind shows a more complex development in his character, marking North out as distinct from Swede who enjoyed no such revival in his final years, merely eking out an existence at a filling station. It also seems as though North was unlucky. Despite his ability, confidence and Sylvester's meticulous preparation, he still suffers a big accident which has life-altering repercussions. Similarly, later in the film when the treachery becomes clear, there is a look of resignation and sadness on North's face as he is shown on his own, in contrast to the reunited pair of Farr and Browning. Just when it looks as though things had worked out, he was let down so badly and left with a 'why me?' expression, shortly before taking a bullet to the stomach.

North experiences both soaring heights of pleasure and deep chasms of sadness and with the exception of his death, each high- and low-point relates directly to Farr. Mostly she is present in the scene and even when she is absent she is still an important factor in North's mood. For instance, the mail van robbery sequence is an all-male affair but it becomes clear later on that North's professional temperament was sustained throughout by the thought of Farr waiting for him later that day, as shown by their passionate embrace when they meet, and North's words, 'from now on kid, I only take orders from you'. There is apparently an intense relationship, evidenced by North's willingness to jeopardise

a race worth \$15,000 by minimising his practising and missing out on his sleep, as well as getting involved with a high-stakes robbery later in the film after Farr had tracked him down. Farr may be trouble, but she provides North with plenty of excitement. Browning and Farr had schemed so that it would appear that North had escaped on his own with all the money from the mail van, leaving the pair of them to marry and enjoy their million dollars quietly by themselves. The other gang members never realise how they had been duped, though it does not cost them their lives, as it does with North. Somehow he manages to escape death at the hands of Browning, but he suffers great pain at the hands of Farr whom he loves and trusts. Their betrayal, but most significantly Farr's, cuts so deep that North effectively died that day and spends the remaining four years of his life waiting for it to happen (in a conventional sense). Charlie and Lee provide this when their silenced weapons cut North down in his schoolroom.

Sheila Farr enters North's life confidently and right from the beginning shows she is serious about the two of them getting close by touching his leg only moments after getting in the car with him. Similarly, she never tires of the double entendres made during the film by North, where they sound as though he is referring to the car, but he is actually talking about Farr (for example, when asked how his improvements for the heist car are going, North replies 'fine, she'll do what I want her to' while looking at Farr).

In fact, until the final flashback where Farr reveals to Strom and Lee (and the viewer) her involvement in the double-crossing of North, there is little to suggest that she will betray him. Admittedly, she is vague about her finances, but even then, hiding the existence of a 'sugar-daddy' figure is still a long way from the treachery inflicted on North in the motel room after the robbery. She shows affection for North in the hospital, even when she has been reminded of her past romantic dalliances with other sportsmen, and she instigates the meeting after they have split up in order to let him have a test run at chasing the dummy car.

Once North joins the gang, Farr and Browning decide to make him the 'fall-guy' and so their behaviour towards North and their actions in front of the other two members of the gang is directed towards this objective. Once North accepts the

job – and perhaps more importantly once he believes Farr's words, 'I want you' – he is doomed, and it is this realisation that leads him to accept the hitmen's bullets without fuss or fury. The first inkling that the viewer gets that Farr might not be completely as she seems is at the kart racing track when she convinces North to slow down, only to slip past him and win the race herself. This surprises North and lets the rest of us know she was going to play by her own rules. This is further developed in her flashback when she is the one to suggest how North might deal with the alleged double-crossing. It seems as though his instincts were to go and speak to the gang and sort it out (violently if necessary, one assumes) but instead, he likes the sound of escaping with Farr and all the money as well. Her capacity for sweet-talking her way in or out of situations is tested in her final scene, when she tries to convince Strom that she was forced to obey Browning's orders and so should avoid a bullet from his gun, but to no avail. Despite the bruising encounter in her hotel room an hour or so before, she had not figured Strom out and he brushes aside her pleas for clemency with the words, 'lady, I don't have time'. It is a violent, abrupt end to a life that, latterly at least, had been lived on the margins of truth and trustworthiness.

### *Narrative and Discourse*

This version of *The Killers* also uses flashbacks which temporarily upset the linearity. In a manner similar to the 1946 version, the film alternates between scenes from 'now' with scenes shown in flashback, with Strom and his partner Lee attempting to discern what happened to the mail van money and why North accepted his death so timidly and readily. As they interrogate those who knew North – Earl Sylvester, Mickey Farmer and Farr – the retelling of what they can remember is then shown on screen for the audience to see.

Continuity editing is used to ensure that the story unfolds intelligibly, whether in the present or in a flashback. The three flashbacks are highlighted for the audience in the same way: the person introducing the flashback continues talking as the new scene begins, while the camera stays fixed on their face. The first shot (present) then dissolves into the second shot (flashback). Mostly, *The*

*Killers* does not rely on rapid editing but quite often allows its characters time to deliver their lines in one shot, as if we were watching people talking in real life, for instance Strom and Lee talking on the train after killing North, or parts of their interrogation of Farr in her hotel room. During North's crash, the speed of cutting increases as the shot flits from tyre to accident to pits to crowd and back to accident, and the rate of cutting at this point is out of the ordinary for the film. Here, Siegel makes use of the (conventional) practice of using cutting, motivated by the demands of a scene for the majority of a film, only to then use montage for action or exciting scenes. Mostly, the camerawork is not foregrounded but instead allows the story to be told and the characters to develop with a conventional mix of tracking shots, panning shots and static shots. As the filmmakers thought they were producing a film for television in the first instance, Siegel needed to consider how best to shoot the film in light of this and during an interview he mentioned that, 'I had to be tight in on most things, that the long shots would have little value' (1975:57), however he did not let these thoughts dominate his work. Long shots were used if Siegel felt they were needed, particularly while following North's car around the race track and picking out North and Farr as they dance closely in the nightclub.

The lighting is mostly naturalistic, that is to say, appropriate to the location of the scene. It is not distinctively used to convey mood or atmosphere, thus distinguishing it from the earlier *noir* version of the story. However, Lovell believes that instead, Siegel uses unusual landscapes and settings such as the school for the blind and the gymnasium, in order to hint at *noir* associations within a brilliantly-coloured film (Lovell, 1975), a use of setting that Siegel was to develop much more in his later films. For the scenes which take place in the 'present', quite often Strom and Lee provide a makeshift framing of their own, as they tower over, interrogate or otherwise intimidate the characters they speak to. Many of the scenes place the action/conversation in the centre of the shot and include little else to attract the viewer's attention, as was the norm for TV movies at that time. It is not a film where several things take place in different parts of the one shot; rather, our attention is focused on the main action and that is where we look, again, distinguishing it from the 1946 version.

The film makes extensive use of music and there is often non-diegetic music playing over a scene. In an action scene, such as Strom and Lee's search for North, the music is loud and fast, while in gentler scenes, the music is correspondingly quieter and less obtrusive. The film also makes effective use of silence by stopping the music abruptly in order to focus all of our attention on what is next said, or done, for instance when Strom enters the Browning household to find Browning and Farr trying to escape. Only after Browning has been shot does the music resume, remaining audible right through to the credits and beyond. Other sound effects are simply used to sustain verisimilitude, such as during the car race and during both test runs before the robbery. Squealing tyres, dust and rubbish being thrown up, the revving engines and so on all help the audience to believe that the cars are travelling quickly and, in North's case on the track, dangerously. Interestingly, the actual chase sequence of the mail van is shown with music playing on the soundtrack. While we do not hear the same noises as in the other chase scenes, the music does still accentuate the pursuit of the van and the money inside. Throughout the film, the dialogue is generally spoken to be heard, though Strom occasionally delivers his lines in a throwaway manner, helping to emphasise his world-weary demeanour and power: if other characters (and by extension, the audience too) need to listen more carefully to him, then so be it. Given the nature of the film and its investigatory narrative, essential plot points are often revealed in the dialogue (for instance during the train conversation between Strom and Lee, or during the flashbacks), though not to the same extent as they were in the 1946 version. In this later version, evidence sometimes arises visually as well, such as during the first time we see Browning and Farr talking together in the pits during North's last race with Sylvester. Though their exact relationship is not spelled out, body language and nuance suggest what is going on much more than the dialogue does. When Sylvester tells North his findings about Farr later in the film, it merely confirms what the audience already suspected. This version of *The Killers* retells events of the first but with an updated twist and in fact, to underline its self-consciousness, a character from the earlier version appears in the later (Mrs Lubinsky from 1946 is the school secretary in 1964), perhaps further suggesting its neo-noir status.



*Representation of suicide in The Killers (1964)*

Our first view of Johnny North is as a popular teacher, instructing a class of would-be mechanics how to tell if a set of points needs replacing or not. He jokes with them and they seem to get along well. Intercut with this, are the hitmen approaching North's classroom with menace. There is the faintest of film music playing in the background, which increases in volume whenever the hitmen are on screen. The telephone rings and North answers it. The frantic caller tells him that gunmen are on their way to kill him. He does not run. He does not want any help from the police. He tells the concerned caller that he knows who they are, with a sigh that suggests he has been expecting them. He retreats behind his desk and, now separated from the students and isolated in the classroom, summons up all the authority he can manage and dismisses class. The music fanfares this early and unexpected end to the lesson and the hitmen struggle through the doorway as a dozen or so students try to leave. They rather politely ask if he is Johnny North and also rather politely, he nods in agreement. Then they shoot him several times before leaving with the same haste and determination with which they swept in a few moments before. Despite the tip-off, North chooses not to run. Death presents itself and he accepts. Without knowing specifically who they are, he knows exactly who sent them. Just four years earlier he ran, injured, from a gun-toting Jack Browning and their mutual love-interest, Sheila Farr. As North lay in a pool of blood, concealed by a web of undergrowth and scrub bush, he heard Browning say 'I'll put some people on him' and from that point knew his life was probably going to end sooner than he might have hoped.

In terms of feeding expectations on the part of the viewer, by starting with North's death, the film not only withholds a number of salient pieces of information, but also sets up a teasing invitation to find out more. The questions of why North died as he did, as well as discovering who double-crossed who, receive answers throughout the course of the film. Farr's involvement is also revealed in a piecemeal fashion, arguably turning her part of the story into the bigger mystery within the film.

North knew the circumstances of his untimely demise, but his killers did not and it is their pursuit of the truth and the associated million dollars that drives the narrative. As Strom declares, 'I gotta find out what makes a man decide not to run. Why all of a sudden he'd rather die.' Much later, he is able to answer his own question by accusing Farr: 'you killed him four years ago.' Strom becomes our guide and asks the questions that we might ask, if we were able to do so, though perhaps in a more abrasive manner. He sees North's death as suicide and his suspicions are confirmed when they talk to Farr. The plausibility of North's actions takes time to become clear. Such a resigned attitude in the face of death is a jarring beginning to the film – and the viewer's first encounter with North – given the warning that he received. As the film progresses and we discover more about North and his character, as well as discovering the importance of love and money to the film's narrative, the audience are by this time back in familiar territory as these are two common reasons advanced in film narratives for a character wanting to commit suicide. Having let a substantial catch slip through his fingers – in terms of both love and money – the reasons for North staying in the classroom start to become clear.

As with the 1946 version, the character who asks the questions about the deceased drives the narrative forward. In the 1964 version, rather than being an insurance investigator, Charlie Strom is an inquisitive hitman who is adept at following up lines of enquiry. Such a change between the films invites one to consider notions of audience allegiance. Reardon is an employee of a company and it is in this capacity that he operates. He is "safe" and respectable; rather dull, in fact. We see events unfold at the same time that he does and, to use Smith's (1995) terminology for analysing the structure of sympathy afforded to a character, we are aligned with him because of this. Likewise in the 1964 version, we discover facts about Johnny North at the same time as Strom, but this time, the character we are aligned to is a ruthless killer and, thereby, rather more complex than Reardon. The threat of violence towards Reardon follows him through the film, whereas violence emanates from Strom and towards others. This can have the effect of producing ambiguity in the way an audience may move from alignment to allegiance with his character, or not. Strom is played by Lee Marvin in a performance of strength and occasional ferocity (supported, until

the final scene, by his associate, Lee, played by Clu Gulager). Marvin is convincing as a long-time professional gun-for-sale who scents a huge amount of money to ease his final years. Audiences would have been familiar with Marvin in a role like Strom (that is to say, a tough 'bad-guy') from films such as *The Big Heat* (1953) and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962). He exudes charisma and prowess, providing a tough centre to *The Killers* around which the other characters operate. Citing Dyer's (1979) classic research into the star system, Smith (1995) suggests that information which audiences may already hold regarding a star can be marshalled by the filmmakers in order to help spectators 'entertain sympathetically actions, characters, and domains of experience that they might otherwise reject' (1995:194). This is clearly a factor in relation to Strom propelling the narrative through his enquiries, and suggests that the later film is more morally ambiguous than the earlier version. Strom is a key part of the film and yet he is also a hired assassin. For much of the film he and Lee interrogate associates of North, often violently and through this process the narrative progresses. It is only towards the end of the film that Farr and Browning are unmasked as villains themselves, perhaps even more so than Strom, and the audience can finally understand what has taken place, however sustained or ambivalent their allegiance to Strom has been.

### *Representation of gender and suicide in both versions of The Killers*

Place (1998) holds that the fears and hopes of society at large are expressed on screen, and suggests that 'the attitudes towards women evidenced in *film noir* – i.e. fear of loss of stability, identity and security – are reflective of the dominant feelings of the time' (1998:50) and this reflected in both films, though arguably less so in the later version. Kitty Collins (Ava Gardner) is a more rounded version of the *femme fatale*, incorporating character traits to entice and corrupt Swede and filmed in order to emphasise her duplicity. Sheila Farr (Angie Dickinson) similarly uses her charms in order to captivate Johnny North, and double-crosses him for personal gain and should be considered an updated, neo-*noir* version of the *femme fatale* (Harris, 2003). During their relationships, the women show a caring, loving side to their personalities, but when the double-crossing occurs,

they become disloyal and self-centred, seeking to save themselves above all else.

For most of the films, Swede (Burt Lancaster) and Johnny North (John Cassavetes) exude manliness in their day-to-day lives, as a boxer and a racing driver, respectively. They are attracted to women and quickly seek to begin a relationship with them. They show confidence, are protective of their partners and accomplished at critical points (during the robberies). However, devastated by the treatment meted out by the *femmes fatales*, Swede and North retreat to safer environments, both suffering deep psychological injuries, their masculinity undermined at the hands of their former girlfriends. Kitty and Sheila also perform active roles, involving danger and duplicity, available to them owing to the cinematic tradition of their respective films. Regarding the *femme fatale*, Place (1998) contends that her sexual power and danger is signalled to the audience by elements of iconography including cigarettes, jewellery and to this we can add fashionable clothes and hair. Stylistically, the *femme fatale* often dominates scenes by appearing centrally placed and active within it. Once compromised, this is reflected in a change of framing, with her movement being limited and her position being marginalised to the edge of the frame; as seen in both versions of *The Killers*.

Writing about the 1946 version of the film, Krutnik (1991) proposes that, 'the investigative narrative serves simultaneously as a means by which the male's "fall" can be measured, and as a strategy by means of which his "fall" can be recuperated' (1991:128) and this recuperation is carried out by Reardon on behalf of Swede. Similarly, in the later version, Strom and Charlie's investigation seeks to understand North's position in the story. Krutnik (1991) holds that *femmes fatales* cause men to fall out with each other, 'and to renege against the bonds of friendship and obligations that unite them' (1991:121) and the posthumous investigations in both films can be seen as attempts to fulfil such obligations.

Given that the two films share the same source material it comes as little surprise that a number of close similarities are evident, but there are also stark differences

to be seen. It will be worth drawing out these distinctions and commonalities here and I will start with the latter. In both death scenes, the victim is warned and has time to escape but chooses not to run. From the moment Swede bids Nick Adams to leave and from the moment North puts the telephone receiver down, they have decided to embrace death as opposed to life. The actual shooting is carried out by two gunmen in each film, sent by a man with a reason to want Swede/North dead, relating to a robbery from a number of years earlier. In both films, the man who paid for the contract killing had recently married the woman who was the source of infatuation for Swede/North characters and indeed was a willing – and important – participant in the double crossing of the leading man.

In addition to these similarities, there are some noteworthy differences as well. Though both Swede and North find new occupations following their break up with Kitty and Sheila respectively, there are marked differences in their choices. North, unlike Swede, is not spared the knowledge that the girl he thought was his own had not only set him up but was also keen to see him die for his troubles. As we have seen, Swede opts out of city life to be a garage worker in a small rural settlement where the only excitement, according to one of the killers, is to eat in the diner. Swede is broken by Kitty's behaviour toward him and Brentwood represents this destruction. North leaves the race track behind for a teaching post at a school for the blind and it is this new profession which demonstrates he has not fallen in quite the same way as Swede. From the glimpses inside his classroom that we get, North looks like he is making a serious attempt to *be* a teacher, rather than wallow in self-pity like Swede. The choice of a school for the blind encourages comment and I can say that such a setting provides a distinctive beginning to the film and provides – along with the night time murder of Swede in the earlier version – almost total cover for the killers despite the bright sunshine of a summer's day. The location of North's final hours might also hint at the blindness he exhibits in his relationship with Sheila Farr and Jack Browning some time before. He is gradually building a new life for himself but when Strom and Charlie arrive, North accepts his fate without running, just as Swede does. While Swede embodies a towering, strong physicality, North looks distinctly ordinary. He does not enjoy the same physical presence as Swede and, in fact, it is the hitmen who provide the muscles and machismo in the 1964 version.

One of the main changes from 1946 to 1964 is captured in the composition of the camera-shot of the victim prior to his death. In the earlier film, Lancaster's resigned Swede is subdued by the dark in his room to the point where we barely see his face at all, whereas Cassavetes' more active North is lit and photographed prominently so that we cannot fail to see his features before they are bloodied by gunshot. The actual shooting is another point at which the two films differ substantially. While a similar number of bullets are fired at the victims, in the earlier version we see the gunmen fire and then in a separate view we see Swede's hand grip the bed frame in pain and then release it as death overwhelms him. In the later version, we again see the gunmen fire but a shot/reverse shot is used as we see what they are shooting at, and also the effect – shown in slow motion – that the bullets have on North's body. His body bucks and writhes with every impact and he is thrown back against the wall, causing yet more damage. Such a difference can be in part accounted for by a greater relaxation in censorship between 1946 and 1964. Put simply, the later version could show more violence than the earlier film could, as well as being made at a time when an exciting opening to a thriller – the 'hook' – was *de rigeur*, championed by Don Siegel, director of *The Killers* (1964). However, it is also the case that 1940s *film noir* worked more by suggestion through visual style than by the kind of graphic representation that was to become common in later thrillers. This is a clear stylistic difference in the traditions from which the two films emerge. The black and white, 1946 version shares many features with *film noir* releases from the period, particularly in terms of lighting, *mise-en-scène* and editing. The colour, 1964 version, however, draws upon a different set of associated genre conventions, this time from the more 'realist' thriller which developed in the 1950s and came to dominance in the decades that followed: its cinematography, editing and pacing help to set it apart from the earlier version.

## *Conclusion*

This analysis of the two versions of *The Killers* and the movie representation of suicide that they exemplify – Occasioned Suicides – has identified a number of

salient points, particularly in relation to the cinematic traditions, *film noir* and neo-*noir*, of which they are part. In relation to the earlier version of the film, we have seen how it conforms to a number of conventions relating to *film noir*: it takes place in the classic *film noir* settings of anonymous, public places where criminal activity is planned and carried out. Swede (fall guy) thinks he is going to spend the rest of his life rich, with the girl of his dreams, only to discover she has manipulated him in order to escape with the money and return to her partner. The film itself uses continuity editing, with no rapid cutting and typical *film noir* high key-lighting, to accentuate the mood of characters and scenes.

In the later version of *The Killers*, the settings are of a similar type, though here there is more of a difference in class between characters, or at least it is more marked than in 1946. North is destroyed by the woman he is infatuated with, as in the earlier film. In terms of discourse, the later version is noticeably different in a number of key areas, notably the fact that it is in colour, in its editing, where rapid cutting is used to inject tension into an action scene, and in its lighting which, unlike its 1940s predecessor, is not used to convey atmosphere; instead, most scenes are drenched in sunshine, though as Lovell (1975:71) observes, some settings, through their strangeness, are used to convey a distinct sense of unease. Where classical *film noir* used extremes of monochrome light and shade to invoke its malevolent and duplicitous world, the colour cinematography of neo-*noir* has necessitated the use of other techniques to achieve that same end.

Prior to analysis of the exemplary films, various sub-categories of Occasioned Suicides relating to suicide by an aggressor; suicide by a victim; and heroic suicide were outlined in relation to a range of films. Particular cases were distinguished in which female characters attempt to challenge traditional female roles, often by engaging in illegal or dangerous activities. The two exemplary films were then discussed in relation to their representations of gender and suicide. It was found that while conventional ideas regarding gender were played out in both films, across each film, there was a greater fluidity concerning active and passive roles, underlined by the essentially unstable and chaotic worlds of *noir* and neo-*noir*. While *The Killers* are both early examples of this form of representation of masculinity, and they are heavily influenced by the *noir* tradition

of the *femme fatale*, it can also be said that they suggest patterns of behaviour for stressed males in later films quite independent of any *noir* influence: for instance *Tunes of Glory*, *Falling Down*, *The Mist* and even *The Wild Bunch*. These two exemplary films are prime examples of their respective cinematic traditions and draw heavily on those conventions throughout, with moral decay, corruption and double-crossing leading to suicide. It is interesting to note that both Swede and North do not seem to confide in anybody about their recent histories and so, 'suffer in silence' which, in addition to their impulsive behaviour, as we have seen, can lead to suicide. Usually a more active decision to die is taken but access to opportunity is a significant element of suicide and thus Swede and North took advantage of their opportunities when presented with them.

Although the characters in the earlier version refer to Swede's death as murder throughout the film, setting it alongside the later version we can see how it is clearly represented as an act of suicide. That there is no doubt in the mind of Strom, in 1964, that North had himself killed (with Strom unconcerned at the thought), we can surmise that views about suicide in American society at large had altered in the intervening years.<sup>58</sup> While both deaths were in effect suicide, the early film treated Swede's death as murder and showed very little of his violent death, while the later film introduced the notion of suicide early on and, was able to show more of Johnny's violent demise, suggesting how culturally-held views had changed in eighteen years to incorporate notions of this kind of suicide and depict it in a Hollywood film.

---

<sup>58</sup> Referred to in Chapter 1.



## CHAPTER 6. THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUICIDE FOR OTHER CHARACTERS.<sup>59</sup>

This chapter is somewhat different to the two that have preceded it. Thus far, I have outlined and examined the representation of gender and suicide in films where the precipitating cause of suicide, be it 'internal' (Chapter 4) or 'external' (Chapter 5) has been established. Every film suicide identified in this research falls into one or another of those groups. This chapter, however, examines those films which explore the consequences of suicide for those left behind; it is interested in the aftermath of suicide and how characters respond. Two further sub-groupings within this collection of films are outlined and, following a general account of the overall group, the two exemplary films are analysed: *The Hustler* and *The Virgin Suicides*. In the interpretive analysis of these films, I examine the reasons for suicide, how the suicides are represented, and the similarities and differences in the way these films deal with the themes of suicide and gender and the consequences of suicide for the living. The exemplary films will be set within the context of the apposite cinematic tradition, namely the "teen film" for *The Virgin Suicides* and the so-called "serious" drama for *The Hustler*. This latter label is partly inspired by Andrew Sarris' suggestion that Robert Rossen's work be categorised under the heading, 'strained seriousness' (1968:189). To begin with, let us examine the general group of films where the effects of suicide on those still living are portrayed.

### *Consequences of Suicide: Historical and Generic Context*

The overall category under discussion in this chapter relates to films where, following the suicide of somebody close to them, the consequences for the living are investigated. Within this category there are different ways in which the films can be grouped. Firstly, there are films where a distinct process of *character*

---

<sup>59</sup> In the rematch with Minnesota Fats in *The Hustler*, Eddie reflects on Sarah's suicide and responds to an earlier criticism by Bert, saying, 'I sure got character now. I picked it up in a hotel room in Louisville.'

*development* is brought about by the suicide of another character and secondly, there are films where, rather than any development, *bewilderment, anger or other behavioural response* are caused by the suicide. *The Hustler* exemplifies the first category, while *The Virgin Suicides* exemplifies the second.

Taking the first sub-category, the person who feels the impact of a suicide may be a relative, a friend or even a stranger. *Victim* (1961), for example, features a young man who, having been blackmailed and arrested on account of his homosexuality, hangs himself in his police cell. Before he dies, he tries to get help from another homosexual character, Melville Farr, played by Dirk Bogarde, who, out of fear of losing his respected position within society, chooses not to help. However, upon later finding himself in a similar situation, Farr fights back on behalf of those who have experienced what he is going through but lack his status (including the man who killed himself earlier in the film). In *The Luzhin Defence* (2000), when the title character throws himself from a window midway through a prestigious chess match, it befalls his fiancé, Natalia Katkov, to play out the remainder of the game according to his instructions, winning with an entirely new manoeuvre. The instructions were not written with such an ending in mind, but once discovered, Katkov felt that it was the appropriate way to respond to the situation. Luzhin himself seems to have no interest in what might occur after his death, so exhausted is he with life. Finally, for this group of films, in *The Reader* (2008) the suicide of a female prisoner on the day of her release acts as a prompt for Michael Berg to begin to explain his perceived emotional coldness to his daughter. He had been involved in an affair with the prisoner, Hannah, a former concentration camp guard and had subsequently seen her sent to jail for a wartime crime that she could not have committed but, in relation to which, he takes no action to save her. This experience causes him to be withdrawn, even with close family, and Hannah's death precipitates Michael's decision that he should confess his previous involvement with Hannah to his daughter.

The second sub-group of films, exemplified by *The Virgin Suicides*, includes *The Deer Hunter* (1978), which sees Christopher Walken's character, Nick, brutalised by his experiences in Vietnam to the point of failing to recognise help when it arrives and shooting himself during a game of Russian roulette. His friends are

left to puzzle over his condition and wonder how they could have saved him from destruction. A female suicide, Alice Munro in *The Last of the Mohicans* leaves her companions struggling for explanations of her actions as she jumps to her death, as rescue for them all was close by. Similarly, in *The Ninth Gate* (1999), the hanging of a man involved in matters of the occult, Andrew Telfer, leaves far more questions than answers for those left behind.

The suicide in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, following a night of passion on the ward of a psychiatric hospital, is prompted by a censorious response to what the Sister found the next morning. Billy Bibbit, the character in question, feels so ashamed, he quickly takes a piece of glass to his neck. This then causes Nicholson's character, McMurphy, to violently attack the Sister and eventually to receive a lobotomy due to his violent action. He was close to escape, standing in front of an open window, but then moments later he was institutionalized for the rest of his life. In a similar vein, Todd in *Sweeney Todd: Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007) is driven to seek revenge on the judge and, to a lesser extent, the city that deported him and drove his wife to attempt suicide. He believes she died from swallowing poison though in fact it did not take her life, merely her mind. Such a response to a suicide in a vengeful way taps into a more widely popular cinema trope, where a character's family or loved ones have been murdered and s/he is spurred into action to avenge their deaths.<sup>60</sup>

Turning to the exemplary cases for this chapter, I can situate them in their respective contexts. As I have already mentioned, in Sarris' famous authorial study of the American cinema, Rossen was confined to the section entitled 'strained seriousness' and the directors within this category were defined as 'talented but ... with the mortal sin of pretentiousness' (1968:189). Leaving aside the second part of this evaluation, Sarris' insistence on identifying an overtly "serious" tradition in American cinema is useful in placing *The Hustler* into the cinematic context of that period. Sarris includes four other directors in this category all recognised as producers of "serious" dramas. Jules Dassin, who made *Never on Sunday* (1960) and *Phaedra* (1962), both focusing on the

---

<sup>60</sup> *Death Wish* (1974) and *Lethal Weapon*, in addition to the characters of James Bond and Batman, all fall within this type of film.

repercussions of highly dramatic love triangles. John Frankenheimer's film, *All Fall Down* (1962), sets two brothers against each other as they compete for the attention of the same woman. This film, starring Warren Beatty and Eve Marie Saint, also includes a controlling mother and a drunken father. Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita* (1962) which, although employing a very different style, still deals with domestic and romantic relationships and the pain they can cause, while Sydney Lumet directed *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1962) which focuses on the effects on one family of drug and alcohol addiction. And shortly after *The Hustler*, Rossen himself released *Lilith* (1964), also in monochrome, telling the story of a therapist falling in love with a nymphomaniac under his care. Another patient also begins a faltering relationship with her, but commits suicide when the situation turns against him.<sup>61</sup> Generic features for these kinds of "serious" dramas can be summarised as including, a concern with personal relationships – particularly romantic relationships – as their primary focus; an interest in the exploration of character; a commitment to considering relationship and character at significant length; and the use of "literary" screenplays. These features occur regularly across this type of film, in conjunction with a stylistic emphasis which supports their comprehension. This is done by incorporating a high degree of verisimilitude in the *mise-en-scene* to suggest believable situations, by allowing actors the space and time to articulate these deep emotions in their performances, by classical unobtrusive editing, and by studied use of music to stress emotions and their associated underlying themes throughout the film.

The second of our exemplary films, *The Virgin Suicides*, emerges in part from the loose American genre of "teen films" which, according to Lewis (1992) reflect youth culture, their concerns and anxieties, namely, 'anomie, deviance, promiscuity and sexual experimentation, conspicuous consumption, rebellion and regression' (1992:2). For these reasons, *The Virgin Suicides* should be considered alongside other teen films, for instance *Dead Poets Society* (1989) and *School Ties* (1992), both set in an earlier decade, although here, the teenagers study in a private school, and *Heathers* (1989), offering a wry take on cliques and suicides in a high school setting. Other films that illustrate the

---

<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the theme of a love triangle features in *The Hustler* as well, referred to as a 'triangle of conflict' by Casty (1966:9).

cultural background from which *The Virgin Suicides* has emerged, include *The Breakfast Club* (1985), *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), and *Pretty in Pink* (1986), directed by John Hughes and concerned with teenagers attending high school (or playing truant). In the 1990s, teen movies continued to focus on dating and the Prom (important themes in *The Virgin Suicides*), such as *Encino Man* (1992), *She's All That* (1999), and *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999). *Election* (1999) explored themes of sexuality and relationships within a school setting, as well as using multiple narrators to comment on events in the film (although it is always clear which character is narrating, unlike in *The Virgin Suicides* where a single voice talks on behalf of four characters). Scholarly writing on the subject of the teen film (for instance Lewis (1992), Doherty (2002) and Shary (2002)) is often organised along the lines of sub-genres, for instance, the science film, teen-horror, sex comedy, juvenile delinquent, and, for Shary (2002), 'probably the most foundational subgenre of youth films' (2002:9), the school film. The school film is clearly the most appropriate cultural backdrop for *The Virgin Suicides*, and therefore its distinctive features may usefully be outlined here. Doherty (2002) contends that early teen movies sought to cash in on the explosive popularity of rock and roll music and soundtracks incorporating this type of music became part of the conventions for these films. Other generic conventions include, a primary focus on teenagers as the main characters, with a limited screen presence for adults (though they often appear in positions of social power such as parent, teacher, police officer and so on); an emphasis on and exploration of youth; storylines often involving "coming of age" themes, for instance relationships/sex, issues of body imagery and employment; frequent inclusion of moral questions relating to rebellion, delinquency, the pursuit of hedonism, or crime; common characters such as nerd, jock, delinquent, rebel and "stoner"; and speedy editing and bright colour palettes, influenced by music videos and advertising, as Doherty (2002) notes, 'the modern teenpic buzzes with fast-paced editing and swirling camera movements' (2002:210). While drawing upon many of these generic features, *The Virgin Suicides* progresses at a much slower pace than that described by Doherty, allowing plenty of time for pause and reflection, supported by a soothing, mellifluous soundtrack by a French pop group, Air. It is certainly a film which deals with many traditional issues pertinent to movie representations of adolescence, but it retains its distinctiveness at the same time. This extends to

its treatment of the Lisbon sisters' suicides as well and will be discussed further below.

Having outlined the aim of this chapter and set both exemplary films within their cinematic traditions, it is now time to focus in more depth on those films representative of their groupings.

## *Exemplary films*

### ***The Hustler***

*The Hustler* is about a pool hustler named Eddie Felson who plays a 40-hour match against the finest pool player in the USA, Minnesota Fats. Despite being \$18,000 ahead at one stage, Eddie loses it all. After this humbling experience, he meets Sarah and they become a couple. Eddie craves a rematch with Minnesota Fats and joins up with a local gambler called Bert Gordon who believes they can make a lot of money. On a trip to Kentucky Bert and Sarah fall out and Sarah takes her own life. Eddie leaves Bert, raises the money for a rematch with Minnesota Fats and crushes him second time around. Despite his victory, Eddie exhibits a great deal of pain due to his part in Sarah's decision to kill herself. Narrative drive is supplied by Eddie's desire for a rematch with Minnesota Fats, which involves trying to raise enough money to do this, as well as his developing relationships with Sarah and Bert.

The settings in this film can be categorised in the following manner:

- Functional: petrol station, bus station, off-licence, restaurant, picnic
- Domestic: Sarah's apartment, Eddie's rented room, hotels
- Gambling: pool halls, bars, Findley's mansion, Kentucky Derby

The settings in *The Hustler* significantly contribute to our understanding of the story and the characters by emphasising pertinent details and reinforcing

information heard in the dialogue. It is clear from the room that Eddie rents after leaving Charlie, for example, just how short of money he is. Similarly, as he walks across the pier front at a low point, Eddie is a small figure dominated by the industrial surroundings and the effect is to threaten and intimidate him. Inside, the bar in which he is beaten up for hustling is grubby and run down, further underlining the unpleasantness of Eddie's time there.

A significant portion of *The Hustler* features Eddie hustling for money, or with Sarah, hustling her into a relationship. Ames Billiards Hall accounts for the most screen time as scenes set there include the first match between Eddie and Minnesota Fats which lasts for 27m33s, while their rematch lasts for 11m07s. The Louisville trip to the Kentucky Derby, accounts for 25m56s. Add to these the pool games that Eddie plays in order to raise some money in between and we can see how gambling dominates *The Hustler*. It is in the settings in Louisville where we see how powerless Sarah becomes when away from home. She is out of her depth and cannot convince Eddie to rethink his behaviour. In her apartment though, she is much more comfortable, able to write and speak freely with Eddie. Here, Eddie is not so dominant as he has to rely upon Sarah's private income and, after having his thumbs broken, he requires her help for even the simplest of tasks.

The social world of *The Hustler* is played out in predominantly working-class environments, with Eddie, Minnesota Fats and the other pool players embodying a traditional working-class ethic of using one's skills to earn a living. Though Bert may have much power and influence, it is only on the basis of accumulated wealth: at heart, he is still of a similar class background to the others. The pool players, in particular, couch their success in financial terms, though Bert seeks to control others with his money. Life in *The Hustler* is lived on a day-by-day basis and the large amounts of money involved in the gambling do not change the mentality of those winning or losing. The film's social world is male-dominated with only two females having any lines of dialogue at all (in addition to Sarah, the coffee shop assistant briefly speaks to Eddie). In conjunction with the pervasiveness of gambling, this brings with it an apparently masculine competitiveness and desire to win that ultimately sees Eddie so comprehensively

reject Sarah's advice during the billiards game in Kentucky. In an interview, Rossen suggested that 'the drama, in this story of two cripples, is that she needs a cane and he can give her only a billiard cue' (Millar, 1972:316). The moral quality of the film's articulation of that failure becomes apparent in the series of trials faced by Eddie during the course of the film, enough to prompt Trachtenberg (1962) into calling it 'a morality play' (1962:430).

Interestingly, Sarah shares a number of social similarities with Bert. For instance, she receives an income from her father without working and appears to have a better level of education than Eddie. However, she seems much more content with what she has and does not display any avaricious desires in terms of acquiring wealth or possessions. Sarah has a disability which gives her a limp when she walks. During their first morning together, Sarah explains her situation to Eddie after stumbling by saying, 'I'm not drunk, I'm lame'. As it will turn out, this comment will have metaphoric resonance later in the film.

Father figures, be they estranged (Sarah's), adoptive (Bert of Eddie) or surrogate (Charlie of Eddie), appear fleetingly in *The Hustler* but otherwise it is a film that makes little reference to family or larger social networks. The three main characters combine on the trip to Louisville but in a dysfunctional unit that purports to offer a secure supportive framework to allow Eddie's talents to flourish, but rarely approaches anything like a family.

### *Narrative and Discourse*

There are a limited number of stylistic flourishes in the film, for instance freeze-frame during the opening credits and again at the end, as well as montage sequences compressing the pool games. In fact, these credits provide something of a mini-introduction to the film as they include several scenes that we have yet to see, but will see during the course of the film. This does not alter the fact that the film stays broadly within conventional boundaries for a narrative film of this type.



Continuity editing is used to ensure that the story is told intelligibly. Cutting in *The Hustler* is quite sedate, with the exception of the pool matches, where 'fast' Eddie lives up to his name (as does the editing). Often though, the 'scope framing allows the characters to move about within a shot without cutting. Occasionally there is a long take, for instance Sarah's final scene in the bathroom or when Minnesota Fats arrives at the pool hall the night that Eddie is waiting for him. At Findley's mansion, just as Eddie has left to walk back to the hotel and Bert's taxi has arrived, Bert walks towards the audience and past the camera to leave. As he does so his coat falls over the lens of the camera and so the transition from mansion to hotel is achieved with an unusual – for this film – form of cutting.

Mostly, the camerawork is not foregrounded but instead allows the story to be told at a steady pace and the characters to develop. There is a conventional mix of tracking shots, panning shots and static shots, though zooming is used very little in the film. In conjunction with the relaxed rate of cutting employed for most of the film, the camera does pan quite often as it follows characters. This is most evident around the pool tables as we watch the characters while they play the game or as they walk about the pool hall before and after games.

*The Hustler* is a black and white film and though the lighting is mostly naturalistic, there is considerable use made of shadows. In the train compartment on the way to Louisville, the shadows of the three travellers make the space feel even more cramped and claustrophobic than it is. During the final confrontations between Bert and Sarah, there is a distinctive shadow cast by Sarah and this gives the impression of a mournful spectre, watching the proceedings but unable to halt them.

There is a mixture of close ups, medium shots and long shots throughout the film. Close ups tend to occur during the pool games, either of the balls being played or of the player taking the shot. On a number of occasions we see the player and the ball they play in the same shot, but not always. Medium shots help to establish the characters and their settings, for instance our first view of Sarah is of her shoulders and back as she looks at Eddie in the bus station. Long shots,

through the *mise-en-scene*, contribute to the mood of a scene by showing a character dwarfed by their surroundings, for example, Eddie approaching the pool hall on the pier where he will end up having his thumbs broken. He looks vulnerable, filmed at such a distance in an otherwise deserted location.

The aspect ratio of *The Hustler* is 2.35:1 and such width allows a great deal of action to take place in the one shot, exemplified in Ames Billiards Hall as Minnesota Fats agrees to play Eddie. With the words, 'Sausage, rack 'em up' the shot teems with movement as characters prepare the table, settle into a position to watch and otherwise focus their attention on the match about to begin. The camera stays in one place as Minnesota Fats walks from left to right in order to get set up and in addition to numerous other people bustling around the table, people can also be seen upstairs on a secondary level of pool tables. Once they hear Minnesota Fats, they too turn towards the action. Similarly, in the restaurant car on the train to Louisville, as Bert and Eddie finish their breakfast on the left of the screen, Sarah's struggle to walk through the carriage towards their table is seen on the right of the screen. Their talking and her walking are seen in one take and while she is not in focus for much of her 'journey', she can be recognised as Sarah as soon as she enters the carriage.

The focus of attention is generally on what is positioned centrally within the shot, but there are numerous images where characters or action left and right of centre are in focus and integral to the narrative. Some scenes in this film look as if they have been taken from a film more usually referred to as featuring deep-focus cinematography, for instance the beginning of Eddie's first match with Minnesota Fats referred to above. A number of shots illustrate how filmmakers at this time were beginning to deal with the opportunities offered by Cinemascope, by utilising the widescreen space in various ways, for instance the meeting between Charlie, Eddie and Sarah in the cramped apartment. As the men talk about their past business relationship, the whole width of the frame is made full use of with shots showing the three characters spaced across it, interspersed with shots of one or two characters, and the widescreen framing emphasises the distance – both physical and emotional – between them.

The film makes limited use of music on its soundtrack with large portions of the movie having no music at all. Out of the total film length of 129m14s, music plays for just 26m48s. Generally, the music – a soft jazz sound – plays for approximately a minute during scenes of montage or where there is little dialogue. The longest stretch of music is at the restaurant but that lasts for just 03:08s. Occasionally there is live music as at Findley's party, but most often the music is non-diegetic and added to enhance the mood of the scene, a typical generic feature. Between 104m20s and 122m23s there is no music at all, but instead there are important sections of dialogue and long passages of silence. This emphasises the loneliness and painful nature of Sarah's plight in Louisville. During the scenes at the pool halls and bars there are plenty of diegetic noises, the sort which help to create a sense of verisimilitude. As Eddie lies in bed after his match with Minnesota Fats, the sound of pool balls being potted can be heard, giving the impression that we can hear his obsessive replaying of the match in his mind.

### *Representation of Suicide in The Hustler*

Sarah is sent back to the hotel room by Eddie and following his eventual defeat of Findley at billiards, Eddie and Bert also return to the hotel. Eddie decides to walk to clear his head while Bert takes a taxi. Back in his room, Bert is restless. He fidgets and keeps looking towards the suite next door. After taking a last, big gulp of drink, he opens one of the doors linking the suites together and sees Sarah seated on the bed. She is framed through the doorway and by Bert's arm and side. She looks vulnerable. Bert wanders in uninvited and questions her about the luggage piled up on the bed. She replies she is leaving soon and adds, 'it's what you want isn't it?' Bert's response is to deny responsibility and blame somebody else, 'it's what Eddie wants. He told me to give you some money'. Given the fact that Eddie and Sarah had argued earlier in the evening, in conjunction with Sarah's fragile demeanour, we infer that Bert's lie is unlikely to help the situation. She tells him to put the money on the bed, 'that's the way it's done, isn't it?' and after a few more words between them, Bert picks Sarah up and kisses her. She does not respond to this so he lets her fall to the bed and

goes back to his own room. Sarah, however, seems to reflect on her situation for a split-second and then follows Bert through to his room, asking, 'you got a drink?' There is then a slow dissolve from the image of Sarah with an unlit cigarette in her mouth to a slept-in bed seen in a mirror reflection from within the en-suite bathroom. Bert is asleep and Sarah, in her underwear, leaves the bedroom for the bathroom. In a single take, Sarah shuts the door between the rooms and looks at herself in the mirror. She takes a lipstick and writes on the mirror, across her own image, 'perverted, twisted, crippled' [underlining in film]. Sarah has already used these words earlier in the evening to describe the guests at Findley's party.

The scene then dissolves to Eddie entering the hotel lobby and asking for his key from a reluctant receptionist. He lets himself in and looks confused by the cases and money still on the bed. He turns around and momentarily stops as he sees through the doorway into Bert's suite and notices there are several people in there, talking seriously. His entrance is initially blocked by a police officer but Bert waves him in. It looks as though two police officers are trying to take a statement from Bert, who is temporarily lost for words. A police photographer takes a picture which further confuses Eddie. Sensing further activity in the bathroom, Eddie walks in and is stopped on the spot by what he sees on the floor. We see his reaction but not what he is looking at. He collapses against the doorframe and then drops to his knees. As he does so, he rocks forward and back in a somewhat mannered fashion. His hunched frame and subdued expression produced by what he sees in this scene stays with him for the remainder of the film. The camera follows him and it is then that we see Sarah lying on her side on the floor. In the shot, we can also see the sink which has what looks like blood smeared all over it. Eddie tries to touch Sarah's shoulder, but recoils. Bert calls him and tries to explain what happened, 'she came in here, Eddie. She asked me for a drink and I gave her one. We had a few more. She came in here, Eddie'. Eddie reels as he hears these words and then attacks Bert with all his strength. Not even three police officers can prevent Eddie from giving Bert a beating. The scene fades to black.

There is no music on the soundtrack throughout this entire section of the film. It plays out in eerie silence, except for when the characters are talking to each other. This focuses our attention on the events unfolding onscreen, but without highlighting them through the use of music. The performances hold our attention and through the characters we comprehend the events we are seeing.

In terms of feeding expectations on the part of the viewer, Sarah's suicide is not heavily suggested in advance of her death. It is fair to say that, for all her evident unhappiness, her suicidal intentions do not reveal themselves until her final trip to the bathroom. There are plenty of episodes in the film where she appears to have low spirits, or seems fragile, or suffers a setback in her relationship with Eddie, or is cruelly undermined by Bert on the trip to Louisville, but she does not appear to harbour feelings of wanting to end her life. Her heavy reliance on alcohol should be noted, though unlike Ben in *Leaving Las Vegas* or Alain in *Le Feu Follet*, Sarah does not have a long-term plan to die by her own hand. Earlier in the film Sarah had dismissively referred to her relationship with Eddie as a 'contract of depravity' but such a damning indictment of life with one's partner need not necessarily entail suicide in order to escape. Even in the bathroom scene, she could have simply been writing a message of sorts to Bert (and Eddie too) before leaving with her cases. Replacing the image of Sarah with Eddie via a dissolve provides the first clue that something else might have happened in the hotel suite (by way of connecting two characters in different scenes through editing), and this anxiety on the part of the audience increases as the receptionist proves reluctant to let Eddie have his key. When we see people in Bert's room it could still be for something other than Sarah's suicide, for instance, she had killed or tried to kill Bert, but once we see he is still alive, our thoughts turn to Sarah and curiosity at what took place after she left the message on the bathroom mirror.

Killing herself in Bert's bathroom after writing on the mirror makes it seem as though she wished to leave a significant – and obvious – statement. The three words that Sarah uses as her cryptic last will and testament were originally used to describe the revellers that Findley had assembled for his Kentucky Derby party. Sarah asserted that the partygoers, as well as Findley and Bert, wear

masks which conceal their true features. It was her contention that 'underneath the masks they are perverted, twisted, crippled'. Her words in this context evoke images of a masquerade, where people behave in any way they like as their identities remain unknown. Her concern appears to be that Eddie is at risk of turning into a character without scruples if he continues to associate with the likes of Bert and Findley. In the context of Sarah's final message to the world, though, scrawled upon a mirror moments before taking her own life, the echoed words can be read in a different way. Here, they seem to refer most of all to herself in terms of what she has done and what she has become. They may also refer to Bert, and his unscrupulous behaviour, and Eddie, in terms of his perpetual selfishness, but it seems most likely she was thinking of her own situation when she wrote the words. The determined underlining of the word 'crippled' suggests that is the word she most wanted to emphasise to those who would find her dead body.

The method and timing suggest she was angry with how she had been treated and she may also have suffered a bout of self-loathing after giving herself to Bert in Eddie's absence. Despite earlier admitting that her life had improved since meeting Eddie, it is clear that his presence in her life adversely affects Sarah. Once Bert became a factor, she was often marginalised and perhaps left to feel that she wanted to get out altogether, even if that meant suicide.

#### *Impact of suicide on characters left behind*

After Eddie's hands are damaged, he requires substantial assistance from Sarah and to make sure she can provide it, she drastically reduces her drinking. Though it is for his benefit, this appears to find little approval with Eddie who can no longer cut short an unwanted conversation with an offer of a drink. He becomes short-tempered with her, contributing to her feeling unwanted. He struggles to come to terms with this setback and perhaps loses some of his previously assertive masculine identity by being weakened in such a way. On a picnic, as she is expressing her love for him, Eddie surprises Sarah with an unromantic comment, by saying that he thinks she will marry someone else in the

future. They had a relationship, but how deeply did it really matter to Eddie? Following Sarah's suicide, we find out that it mattered a lot and his reaction is most striking. While both he and Bert return to pursuits they were involved with prior to and during Sarah's life with them, Eddie has shed his former recklessness and instead developed an inner strength that simply overwhelms Minnesota Fats in their second competitive meeting. Bert, meanwhile, acts as though nothing has happened. Eddie is unbeatable, as he claims, and while it may seem as though he is propelled both by guilt and the thought of the responsibility he welched on, it is more likely that he believes that he has acquired inner strength through a toughening of his character, something Bert had accused him of lacking. As he tells Bert: 'I sure got character now. I picked it up in a hotel room in Louisville.'

In what ways does gender play a part in this dynamic? The masculinity embodied by Bert brings with it some of the more toxic elements highlighted in Chapter 2, such as greed, violence and sexism and it is a combination of these that irreparably damages Sarah and Eddie's relationship. Eddie falls short of the ruthlessness exhibited by Bert, but, thinking it will result in winnings to pay for his rematch with Minnesota Fats, he is keen to emulate it. Upon his return to playing pool after having his thumbs broken, Eddie is impressed with Bert's success and his confidence in Eddie and agrees, with a huge smile on his face, to such a deal. At Findlay's mansion, when Eddie is given the choice of following Sarah's or Bert's advice, he chooses Bert's and it is only once Sarah has died that Eddie is able to see the mistake he made.

What does Sarah's suicide say about Eddie? Sarah's predilection for alcohol and her subsequent vulnerability means that she needs love and protection, but instead receives relationship trouble and disappointment. Her suicide challenges Eddie to reconsider his shabby treatment of her and he not only responds, but excels in fighting back to remember her as a woman he loved, but did not know how to express his love at the time. Eddie's character thus undergoes dramatic development throughout the film, with Sarah's death proving to be the watershed after which Eddie is substantially different. Arguably, Sarah's suicide forces Eddie to grow up, to turn into a man. While under Bert's influence, he is unable –

incapable? – of being the sort of man that Sarah needs. It is only once she is gone that he learns how to be that person. The issue of being in love also reveals a distinctive change as while Sarah was alive and asking him directly whether he loved her or not, he was unable to say he did, but once she was gone and the enormity of the situation had sunk in, Eddie was finally able to admit his feelings for her.

Following Eddie's convincing defeat of Minnesota Fats, Eddie is forced to confront Bert. As soon as Bert speaks to him, Eddie shrinks to a smaller stature as his shoulders and head drop. His voice trembles and he can be seen breathing heavily and nervously, though it is difficult to say whether he is scared or so disgusted with Bert that he can barely bring himself to talk to him. There is considerable tension in the room, revealed by close ups on the faces of characters in the pool room, and as Eddie is so insistent that he wants nothing more to do with Bert, Bert relents. However, he insists that Eddie must avoid all 'big-time pool halls' in the future, thus taking some of the shine off Eddie's victory. This is the cost of redemption for Eddie, but he now knows that the loss of Sarah still far outweighs any of these victories achieved with a pool cue. As he leaves Ames Billiards, and in spite of his recent emotional confrontation with Bert, there is a look on Eddie's face that suggests he feels a tiny amount of pleasure at having beaten both Minnesota Fats ('Fat Man, you shoot a great game of pool'; 'so do you, fast Eddie') and Bert in the same session, though this feeling is tempered with the news that his pool hustling days are over. The theme music begins just as he casts a glance around the pool room and this suggests to the audience an upbeat ending as opposed to a despondent one. We have seen Eddie triumph – albeit at great personal cost – but it was a triumph all the same. However, the ending of the film undercuts this triumph by showing the poolroom continuing after Eddie has left. Minnesota Fats dresses and leaves, tidying and cleaning goes on around the other players and Bert sits, perhaps musing on what has happened while waiting for the next piece of action to come along.

For Bert, the tragic early death of Sarah served only to interrupt his profitable relationship with Eddie. While Sarah was still on his bathroom floor he was trying to lay the blame with her and this continued into the pool hall with his outburst, 'if



it didn't happen in Louisville it happened someplace else. If it didn't happen now, it happened six months from now. That's the kind of dame she was'. He chooses not to let it affect him owing to his ideas regarding his status and how he should act, 'I'm a businessman, kid', and it is this which dictates his behaviour. There is little development for Bert as he remains fundamentally the same character throughout the film, full of arrogance and a brashness which allows him to believe that most things are available at a price, whether it is an extra hotel suite, hired muscle, or even Sarah. His masculinity is never in question and Sarah's suicide has no effect on it. Back in the hotel room, and despite his dishevelled appearance, Bert looks at ease with the room full of police, but this changes when Eddie appears. For much of these encounters, Bert is only partially seen as the focus is on Eddie. We can hear the pleading tone in his voice, but it is only when Eddie attacks him that we see all of him. This has the effect of marginalising Bert and drawing us (even) closer to Eddie, as we are throughout the film – despite his failings.

Significantly, Eddie's development between Sarah's death and his rematch with Minnesota Fats takes place off-screen and away from our view: we can only speculate what he went through and how long passes between these two events. For a film that incorporates the passage of time into the narrative so precisely before, it is interesting to consider why it is left out here. It allows the viewers to fill in some of the gaps themselves and avoids the familiar problem of trying to convincingly show the fundamental character shift which is, in the end, the primary narrative and moral focus of the film.

*The Hustler* can be thought of as a classic example of a "serious" drama. The primary focus of the film is on Eddie, before and after Sarah's suicide, and the film clearly shows how a character can grow following the suicide of someone close to them. He is badly affected by her death but finds an inner strength to prevail in the end. Let us now see what might happen when there is no character development, only confusion on the part of those left alive following a film suicide.

## ***The Virgin Suicides***

*The Virgin Suicides* is about a group of four boys and their obsession with five girls – sisters – who live in the same street and attend the same school. Following the suicide of the youngest sister, Cecilia, the boys try to understand and interact more with the remaining four sisters, only for their interest and empathy to be left unrequited. The narrative drive is supplied by a narrator who recounts the story 25 years later. With the exception of a small number of interviews which appear to have taken place many years after the main events of the film, all of the film is seen in an extended flashback. The overall narrative progresses over a period of approximately a year.

The settings in this film can be categorised in the following manner:

- Institutions: school, hospitals, psychologist's office
- Domestic or at least quasi-domestic: homes, garden, street
- Sports clubs: country club, tennis club, golf club
- Dreamlike landscapes: beach, boat on the sea, car journey

Such local settings, interspersed with dreamlike locations strongly reference teen movie conventions and the settings accentuate our understanding of characters throughout the film, often by undercutting their words through use of an ironic setting. For example, following Cecilia's death, neighbours watch the news on television and comment on the tragedy. One woman, seated on a sofa patterned in gaudy flower combinations, in a living room dripping with clashing flower patterns and colours, remarks that Cecilia did not want death, but rather she wanted to escape the Lisbon's 'decorating scheme'. A similar use of setting occurs later in the film when Trip talks (to an unseen interviewer) about his reasons for "loving and leaving" Lux after the homecoming dance. While Trip talks, the scene is non-descript enough not to catch the audience's eye, but after an audible *bong* sound, a nurse-like figure (we do not see her head) moves into the frame to remind Trip about his 'six o'clock group meeting' and suddenly the brown décor and table, low level radiator, blinds on the windows, polystyrene cup

and plain ashtray take on a new meaning. Together, they suggest that Trip has been institutionalised and we then recalibrate our assessment of him and his explanation accordingly.

It is clear from the opening few scenes of the Michigan neighbourhood depicted in *The Virgin Suicides* that it is a wealthy, privileged community. The families in the area appear to be successful and supportive of their children. For the greater part of the film this is true of the Lisbons too, until Mr and Mrs Lisbon's growing desire to protect begins to stifle their children. Shary (2002) cites *The Virgin Suicides* as a film which, along with a small number of others (including *American Beauty*, 1999), 'portrays the family as a destructive force in teens' romantic-sexual development' (2002:226) and this will be developed further below. Obvious affluence abounds in terms of the houses, gardens, nearby tennis club and golf club. The characters dress well and seem to have a variety of quality personal belongings to use and enjoy. During the party at the Lisbons' they talk about applying to university after high school and at the asphyxiation-themed ball, Alice O'Connor's father mentions that she is off to study drama at 'a little school in New Haven' (Yale). The expectations for the young people in this film are high, but appear to be achievable, given the available opportunities.

For a small number of the characters, religion – Catholicism – is important. Mrs Lisbon and Cecilia appear to be the most religious. Cecilia's bedroom contains many religious items. She is holding a card with the Virgin Mary on it when she first attempts suicide. We are given the impression that Mrs Lisbon's strictness and, possibly her whole outlook on life, stem from her religion. Indeed, as Lux discovers later in the film, a homily heard during a service can be swiftly acted upon in the home.

Though we do not see the Lisbon family attend church, Mrs Lisbon's religion is a prominent factor in her life, including the burning of Lux's rock records, saying grace at the dinner table, wearing a cross and worrying about how Cecilia's death would be treated by her Church. It comes as a huge relief to her when the priest reveals he has listed the death as an accident. The rock records incident, explained by the narrator as taking place after Mrs Lisbon attended a 'spirited

church sermon' and then 'commanded Lux to destroy her rock records' is a moment of farcical drama as the smoke overpowers them both and the fumes quickly fill the house, prompting complaints from some of the other girls. Mrs Lisbon is left looking draconian and drastically out of touch with her daughters, emphasising the old-fashioned nature of both her and husband. Religion does not appear to be so significant for Mr Lisbon or Cecilia's four sisters and there are no reasons given as to why this might be the case. The title of the film can also be understood in a religious way, as referring to the Virgin Mary. Such an allusion would be in keeping with the film's ambiguity in terms of hinting at answers, but not fully confirming them.

### *Narrative and Discourse*

As with *The Hustler*, there are a number of stylistic flourishes in the film, for instance freeze-frame; showing Trip's name on the side of Lux's underwear (by zooming in so close as to be able to 'see' through her dress); fictitious photographs seen in a fantasy slideshow; a split-screen effect while the boys and the girls listen to each other's music; and some of the characters, including Mr Lisbon, 'seeing' Cecilia after she has died. These do not alter the fact that the film stays broadly within conventional boundaries for a narrative film of this type but do serve to remind the viewer that we are watching a stylistically distinctive variation on the usual teen movie and one, therefore, where simple answers might not be found (again, *American Beauty* is similarly distinctive in this regard).

Continuity editing is used to ensure the story unfolds intelligibly. While *The Virgin Suicides* does not rely on rapid editing (as with some other teen films), cuts are made regularly. Occasionally there is a long take, for instance the bathroom windowsill just before we see Cecilia having cut her wrists; or Trip sauntering down the school corridor to the admiring looks of female students; or Lux having to drag her collection of rock records down the stairs at the insistence of her mother. Compared with other teen films, though, the pace is sedate, allowing time for pause, reflection and consideration of the narrative.

Mostly, the camerawork is not foregrounded but instead simply allows the story to be told and the characters to develop. There is a conventional mix of tracking shots, panning shots and static shots, though zooming is not used very extensively. When the funeral cortege arrives at the cemetery the camera rides in the car and we watch Mr Lisbon negotiate with the picketers through the windscreen. Although we do not see the actual funeral, we feel as though we have been on a similar emotional journey as those who did attend. At two separate instances, we see a slow pan from left to right across a collection of possessions that once belonged to the Lisbon girls (but now belong to the boys who are so fascinated by them) and a third occurs much later in the film, after all the girls have died, in a slow pan across yet more of their belongings, but this time the camera moves in the opposite direction. What at first appears to be a harmless collection of knick-knacks is later transformed into a morbid array of personal items lacking a proper home.

Lighting is mostly naturalistic and the film is generally bright in terms of weather, despite its subject matter and this is reflected in numerous scenes bathed in sunlight. With associations of happiness, extended sunshine in a film featuring five suicides suggests an off-beat take on events, which indeed transpires. When Lux wakes up on the sports field to find she has been abandoned by Trip, the morning light is hazy, giving the scene a dreamlike effect. During their final conversation with Lux before she leaves to wait in the car, the indoor lamp used to light the room aptly conveys the sense of night time, but this is in stark contrast to the few seconds of imagined road trip which interrupts this scene. Speeding along the highway, the sun is shining and the eight of them are smiling. Back in the house, things could hardly be more different. Once the girls are taken out of school and the passage of time is seen by a speeded-up view of the house, the lighting changes appropriately to denote the passing of the seasons. At the debutantes' ball thrown in the immediate aftermath of the Lisbon sisters' deaths, the lighting is affected by a thick pea-green smoke in the air, to coincide with the party's theme of 'asphyxiation'. Such a colouring, along with a number of guests wearing gas masks, gives the event a nightmarish quality, commensurate with the suicide of five sisters within one neighbouring family that has marked the town.

There is a mixture of close ups, medium shots and long shots throughout the film which, in conjunction with the issue of focus to be discussed below, keep the viewer's attention directed at specific items, characters and action.<sup>62</sup> Close ups allow the audience to see exactly which items – that used to belong to the girls – the boys have obtained by both legitimate and mendacious means. Medium shots help to establish the characters and their settings, while long shots use the *mise-en-scene* to create a serious tone for the scene, for instance the shot of the grieving Lisbon family at the front of their house just after Cecilia's death, or the sight of Lux waking up on her own on the sports field. She is but a tiny figure in the vast expanse of green through which she stumbles home.

The audience's attention is directed to many things throughout the film, be they bottles of perfume, character's reactions to events, corpses or even a name written on underwear. When Cecilia drops something in the bathroom after her suicide attempt with a razor, the camera focuses on it to reveal a small picture of the Virgin Mary, encouraging us to wonder how religion may have contributed to this young girl's predicament. As the boys read Cecilia's diary, our view flits across the page as well. As Lux returns home in a taxi, the morning after the homecoming dance, her tired and troubled face is the focus of our attention and it shows how much she feels she has been let down by Trip, as well as the trouble she expects to be in with her parents. As the school photograph is taken and the voiceover reads from the school's hastily produced leaflet on the subject of suicide, the moving image freezes with the closing and opening of the shutter and we close in, not through zooming but through small jumps, first to all four girls, then to Lux and Bonnie and finally just to Lux.

The death of Cecilia and the discovery of Bonnie hanging in the basement are filmed with the use of other characters' reaction shots seen by the audience before the actual bodies are seen, which heightens the tension in these scenes by deferring our view and contributes to an increase in our involvement with the story. We are denied seeing what others can see for so long that we crave to get a better view and find out what has happened.

---

<sup>62</sup> The aspect ratio of *The Virgin Suicides* is 1.85:1.

The film makes extensive use of non-diegetic music playing over a scene, as well as sound effects to convey a measure of verisimilitude. The original score for this film is by Air, while well-known pop and rock songs are also incorporated into the soundtrack, reflecting familiar cinematic conventions for the teen film. While the camera prowls through the Michigan neighbourhood where this film is set, music is heard and as the boys drive to and from the house there is music playing as well. With the exception of the homecoming dance, scenes at school are not generally accompanied by music but instead, diegetic sounds, the sort which help to emphasise the setting in order to let the story play out in a convincing manner.

During the dreamlike or imagined scenes, sounds can be heard which relate to what is being seen, but also function as background noise to further entwine the real and the not-so-real scenes together. For instance, while reading in Cecilia's diary about the boat trip where the girls saw two whales, whale-like noises can be heard, but these continue while other sections of the diary are read too. Much later in the film, where the boys subscribe to the same travel guides as the girls, we see a collectively imagined 'slideshow' of the nine of them enjoying a range of locations throughout Africa and Asia. While we see the entirely fictitious photographs, a jaunty, eastern-inspired piece of music accompanies the images and it partially bleeds into the scene back in Michigan once the slideshow has finished. However, the tune is now awkward and ill-suited to the mundane surroundings of everyday life and its sound becomes tinged with sadness: highly appropriate given the situation with the Lisbon girls and their confinement.

The voice-over narrator plays a significant role in the film, especially when adding a comment to explain a situation, or providing a summary of what has appeared on screen. In an unusual strategy, the narrator speaks on behalf of a group of people, namely the four boys – David, Tim, Chase and Parker – who spent their formative years fascinated with the Lisbon girls. The narrator never says 'I' but always refers to the collective memories or experiences the boys had in relation to the girls. The narrator's presence is vital to fully understanding the intricacies of this story. As already mentioned, narrators are used in *Election* and Ferris Bueller talks directly to the camera in order to comment on events taking place in

his *day off*. Such reflexive devices serve to create a little distance between subject and spectator.

### *Representation of suicide in The Virgin Suicides*

Let us now examine in detail the deaths – as well as Cecilia’s initial unsuccessful attempt to kill herself – in this film. It is with Cecilia that I shall begin. Cecilia’s attempt sets the scene for the entire film as it interrupts the otherwise benign establishing shots of suburbia with a messiness that is quite unexpected. A full 40 seconds before we see Cecilia, the soft music is joined by the sound of emergency vehicle sirens, quiet at first, but gradually increasing in volume. As the shot changes from outside to a cluttered bathroom windowsill inside, the music stops abruptly, and a dripping tap is heard along with the sirens. The dripping continues as the narrator tells us that ‘Cecilia was the first to go’ leading us to expect that Cecilia has successfully killed herself. As the words are spoken, we cut to the bath and see Cecilia in a close up shot of head and shoulders, lying still in distinctly red-looking bath water. The sirens stop, and as we see a small crowd gathering outside, the soundtrack is composed of ambulance/paramedic sounds, suggesting that an emergency medical procedure is being undertaken in the bathroom. We cut back to Cecilia being lifted out of the bath and we can see blood on the floor and one of her wrists bandaged. Cutting, particularly by a female, conventionally conveys overtones of “a cry for help” and indeed it is referred to as such by a doctor later in the film. The soft music returns and as she is carried away she drops a card that depicts an image of the Virgin Mary, which she may have been holding as she cut herself. As she is put in the ambulance and it begins to reverse out of the driveway, Mrs Lisbon appears at the door with a blanket, possibly Cecilia’s favourite, but she is too late and the ambulance drives away without it. The next shot is of Cecilia looking restless in a hospital bed. We see the back of a member of the medical staff as he asks her why she hurt herself, with the less-than-comforting words, ‘you’re not even old enough to know how bad life gets’. Her response, which ends this section of the film and introduces the title card following a brief re-introduction of the Lisbons’ street, is the line, ‘obviously doctor, you’ve never been a 13 year old



girl'. As we see the houses once more, a faster, upbeat music track is heard, helping to maintain a lighter mood after Cecilia's quip.

While her first attempt (a 'cry for help' according to her psychologist) had been so early in film that the audience hardly knew who was soaking in the bathtub of crimson water, Cecilia's second – and successful – attempt is much less of a surprise. She appears a little sad at the dinner table and only becomes animated when telling her mother afterwards that the recent extinction of the Brazilian turbot frog is not the first animal to disappear this year (and her tone suggests she does not think it will be the last either). During the party – organised for her – Cecilia sits alone in the corner of the basement party room avoiding contact with the other guests as much as possible. In their defence they may have felt a little awkward in her company given what the bulky bandages she is wearing on each wrist signify, but when Joe arrives, he is oblivious to this and wanders straight over to her and says hello. She responds, but once Joe starts getting teased by the others, Cecilia cannot take any more. She asks to be excused and walks slowly up the stairs fiddling with her bandages. The camera lingers on her shadow after she has turned the corner and she cannot be seen. The music from the party continues (The Hollies, singing 'all I need is the air that I breathe'), as does the party. The slow music, combined with the ongoing 'freak show' of Joe and his tormentors, produce an engaging and multi-layered scene from which the audience and the characters are snatched following Cecilia's leap to her death. The song ends and in the brief interlude before the next track starts there is an odd sound. Indistinct to the viewer but it gets the girls' and Mrs Lisbon's attention – 'oh Cecilia!' – and she rushes upstairs. As she is about to ascend the stairs to the bedrooms, Mrs Lisbon pauses and it is clear she has seen something outside in the garden. She gasps and dashes out. The boys follow her. All the time, the viewer has been focusing on Mrs Lisbon and the others in the house and we have not seen what they have seen. The girls race outside and join their mother on the porch but she tells them not to look and shepherds them away from the scene. The deferral here builds tension and expectation into the scene. No such protection for the boys as they arrive outside and see what has happened. We have still only seen the reactions, and not the event itself. From the boys' shocked faces, the next shot is of Cecilia impaled on a set of garden railings, with

Mr Lisbon desperately trying to support the weight of her lifeless body. The boys leave in a state of bewilderment and Mrs Lisbon sobs wildly. The final shot of this scene is a long shot of the Lisbon family showing pain and disbelief and resembles an image of the deposition of Christ from the cross. The garden sprinkler spits into life, foreshadowing the tears that will be shed for Cecilia and her sisters later.

Towards the end of the film there is the 'suicide free-for-all', as the narrator describes it, and the Lisbon household is reduced even further, this time down to just two. After being trapped in their home for approximately a year, the remaining four sisters contact the boys who live in the same street and arrange for them to visit one night. As the four boys arrive, all is quiet except for some night-time insect noises in the garden, giving the evening an almost exotic, adventurous tone. They discover Lux waiting for them and she talks to them in a dreamy way, very specific about some details, vague and contradictory about others. The boys are told to wait inside for her sisters, while Lux goes to sit in the car. They are momentarily in the gloomy lounge while sunny, vibrant images are shown on-screen as a trip out for all eight of them is collectively imagined. They hear a noise down in the basement which interrupts this brief picture of happiness and they investigate. Chase takes the lead and as he is professing his love for any one of the Lisbon sisters, the others suddenly stop grinning and start looking a lot more serious at something high up in the air behind him. As with the scenes leading to the discovery of Cecilia's body in the garden, the camera focuses on characters' reactions long before revealing what they can see. Just as Chase asks what they can see that he cannot, the dangling feet of a body loom into view behind him. He turns and then runs back up the stairs with his friends. They leave the house via the kitchen and in order to do this they have to step over the body of another girl. The sound of gas – presumably from the oven – can be heard as they make their escape. Once they reach the garden, the noise of the crickets is louder than before and the effect is to create a hostile environment, far from the impression given on their way into the house. As they run down the alleyway, the narrator begins to explain – or at least tries to – what happened, despite admitting that 'we would never be sure about the sequence of events. We argue about it still'. The screen fades to black.

As a new shot is revealed of a body being wheeled away by ambulance staff, the narrator fills in the details. More bodies follow as we learn how Bonnie hanged herself, Mary gassed herself, Therese had taken an overdose of sleeping pills and with the words, 'Lux was the last to go' we see a limp arm hanging out of a car door in the garage, while the police struggle through the exhaust fumes to reach her. Having started the film with five daughters and ending up with none, Mr and Mrs Lisbon abandon the house and move away from the area. The final time we see them, they leave the house, get into their car and drive away, looking physically and psychologically exhausted, a familiar enough situation for parents in teen films – left to tidy up after the rebellion or experimentation has taken its course - though perhaps not usually on this scale.

In terms of feeding expectations on the part of the viewer, just like the extended siren sound that gradually increases in volume until Cecilia is found in the bathtub, the signs were there throughout this film, but they may not have been obvious. Passing over the actual title of the film, the narrator tells us early on that 'everyone dates the demise of our neighbourhood from the suicides of the Lisbon girls'. That is said after Cecilia's first attempt, but before any of them had actually died. A little later, while the boys are talking to another local, Paul, the narrator again issues another clue, this time about Cecilia by explaining that Paul claimed to have 'found Cecilia on her first attempt'. In the course of the first four minutes of the film, we have learned that Cecilia will attempt suicide more than once and that at least two of the Lisbon sisters will die by their own hands. Questions fundamental to the narrative remain, such as who dies, how do they do it, when do they do it and what are the reasons for it, but the audience has been primed to expect multiple deaths.

Once Lux had caused her parents so much concern after the homecoming dance, the girls are trapped in their house and the viewer can see that with such a lack of self-determination, suicide – if that really was their only way of escape – was a possibility. Although Durkheim makes only passing reference to contemporary examples of this type of suicide, his own text describes the Lisbon girls' predicament perfectly, referring to their 'futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline' ([1897] 2002:239). Despite

this and the fact that rock records are burnt, telephone contact with the outside world drastically curtailed and there is no end in sight for their imprisonment, the action that the Lisbon sisters take still manages to shock, but more for reasons concerning their involvement of the neighbouring boys on the night of their demise. Inviting Tim, Parker, David and Chase round and letting them believe they were going to whisk the girls away for a night of fun and enjoyment, only to have them discover two suicides and speak to a third moments before she too kills herself, adds a ghoulishness to the proceedings which would not have been present otherwise. This dark ending reminds the viewer what a tragic story we have been watching - despite some of the lines delivered to raise a laugh – and underlines the harshness of the situation that the girls endured for the final year of their lives.

Following Cecilia's death, the remaining Lisbon girls' decline from gregarious and outgoing to suicidees while prisoners in their own home is all too noticeable to the boys in the street gripped by a fascination with them. They may not be the brightest of private investigators (it takes their massed intellects a week to work out that the best way to make contact with the girls would be to try the telephone), however, they are surely the most thorough, acquiring every last scrap of material evidence and assembling a vast collection of Lisbon memorabilia. This even includes Cecilia's diary so they get a vivid picture of her thoughts leading up to her death, as well as some incidents involving her sisters of which the boys were unaware. The boys also notice when other males in the school talk to Lux and how calm the sisters seem in the classroom environment. This is confirmed as a counsellor addresses a school gathering and the voiceover outlines a number of suicide predictors that students, teachers and parents should look for, including dilated pupils, losing interest in schoolwork and hobbies and withdrawing from friends and other social networks. Most of these features do eventually become true for the girls, though not through choice but of necessity, given the draconian curfew imposed following Lux's misdemeanours while out with Trip. Once captives in their own home, the girls' social lives end as does any hobby that requires the outdoors. Their desire for escape is encapsulated in their subscription to magazines such as 'African Adventures' and 'Encounters Overseas', which the boys emulate in order to try to understand the

girls' collective state of mind. When a Morse code message is interpreted as 'help send bobo', while the boys are mystified as to its meaning, audiences might understand its slang reference to sleep – indicating that the Lisbon sisters were still, at that point, hopeful of outside help to free them from their situation.

### *Impact of suicide on characters left behind*

Cecilia's suicide attempt causes Mr and Mrs Lisbon to relax their rules about the girls socialising – upon recommendation by a psychologist – by inviting a boy from school round for dinner, as well as organising a party. After her first attempt, Cecilia survives just a further two weeks and apart from the two social gatherings, plus a spot of sunbathing on the lawn, we see little else of her during this time. Strangely, the other sisters seem unaffected by Cecilia's attempt.

Following her successful suicide, however, other characters do begin to act differently. In the immediate aftermath of their youngest's death, Mrs Lisbon seems most affected as she remains in her room, too upset to leave, while Mr Lisbon is unable to communicate with the priest other than to refer to the baseball game he is watching. Mrs Lisbon is momentarily buoyed by the news that Father Moody has recorded Cecilia's death as 'an accident' but she remains low for a long time afterwards, unsure of why her youngest chose death over life. The camera cautiously follows Father Moody up the stairs as he first checks in to see how the girls are doing, before shuffling in to talk with Mrs Lisbon. The music on the soundtrack is slow, complementing the mood of sadness pervading the house. She is shown seated on the bed with her back to the door – and audience – in a position which invites us to contemplate how upset she must be. She is still in her dressing gown and her hair is a little unkempt. As Father Moody speaks, she turns her head slightly, in recognition of his words, but keeps quiet. She also tries to avoid publicity by sending the reporter away who is seeking an interview. Her strictness and power to lock down the house both make an appearance later in the film, shepherding in the final chapter for the family. Mrs Lisbon spends the majority of the film being either fiercely strict or upset. From very early on in the film we see, and indeed are told, how austere she can be and

this remains the pattern of her behaviour throughout. Cecilia's death perhaps makes her a little more protective of her remaining children, for instance, the cross-examination she conducts on Chase about the dangers of driving, but it is the breaking of curfew by Lux which precipitates the extreme measures adopted against the four sisters. Mr Lisbon, meanwhile, returns to the classroom and gets back to normal, that is to say, deferring to his wife on most matters concerning the girls, though he does speak on Trip's behalf in order to arrange the group date to the homecoming dance.

Lux's involvement with Trip results in a change in her character as well as a change in her freedom. From being a gregarious fourteen year old with a seemingly healthy interest in boys of her own age at school, after the imposition of 'maximum security isolation' for her and her sisters, Lux throws herself into physical relationships with a variety of random males in a display which looks like a case of extreme self-loathing. It is true to say she had vaguely flirted with men older than her before (knife-sharpener, bin collector) but it seems without any serious intent. Later in the film, as each opportunity presents itself, so Lux behaves in ways that suggest a degree of desperation. Such experiences, however, do not seem to have allowed Lux the kind of enjoyment and fun she exhibits for the first two-thirds of the film. The final few months of her life are an ordeal, but one of a personal nature as opposed to the more altruistic-inflected ordeal of Cecilia's final weeks. Lux is not concerned with trees or animals in the way that her younger sister was, but rather, she is grappling with distress at her own (endangered) situation.

The other sisters seem largely unaffected by Cecilia's passing – other than an initial sadness and a dislike of being the focus of attention, either by having others from school try to be friendly or the death of a character in a piece of literature causing an awkward moment in class – and are able to carry on with their lives. However, her death may have alerted the remaining sisters to the

possibility of suicide as a means of ending their imprisonment, and showed them that even while trapped in their home, suicide methods abound.<sup>63</sup>

After the suicides of their four remaining daughters we see very little of Mr and Mrs Lisbon, except to witness their hasty exit from the house and neighbourhood. The camera watches from the edge of the road as Mr Lisbon escorts his wife out of the front door, round to the passenger's side of the car, opens the door for her, then goes to the driver's side before getting in and driving off. There is a wistful look at the house before he drives away and his wife narrates a few poignant lines, referring to the abundance of love in their house and wondering why her girls had ended their lives as they did (once again, confusion on her part). As the couple drive away, the narrator describes the situation as the boys saw it and talks about the abandoned house as we see pictures of the interior, lit in a harsh way, with personal items boxed or half-wrapped. The effect is one of detachment and lack of emotion and leaves the viewer pondering the unintended irony in Mrs Lisbon's assertion about the quantity of love on offer in her house.

Trip appears to have suffered for his actions along with the Lisbon girls, as the man we see just before his group meeting is not such a fine specimen as his younger self might have seemed to girls at the time. He has not aged well and though it is left unspecified what his meeting relates to, the fact that we learn he is receiving therapy just moments after hearing him admit to leaving Lux out on the field – without any feelings for her whatsoever – comes as no surprise. Whether it was drink, drugs, sex addiction or psychiatric problems (the quotation about being driven 'crazy' might be closer to the truth than at first thought), the implication is that he needs help. We do not see much of Trip immediately following the homecoming dance, other than a brief shot of him looking upset and so not a lot can be said about how his character altered afterwards, though the impression we are given by the narrator and the man we see 25 years later provides a partial answer. Indeed, we are encouraged to wonder whether it was his heavy reliance on marijuana, or receiving advice on his love life from his father and male partner, or the premature destruction of a seemingly-perfect

---

<sup>63</sup> As Durkheim ([1897] 2002:82-94) suggests, the idea of suicide can be passed from one person to another, though acting upon such a thought is not guaranteed.

relationship with Lux – or a combination of all three – which resulted in the man we see 25 years later. The boys from the neighbourhood were already fascinated by the Lisbon girls prior to Cecilia's incident with the razor, but this fascination becomes even greater after her death. Their dogged pursuit of anything Lisbon family-related allows them to amass a huge collection of souvenirs, scraps and other memorabilia with which to remember the girls – which became extremely important once the house falls under Mrs Lisbon's maximum security regime later in the film. As the narrator describes, 'collecting everything we could of theirs, the Lisbon girls wouldn't leave our minds; but they were slipping away. The colour of their eyes was fading, along with exact locations of moles and dimples.' The boys kept the girls under intense surveillance and the film shows this in a number of different ways. When monitoring Lux's late-night rendezvous with a series of random males the boys keep watch via telescope and we mostly see and hear their reaction to the proceedings. They also subscribe to the same travel magazines as the girls and imagine being on holiday with them.

The sight of four ambulance crews rescuing four bodies from the house while the narrator gives us his view of what most likely happened that night offers a macabre ending to this chapter of the story. This dark theme, though, continues into the next scene where we witness a surreal party taking place under cover of pea green smog, with guests wearing gas masks along with their bow ties and fine eveningwear accessories. Following the sudden deaths, the narrator sums up the boys' situation by remarking that they 'began the impossible process of trying to forget them'. The boys begin their tale of the Lisbon sisters by remarking, through their shared narrator, that some people in the community pinpoint the decline in their neighbourhood to the Lisbon sisters' suicides, but not, interestingly, that they contributed to such a decline, but rather they had a degree of 'clairvoyance' and escaped before the mire began. Even if this were true, it is unlikely to be a sentiment held by the boys themselves, as they end the film bemoaning the selfishness of suicide when there were others around to help, by describing the girl's actions as 'the outrageousness of a human being thinking only of herself'. It is clear their deaths had a devastating and long-lasting effect on the boys who worshipped them. At one point, the narrator refers to the



imagined holidays with the girls as having 'scarred us forever, making us happier with dreams than wives'. Years after the events, the aftermath is still keenly felt, if little understood.

## *Conclusion*

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that films which feature the effect of suicide on a character left behind can be categorised in two ways. Films falling in the first sub-category, where there is obvious character development for the person left to grapple with the consequences of a suicide, generally involve emotionally affecting storylines. *The Luzhin Defence*, *The Reader*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Victim* and *The Hustler* all feature situations of this sort, where somebody close decides that life is no longer for them and commits suicide. The effects on those left behind are devastating and life changing. Typically, such films then focus on the consequent process of character development, often finally leading to a new found confidence that emerges from the harrowing experience of dealing with the suicide. Natalia Katkov completes Luzhin's chess game for him; Michael Berg begins to explain his past to his daughter; Todd Anderson stands up for his deposed English teacher; Melville Farr stands up to the blackmailers; and following Sarah's death, Eddie reassesses his life and emerges stronger than before. He challenges Minnesota Fats to a rematch and breaks free from Bert's pernicious influence. Within the confines of their narratives, it appears that these characters would not have acted like this *without* the impact of suffering the suicide of somebody close to them.

In the second sub-category, there is a degree of intimacy between suicidee and those left behind, but not to the same extent as in the first sub-category, and this may account for the confusion and puzzlement on the part of the living following the suicide of a character they knew. McMurphy attacks Sister Ratched after his friend kills himself in hospital; Nick's friends back in America sing a patriotic song at his wake while trying to come to terms with his rejection of life; and Frankie Machine in *The Man with a Golden Arm* is freed from his obligation to a woman

he injured after she is unmasked as a duplicitous murderer, and his expression upon comprehending what has happened is one of utter bewilderment.<sup>64</sup> After all the years of caring for her, he was deeply puzzled to find out she chose to remain in the wheelchair in order to keep him from leaving. Majid's sudden and horrific suicide in *Caché* similarly leaves its witness stunned and confused and it is this incapacity to understand the reasons for the suicides that distinguish this sub-category from the first. After the Lisbon sisters' deaths, David, Tim, Chase and Parker cannot comprehend what happened, or their part in it. They are left bewildered by the actions of others and their part in the events leaves them scarred.

Across the category as a whole, it is notable that women in these films are represented in stereotypical ways – wives, girlfriends, mothers, daughters, sisters – and these roles contribute to the selection of suicide by the female characters. Trapped and seemingly without opportunity for an escape to freedom, Sarah, Lux, Bonnie, Therese and Mary choose to kill themselves and escape the restrictions placed upon them. The impositions upon them range from Lux being told to cover her shoulders at the dinner table, to prom dresses being designed – by a protective mother – to cover as much flesh as possible, to prom dates being vetted for suitability. Farrimond (2011) suggests that, 'the teenage girl can define her image in accordance with one of two key paradigms: virgin or whore' (2011:85) and there are glimpses of both within *The Virgin Suicides*. At numerous points in the film, the girls' looks are either commented on by other characters or picked out by lingering camerawork and close up shots. *The Virgin Suicides* may differ in its use of a single narrator recounting collective memories, in progressing at a leisurely pace, featuring a significant number of suicides, and in withholding salient pieces of information about why characters acted as they did, but it still uses the "female form" in a conventional way (well lit, accentuating looks). It is this combination of established cinematic tradition and nuanced style that helps to expand the body of generic conventions and provide new ways of representing established storylines. For Kennedy (2010), therefore, '*The Virgin*

---

<sup>64</sup> Another of Sinatra's characters, Major Marco, has a similar look of bemusement on his face at the end of *The Manchurian Candidate*, having recently seen his brainwashed comrade kill himself.

*Suicides* ... serves as a prolonged exploration into the degree to which female characters are idealised, objectified and defined by the image that the film – and their society – imposes upon them' (2010:44).

Sarah, in *The Hustler*, is rather differently constructed, in as much as she is not dwelt upon as a spectacle in quite the same way as the girls in *The Virgin Suicides*. Her physical disability impacts upon our perception of her, as well as the fact that she is an adult woman in a problematic relationship with a complex central character. Her suicide occurs at a pivotal point in the film, with Eddie having spurned her help and struggling on the billiards table. Her death reminds Eddie of what is important in his life and memories of her pervade the rest of the film. Both the story and the style ensure that Sarah's death is experienced as a turning point in the film. As she lies dead in the bathroom, Eddie treats her body with such reverence that he is unable to touch it, so distressed is he. The suicides in *The Virgin Suicides*, however, are treated in a more detached manner; there is simply not the "shock" factor. As Kaveney (2006) suggests, in relation to *Heathers* but applicable here as well, 'teen suicide is a social expectation' (2006:78) and Cecilia's first attempt seems to affect hardly any of the other characters at all. Tremendous pain is evident for the Lisbons as Cecilia's body lies spiked on the fence following her second, successful attempt, but the multiple suicides are so bizarre – a studiously different method per sister – and discussed by the narrator in the same deadpan manner as the wry observations that have gone before, that we are not invited to respond to them in the same way that *The Hustler's* dependence on the conventions of serious (melo)drama invite us to respond to Sarah's suicide. In fact, by the time Lux, Bonnie, Mary and Therese sever ties with life, suicide is considered a suitable topic for a joke by a man at a debutante's party, throwing himself into a swimming pool and proclaiming, 'you don't understand me, I'm a teenager. I've got problems!' His joke receives few laughs, but no audible condemnation either, suggesting that culturally as well, attitudes have changed and the shock of suicide has decreased to the point where it can be joked about. The difference in attitudes to suicide between the two films can be summed up thus: the loss of Sarah is treated as a serious occurrence and allows the film to explore the different responses to dealing with it taken by Bert and Eddie. The deaths of the Lisbon sisters, though evidently

confusing for four neighbouring boys, were not unexpected for the viewer; indeed, the narrator suggests that the girls had shown a degree of 'clairvoyance' and escaped before the decline of their community set in, underlining a tone which is markedly different to that seen in the "serious" drama of *The Hustler*.

We have seen how both the exemplary films draw upon generic conventions and that both reference narrative, thematic and stylistic traditions already likely to be familiar to their audiences. Of course, neither the teen film nor the "serious" drama need always involve suicide, but over the course of this chapter I have outlined how in these movies teenage angst and adult relationship problems, along with variously problematic gender roles, can plausibly give rise to a character committing suicide, and how that suicide can be represented as affecting those left behind in a variety of ways.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored new terrain in seeking to investigate representations of suicide in film, particularly in relation to the construction of gender and to the cinematic conventions and traditions within which movie suicide has been framed. To carry out this study, plot and character information from hundreds of cinema releases were first examined and from this data a list of 350 films featuring suicide or attempted suicide was produced. In order to classify the films for purposes of closer examination, a set of distinctions were introduced based upon the narrative function played by the suicide event in each film. This permitted the films to be analysed in comparison with others within the same category, allowed the development of certain sub-categories where that proved useful, and facilitated comparison across the categorial system. A smaller group of six films were then selected as exemplary cases drawn from each of the three main groupings and were subjected to more detailed analysis regarding constructions of suicide, character, narrative, style, presumptions about gender and relevant cinematic tradition.

Analysis of the dataset in terms of suicidal methods showed that, with the exception of poisoning and drowning, men outnumber women for every other suicidal method featured in this research.<sup>65</sup> There has been a particular increase in the number of suicides in films released in the last twenty years, and, in some contrast to real world statistics, a high proportion of these suicidees are male (67% male and 33% female for suicides across all categories and sub-categories since 1992). For Melancholic suicides, the film characters here are mainly men and the majority of these films were released post-1990. For Occasioned suicides, the single largest category in this research, there is a consistent spread of males and females across the decades until the 1990s when there is sharp increase in numbers and some notable gender differences within the sub-categories. For instance, men greatly outnumber women in both the sub-category where a perpetrator of an act kills him/herself (males 80%, females

---

<sup>65</sup> Other notable methods include gun, cutting/stabbing, hanging, exhaust fumes, explosion, electric shock and suicide by vehicle.

20%), and in the sub-category of heroic suicides (males 80%, females 20%), but for the sub-category where a victim of an act commits suicide, numbers of men and women are much more even (males 56%, females 44%). These figures tie in with traditional conventions of active male film characters and passive female film characters, though this situation is often inverted in distinctive ways in *film noir* or *neo-noir*. The proportion of men and women in the group of films showing the consequences of a suicide are also evenly matched, with the majority of films appearing post-1990.

As one might expect, constructions of film suicides relate to pained characters in often painful situations which the films document in varying detail. This has remained constant throughout a century of the cinema. In each sub-category there are films produced both before and after 1960, demonstrating the general consistency of storylines regarding suicide. Where the consequences of suicide are explored in the film then that pain is passed from the suicidee to the living characters left behind. Even those characters enacting heroic suicides are shown to imagine the anguish that will be caused if decisive action is not taken. In addition to the consistent presence of troublesome and painful circumstances, let us assess what else has remained more or less consistent across the period of this research, followed by those features that have clearly changed over time.

The construction of male and female film characters has remained broadly constant, with roles for females tending to centre on the familial and private, while roles for males offer more variety in the public domain. We have already seen how researchers such as Haskell defined such roles, particularly those felt to be stereotypical depictions of women, and in relation to American cinema, Milestone and Meyer (2012) conclude that, 'the Hollywood dream factory has worked tirelessly, both on screen and off, to paint and reinforce cultural ideas about gender norms' (2012:53). Thus, in *The Virgin Suicides* the Lisbon sisters rebel against the roles of dutiful daughters expected of them by their parents and consequently kill themselves. And even where the generic conventions of *film noir* and *neo-noir* allow for a woman to defy the safe confines of the home and play the part of the *femme fatale*, as in both versions of *The Killers*, their movie

world remains corrupt and morally ambiguous, and the women do not prosper in the long term.

Social scientists suggest that in most Western societies, men successfully kill themselves more than women do and women attempt suicide (but remain alive) more than men do (for instance McIntosh (2009) and Clare (2000)). However, we have seen that, in films, more men than women attempt suicide. Initially this gave rise to the hypothesis that the reason for the imbalance relates to a perceived “crisis of masculinity”. It is important to note, though, that even before notions of masculinity being in a “crisis” arose, there were more men trying to and committing suicide in films, and therefore the distinctive gender imbalance on-screen is more likely to result from a combination of cinematic tradition and gender conventions regarding film representations of men and women. As we saw in Chapter 2, there is a disparity in representations of men and women in terms of typical roles played on-screen. The active protagonist in the cinema is predominantly male and, therefore, as numbers of film suicides and attempted suicides have risen, so have numbers of men finding themselves in suicidal situations.

The hegemony of heterosexuality in mainstream films has stayed constant across the dataset, though, as we have seen in relation to both Alain in *Le Feu Follet* and Ben in *Leaving Las Vegas*, it can sometimes be problematised. Alain is financially supported in his private clinic by his estranged wife and incapable of forming emotional attachments with women, while Ben is unable to offer love of a physical nature to Sera until just hours before he dies. Some suggestions of masculinity in crisis, then, do feature in the films of this research, but not generally in such a way as to decisively propel character behaviour towards suicide without additional factors intervening. As we have seen in relation to the exemplary films, other narrative elements contribute to and/or mitigate a character’s suicidal actions. While Alain and Ben are demonstrably unable to fulfil the traditional gender role of breadwinner, there are other reasons suggested for their inherent unhappiness, most notably the effects of alcoholism and an unspecified angst which pervades their actions. Swede and Johnny North suffer at the hands of women whom they trusted and loved, but by the present time of

the films both have moved away and started new lives elsewhere, apparently managing to live with the long-term consequences of their failed relationships if with a constant undercurrent of ennui. And in *The Hustler*, even as Eddie struggles with the challenge to his autonomy in the masculine world of pool following the injuries to his thumbs, and his consequent need for Sarah's help, he has other frustrations relating to that larger, male world which come to adversely affect his relationship with Sarah.

Issues regarding body imagery of female characters, and their much documented treatment as spectacle, have remained constant, with physical appearance and clothes of females subjected to much greater scrutiny than for males. This is most obvious in *The Virgin Suicides* where, for example, little attention is paid to selection of the boys' outfits for the prom, but a great deal of screen time is spent on the girls' dresses for the same occasion. As for the adult women in the other exemplary films, Kitty Collins, Sheila Farr, Sera and Sarah are all clearly constructed to be 'looked at' by both other characters and spectators, and while Sarah's limp affects her physical appearance, she is still seen as desirable by the two male leads in the film and presented as such to the spectator.

Having outlined those aspects which have remained constant across the data, let us now review those features that have changed with time.

Through the writings of Durkheim (2002), Douglas (1967) and Atkinson (1971), we saw how the meaning of suicide is culturally constructed and has therefore meant different things at different times in different societies. Recent research by Reynders et al (2011) and O'Donnell and Farmer (1995) has shown how even among professionals dealing with potential suicides on a regular basis, in this case death by train, similar behaviour can be categorised differently, prompting caution in relation to official suicide statistics and to the potential for changing emphases in what we more generally count as suicide.

This question of what precisely constitutes a suicide is foregrounded in the two versions of *The Killers*. In the 1946 version, Swede's death is investigated as murder, which it clearly is, resigned though he may be to it, and the physicality of



the moment itself is given little onscreen attention. In the 1964 version, North's death is explicitly seen as a kind of suicide by the hitmen who kill him, and the violence of his final moments are shown in some detail, clearly a reflection of changing conventions of movie portrayal of violence in the intervening years, suggesting also that culturally-held views regarding suicide had also altered, allowing this more explicit depiction in a Hollywood film.

Despite male film characters being constructed with an expectation of strength and the drive to use it, in *noir* and *neo-noir* this is not necessarily the ultimately dominant pattern. By neither running nor fighting back, Swede and North reject conventional masculine ideals and accept death when it is offered. Suicide is their choice having been ruthlessly let down by women they loved. In relation to Lancaster's Swede, this provides a significant puzzle, as despite his evident strength and accentuated physique he still opts for death without any objection. Though the insurance investigator, Reardon, seeks the stolen money from the hat factory robbery, after the opening scenes, the audience want to know why Swede does not fight back. And, as already observed, this question is what prompts Strom's inquiry in the later version, following North's meek acquiescence to his gun.

The "shock factor" in the visual portrayal of violence in general and suicide in particular appears to have changed over time and differs between particular film traditions and genres. This can be seen in relation to *The Hustler* and *The Virgin Suicides*. Sarah's suicide is a highly emotionally charged and unexpected off-screen event in *The Hustler*, although the viewer is aware that she was emotionally unstable, the filming of the scene means that they share the same surprise that Eddie does in finding that she has taken her own life. In the later more "postmodern" and indie-inspired *The Virgin Suicides* this element of surprise is completely removed. The film begins by alerting us to the fact that suicides will feature and, despite the ghoulish endings of the sisters' lives, they do not provide the same emotional shock as the earlier film. This is due to the combination of a montage-style series of images as each body is recovered, the muted responses by characters in the immediate aftermath of the discovery of

the deaths, and the deadpan narration, attempting to explain what happened in the house that night.

In relation to the alcohol-addiction film, subtle changes have taken place in the representation of suicide. Both Alain and Ben spend much of the film dwelling on their choice of suicide, but with noticeable differences. While Alain rails against his world, distances himself from the audience, and dies quickly from a gunshot wound, Ben fails in life, chooses drink as his method of suicide and slowly wastes away. Though we see Alain become more and more dissatisfied with what life has to offer, his actual suicide is swift and matter-of-fact. *Leaving Las Vegas*, however, closely charts Ben's visible decline and is much more explicit in its depiction of Ben's demise.

Another element that has changed over time concerns the category of Melancholic Suicide. Such suicides were rare until the 1970s when they began appearing with much greater frequency, with both men and women suffering from a variation on Alain's depressive *ennui* as seen in *Le Feu Follet*. This increase in numbers ties in with the rise in the medicalization of depression in Western cultures at around the same time, perhaps suggesting a greater awareness of depressive symptoms amongst film audiences. Filmmakers appear to have felt more able than before to articulate themes of deep sadness, listlessness, despair and exaggerated boredom with life – with no seemingly identifiable cause – and notably more suicidal characters, constructed with such inner turmoil, are seen in the cinema.

Following this overview of continuity and change in relation to the representation of suicide, with reference to gender and generic convention, it only remains to recap on the detailed analysis of the exemplary films. The first case studies, those of *Le Feu Follet* and *Leaving Las Vegas*, were taken to exemplify Melancholic Suicides, where an individual pursues suicide owing to an overwhelming desire to die emanating from within. Such characters are often plagued by profound sadness and exhibit a depressive demeanour. These two films were explored in relation to their cinematic contexts in the *French Nouvelle Vague* and the alcohol-addiction movie, and it was seen that these traditions

affect the portrayal of suicide and its relation to gender in these films. The distinctive stylistic and thematic emphases of the *Nouvelle Vague* provide a congenial context for Alain's lengthy discussions about life and love with his acquaintances at parties or on the many street locations of the film. In *Leaving Las Vegas*, Sera and Ben's apparent isolation amongst the hordes of gamblers and holiday makers, in conjunction with the bright colours of Las Vegas, draw the viewer into their private world, adding extra emphasis to Ben's ultimate demise. Alain and Ben choose suicide early in the narrative and the films end as this is achieved.

The category of Occasioned suicides was exemplified in the 1946 and 1964 versions of *The Killers*, where suicide results from events documented in the narrative. Within this overall category, three sub-categories were identified on the basis of the data: suicide in order for characters to escape justice of some kind; suicide where they were victims of an unpleasant situation; suicide for reasons of heroism. The two exemplary films here were contextualised in terms of their respective generic conventions, namely *film noir* and *neo-noir*, and it was seen that these traditions had a marked influence on the representation of suicide and gender in the films. This revolved primarily around the characteristic narrative trope of *film noir* where double crossing by *femmes fatales* could lead to a man giving up on life and choosing not to flee even when warned that he is in serious danger. Of course, the Occasioned Suicide category more generally offers a wider range than this of explanations for the suicidal event, dependent on both generic locus and the specific details of the various narratives. Nevertheless, the exemplary films here provide an illuminating illustration of the interactions between a particular cinematic tradition and film representations of suicide.

The final case studies – *The Hustler* and *The Virgin Suicides* – exemplify that group of films where a major focus is on the consequences for the living following a suicide. Within this group it proved possible to discern a further two sub-groups distinguished by reference to the typical responses of characters to the suicide. Did the suicidal event elicit development in the character(s), such that behaviour once seemingly beyond their reach was now possible? Or was the suicide

merely met with bafflement and confusion? The exemplary films, each representing one of these two sub-groups, were contextualised in terms of their respective cinematic traditions, namely “serious” drama and teen movies, and generic conventions were found to influence onscreen portrayals of suicide, of gender, and how suicide affects other characters in the film. Following Sarah’s suicide in *The Hustler*, Eddie develops a steely inner strength which allows him to better understand his own emotions, to succeed on the pool table, and to stand up for Sarah’s reputation against the hitherto all-powerful Bert. After the Lisbon sisters’ deaths in *The Virgin Suicides*, in contrast, the four local boys react only with bewilderment, a response which marks them into their adult lives.

This thesis has explored representations of suicide in film, particularly in relation to the construction of gender and to the generic traditions within which movie suicide has been portrayed and has found that both gender and generic conventions can affect cinematic representations of suicide. A wide range of suicide types can feature in a similarly wide range of film types, illustrating just how universal a theme suicide is. Suicide has been used in films to explore a variety of human emotions, from pride to shame, heroism to guilt, and loneliness to *esprit de corps*. Whether chosen as the result of a period of intensive introspection, or to escape justice, or to escape harm, or even to save others, it is clear that gender and generic conventions have significantly influenced the ways in which suicide has been represented and utilised narratively in the cinema.

## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A. *Le Feu Follet*

### Sequence Analysis

Number	Film time (h.m.s)	Sequence length (m.s)	Description
1	0	1.45	Credits
2	1.45	2.45	A couple are in bed together in what looks like a hotel room. Alain apologises to Lydia. She says 'poor Alain, you look so sad.'
3	4.30	4.17	They smoke a cigarette each. Then they dress and talk as they do so. Lydia is leaving for NY. She believes he is cured, though she does not say of what. They talk about Dorothy, Alain's estranged wife. She pays his clinic fees.
4	8.47	1.12	Alain says 'I do silly things when I'm miserable'. They leave the hotel. Alain tips the chamber maid with his watch rather than cash.
5	9.59	2.06	Alain confesses it has been almost four months without a drink. Lydia writes him a cheque, 'a gambling debt.'
6	12.05	3.11	In a taxi, Lydia asks why Alain stays at the clinic. He is in no rush to get back to an ordinary life. She asks him to go to NY with her but he refuses and goes into clinic.
7	15.16	3.34	After changing his jacket, he eats in the dining room with the other patients. Two gents argue about philosophy. A middle-aged couple talk. A young woman struggles with her words and a middle-aged woman talks to Alain about the fact he slept elsewhere the night before. He excuses himself and goes out to the terrace. She follows him and they talk some more. He goes upstairs to his room, via the billiards room where the other patients have moved to.
8	18.50	4.38	Alain is out of breath and stares round the room. He cuts out a newspaper story and sticks it to his mirror 'Tragedy! 5yr old tries to fly.' There are other stories in a similar vein stuck up as well. 23 July is written on his mirror. He paces about. He pins cheque up.
9	23.28	1.43	Alain writes quickly, then edits what he has written. He smokes.
10	25.11	1.39	He retrieves his pistol from his briefcase and fiddles with it. His rumination is disturbed by the sound of car horns outside. He looks out of window and sees a car has broken down. A woman walks into his view and he follows her progress along the road.

11	26.50	6.06	His doctor visits him in his room and they talk. It is mentioned that the clinic is in Versailles. They play a few moves of chess. The doctor confirms that Alain is cured, but Alain reiterates his desire to stay. He is waiting for a letter from his wife in NY. It transpires he was in the army and is in debt. He tells the doctor 'I'll be gone by the weekend, whatever happens.' The doctor leaves by saying, 'life is good' to which Alain replies 'tell me why, doctor.'
12	32.56	0.39	He holds the gun again and says to himself 'life moves too slowly in me. I'll put it right.'
13	33.35	0.23	In bed, Alain declares 'tomorrow, I'll kill myself'.
14	33.58	4.58	Alain is woken by a hand stroking his hair. It is one of the members of staff at the clinic. She reminds him to telegram his wife, as per the doctor's instruction. He jumps out of bed and gets ready to go into Paris. As he dresses he has several attempts at getting the wording of the telegram right by talking to inanimate objects. He throws all his writing away. Once he has settled on the wording he scribbles it down and asks a maid to send it.
15	38.56	3.16	Alain leaves the clinic and goes into a café for some cigarettes. He asks for 'sweet Afton' but the man in the café has not heard of them before. Two mail deliverers enter and Alain buys them a drink. They give him a lift in to Paris. He tells them he does not drink and that he is ill.
16	42.12	1.18	He goes to the bank and cashes Lydia's cheque. It is a substantial amount of money.
17	43.30	5.39	In the Hotel Quai Voltaire, he meets old acquaintances and his past drinking exploits are referred to. The staff think he looks ill. He uses the telephone to arrange a meeting. A young couple enter the bar looking tired and dishevelled. The man, Michel Bostel, and Alain talk. Alain refers to Michel as his 'successor' then he leaves.
18	49.09	6.58	Alain gives the taxi driver a generous tip and goes to see Dubourg, a friend who is an Egyptologist. He stays and eats with the family. Dubourg offers Alain the chance to go to Egypt with them.
19	56.07	5.43	The two men go outside and talk as they walk through the Parisian streets. Alain is accused of being 'stuck in adolescence' to which he replies that he 'won't get old'.
20	1.01.50	4.15	Alain leaves his friend and walks alone. He stops at an art gallery to see another friend, Eva, and they walk to the market. They talk about old times. A mutual friend killed herself the year before. She asks Alain to stay but he says he has just come to say goodbye.
21	1.06.05	2.31	They go to a commune-like place where there are a number of 'intellectuals' talking and smoking. Urcel, a poet, talks the most and annoys Alain, who strides about criticising people's reasons for staying alive. Then he leaves.
22	1.08.36	0.35	He goes to a bookshop to ask the whereabouts of the Minville brothers. Then he heads for the café which they frequent.

23	1.09.11	6.24	Alain meets the brothers and they talk about old times in the army together and current events in their lives. They leave him and he watches the world go by. He notices a shot of alcohol on the table and is tempted by it. After drinking it he instantly feels ill and rushes to the bathroom to wash his face. He is in a bad state.
24	1.15.35	1.17	It begins to rain and Alain has no coat or umbrella. He stumbles about the streets and is rescued just before a car hits him.
25	1.16.52	2.29	Alain goes to see Lavaud and is put to bed to recover. Two women go to see him and they know he is ill after drinking since the cure.
26	1.19.21	3.49	Alain wakes up and tidies himself in the bathroom. He leaves the bedroom and descends the stairs. His friend is in the middle of a dinner party and the talking stops as soon as they see Alain. He is introduced as a 'ghost'. At the table, he only eats cheese.
27	1.23.10	3.33	A story is told about an intoxicated man sleeping on the tomb of the unknown soldier, which turns out to be Alain. They move to another part of the house to continue the party. Alain is told that his wife has filed for divorce in NY on the grounds of 'mental cruelty'.
28	1.26.43	4.34	Alain is given a drink and he swallows it, then smashes the glass, cutting his hand. He is introduced to a man he has not met before, though he cannot keep his eyes off a woman named Solange, who he used to be in a relationship with. She is now with Lavaud but being courted by Brancion, a wealthy anti-drinking man.
29	1.31.17	3.24	Solange tries to convince Alain to go back to Dorothy, or Lydia. Alain feels sorry for himself. He leaves suddenly and is invited back for lunch the next day. A friend of a friend leaves with him.
30	1.34.41	1.58	On the tram home, they drink and talk about love.
31	1.36.39	2.03	Alain is asleep in his room but the room is messy. There is a bottle by the bed.
32	1.38.42	1.56	He wakes up and is asked by the maid if he wants breakfast and he gives her some money so he is not disturbed. He tidies his photos away and puts the remainder of the money in his briefcase. He shaves and uses aftershave. He finishes packing his case.
33	1.40.46	1.34	The telephone rings and it is Solange reminding him about lunch. He says he will be there. He hangs up abruptly.
34	1.42.20	1.19	Alain reads a book and finishes it. He puts his glasses down and picks the pistol up. He cocks it, opens his shirt to reveal his chest and shoots himself in his heart.
35	1.43.39	0.06	His suicide note is shown onscreen, translated as 'I kill myself because you have never loved me. Because I have never loved you. My death will tighten the slack bonds between us. I shall leave on you an indelible stain.'
36	1.43.45		The end.



## Traits and States ~ Alain Leroy

1	Alain is in bed with Lydia. They talk about his estranged wife and about the treatment he has recently received. He admits to silly behaviour when he is miserable. <i>Apologetic, thoughtful, pensive</i>
2	As they leave the hotel, Alain gives the chambermaid his watch instead of a cash tip. <i>Unconcerned with material items</i>
3	In a café Alain admits to not having had a drink for nearly four months <i>Determined</i>
4	Lydia asks why Alain does not want to leave the clinic and he says 'a patient's life is well ordered. It's a shelter.' <i>Feels in need of structure and rules</i>
5	As Lydia leaves, Alain pleads with her to stay 'don't go', 'please don't go', 'it's serious'. <i>Needy</i>
6	She asks him to go to NY with her but he refuses. She has no choice but to return to NY and says 'I know I'm leaving you to your own worst enemy: yourself'. <i>Anxious to stay within the confines of the clinic</i>
7	In the clinic he interacts with one other patient – a middle aged woman he partially flirts with – but generally avoids contact with the rest. He retreats to his room. <i>Introverted, unconcerned how others perceive him</i>
8	He drifts about his room, stopping the clock from chiming by moving the hands forward. <i>Bored</i>
9	As he sits at his desk, Alain writes quickly and edits his work ruthlessly. He holds his pistol but puts it down to look out of the window and watch a woman cross the road. <i>Absorbed with his writing, absentminded while holding gun, interested in women</i>
10	While talking with his doctor, Alain states his desire to stay, but also that he will 'be gone by the weekend'. They talk about his wife and it seems as though the doctor instigated the recent letter to her that Alain sent. He is told to telegram her for a reply. <i>Confused about staying or going, aggressive in tone</i>
11	Holding the gun for a second time, Alain insists that 'life moves too slowly in me' and that he will 'put it right'. In bed, Alain comments 'tomorrow, I'll kill myself'. <i>Determined to end his life</i>
12	The next day, Alain dresses to go out. As he does so, he rehearses the wording for the telegram to Dorothy. Before leaving he destroys his folder full of writing. <i>Stylish dresser, competent with words, vandalistic</i>

13	As he buys cigarettes, he convinces two mail van drivers to take him to Paris. He tells them he is ill: 'my heart'.
	<i>Persuasive, evasive</i>
14	Alain meets some staff at a hotel he used to live at. They think he looks ill. His near-legendary drinking exploits are discussed.
	<i>Friendly, quiet</i>
15	En route to a friend's house, Alain gives the taxi driver a large tip.
	<i>Generous, unconcerned with keeping money for future needs</i>
16	At Dubourg's house, the two talk about life and how fulfilling (or not) it is. Alain confesses to feeling 'sterilised' and experiencing 'emptiness'. He tells Dubourg 'I'm leaving. Don't you understand?'
	<i>Negative, pessimistic</i>
17	As they walk and talk outside, Alain admits that he drank because he was a 'bad lover'. This is the reason he and Dorothy are estranged.
	<i>Honest, subdued</i>
18	Alain meets Eva and they go back to her lodgings via a market. He leaves quite soon after arriving, not being able to put up with the views of Urcel, a poet. His friend stands up for him by saying 'he's a very nice boy and he's very unhappy'.
	<i>Annoyed, frustrated, angry</i>
19	He meets the Minville brothers at a café and he tries to convince them their scheme to commit a robbery is foolish, likening them to 'boy scouts'. Once they leave and after watching the world pass by for a while, Alain takes his first drink for almost four months.
	<i>Bored, alone, isolated, miserable</i>
20	Alain staggers from café to street, through rain and eventually to a friend's house. He is put to bed. They realise he has had a drink 'the first drink after the cure is murder'.
	<i>Helpless, vulnerable</i>
21	While tidying himself up in the bathroom he mutters to himself about the 'security and well-being of these people'.
	<i>Hypocritical, given his yearnings to stay cosseted in the clinic</i>
22	As he joins the dinner party – introduced as a 'ghost' – he keeps looking at a woman he used to date, Solange. He drinks another glass of alcohol and gets a little out of control. He talks about how insignificant he feels when with women.
	<i>Apologetic, controversial, intimidated</i>
23	He travels back to the clinic on foot and by bus with a mutual friend, and they talk about being in and out of love.
	<i>Philosophical, thoughtful</i>
24	Back in his room, Alain wakes with a sore head and a dry throat. His room is disorganised. He pays the maid to stay away until lunch, then dresses and shaves. He carries on packing his personal things into cases.
	<i>Committed to leaving</i>

25	Solange telephones to remind him about their lunch invitation – which he reiterates he will attend – but he ends the conversation hastily.
	<i>Too busy to speak with Solange, focused</i>
26	After finishing a book, he tidies it away, along with his glasses, then picks up his pistol. He shoots himself in the heart. We read his suicide note which refers to leaving an 'indelible stain' on somebody.
	<i>Matter-of-fact, bitter, angry, unkind</i>

## APPENDIX B. *Leaving Las Vegas*

### Sequence Analysis

(Scenes highlighted in **bold** all take place after Ben's death, where Sera recounts her life with Ben).

Number	Film time (h.m.s)	Sequence length (m.s)	Description
1	0	0.55	Preliminary credits.
2	0.55	0.25	Ben shops for alcohol and is in a manic mood. His trolley is full of all kinds of drink.
3	1.20	2.22	In a restaurant, four people are socialising. Ben arrives – uninvited – to speak to one of them and is drunk. He needs money and asks to borrow some cash. The man reluctantly agrees but lets Ben know where he stands, 'don't contact me again'.
4	3.42	2.26	Ben is in a bar, trying to chat up a woman. He is told to back off by the bartender. The woman leaves, 'maybe you shouldn't drink so much'. He replies, 'maybe I shouldn't breathe so much'.
5	6.08	1.23	In a car, Ben swigs vodka as he drives. He goes to a strip club but is more interested in drinking from his own alcohol supply than watching the performance.
6	7.31	1.14	Ben talks to a prostitute but slurs his words. He says he is not sure whether he drinks because his wife left him, or whether she left him because he started drinking.
7	8.45	0.31	Ben wakes up on his kitchen floor and recollects that the prostitute stole his wedding ring the night before.
8	9.16	0.54	While standing in line at a bank Ben has a bad case of the shakes. He cannot countersign his cheque. He lies about having had brain surgery and leaves in order to sort himself out.
9	10.10	1.18	Back in the same bar as earlier in the film, the bartender tries to talk some sense into Ben, but Ben is resistant.
10	11.28	1.01	Back in the bank, and after some drinks, Ben is much better composed and can hold a pen. He fantasises about the cashier while talking into a voice-recorder and tries to chat her up.
11	12.29	2.29	In his office, Ben pretends to be working when a secretary tells him to go and see his boss. He tries to avoid the meeting but has to go and is told, 'we're gonna let you go'. Ben receives a settlement – 'more than generous' – and says he intends to move to Las Vegas.
12	15.08	0.12	Acting credits appear, overlapping images on screen (up to 18.04).
13	15.20	0.43	A Latvian man, Yuri, talks to a group of people at a private party.

14	16.03	2.06	Sera is in a lift, on her way to the private party. She is a prostitute, working for Yuri.
<b>15</b>	<b>18.09</b>	<b>0.38</b>	<b><i>Sera begins to talk about her life in Las Vegas.</i></b>
16	18.47	1.19	Sera is interrogated by Yuri. He asks why she left him in LA and says they belong together. We see them in bed.
17	20.06	4.10	Ben is in a supermarket and then back at home. He is destroying his old life by bagging up or burning all his personal effects. He burns his passport. He leaves LA and travels through the wilderness towards Las Vegas. He stops at a gas station and a man talks about Yuri on the phone, though not in English. Ben arrives in Las Vegas and nearly knocks Sera over by ignoring a red light. He checks into a motel.
<b>18</b>	<b>24.16</b>	<b>1.25</b>	<b><i>Sera talks about being a prostitute (while she lies on a couch).</i></b>
19	25.41	5.49	Ben is in his car, drinking and he meets Sera again. He picks her up and is fascinated by her. She seems to like him too. They go back to his motel room. Sera is surprised by the amount of alcohol, 'wow, what this room needs is more booze!' They start to get physical but he is uncomfortable and asks her to stop. He just wants her to stay with him, chat and nothing else.
20	31.30	2.08	She asks him why he has come to Las Vegas and he replies, 'I came here to drink myself to death'. He thinks it will take him about 'four weeks?' and he has enough money for '250 to 300 dollars a day'. Sera says she is happy with life in Las Vegas.
21	33.38	2.17	After noticing the time, Sera dashes off. She sees Yuri who is not happy with the money from last night. He hits her. She challenges him to cut her again, but she is scared.
<b>22</b>	<b>35.55</b>	<b>0.26</b>	<b><i>Sera explains Uri cut her twice when they were in LA.</i></b>
23	36.21	1.09	Ben visits a pawn shop to get rid of his watch. Yuri is also there trying to raise money with jewellery.
24	37.30	1.49	In a hotel bar, Sera talks to a man but he storms off when he realises she is a prostitute.
<b>25</b>	<b>39.19</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b><i>Sera talks about her situation at the time.</i></b>
26	39.48	4.30	Sera finds Ben, drunk in the street. He is low. He had been looking for her and asks her to dinner. She refuses and leaves. She goes to see Yuri and he is paranoid about the people in the room next door. He tells her to leave and not come back. As she goes, a group of armed men arrive.
27	44.18	5.00	Ben is in his motel room and Sera turns up. She asks him to dinner and they go out. Ben does not eat though. 'Why are you killing yourself?' 'I don't remember. I just know that I want to'. She suggests he stays at her flat. They go there. Ben thinks it is 'the home of an angel'.
<b>28</b>	<b>49.18</b>	<b>0.50</b>	<b><i>Sera talks about being herself with Ben and how much she liked the time she spent with him.</i></b>

29	50.08	3.36	She suggests he move in permanently and Ben says 'you can never ever ask me to stop drinking'. She agrees and they kiss. He packs his hotel room.
30	53.44	5.33	Sera turns up at her apartment block to find Ben asleep at the gate. Her landlord and landlady are not happy. Ben is in love with her 'but I am not here to force my twisted soul into your life'. She intends to continue working as a prostitute. He is fine with that. She has bought him a new shirt and a new hip flask.
31	59.17	6.39	They go out gambling. He steadily drinks himself into a stupor and is enraged when a waitress refuses to serve him anymore. He tips over a card table and they are escorted out. Back at Sera's, Ben has a horrendous fit of the shakes and drinks vodka and orange juice straight from the fridge. He is sick and cuddles up with Sera. He cannot remember much of the previous night, 'how can you be so good?' She replies 'I'm just using you. I need you' and cries. She tells him she is working that night. Ben goes out for breakfast.
32	1.05.56	3.55	The bakery is shut but a nearby bar is open. Ben gets beaten up for chatting to a girl. His new shirt is ruined. Sera cleans him up.
33	1.09.51	2.58	Out shopping, Ben gives Sera some earrings. Her working is now a touchy subject. He says something unkind to her.
34	1.12.49	1.30	Sera dresses up to go out working. She suggests they go away to a quiet spot in the desert for a few days.
35	1.14.19	6.13	At the motel in the desert they watch television ( <i>The Third Man</i> ). The next day they are affectionate towards one another by the pool and are about to go inside for some privacy when Ben falls over a glass table and makes a mess, as well as injuring himself. The lady in charge asks them to leave, 'we get a lot of screw-ups here'.
36	1.20.32	7.28	At Sera's, Ben wakes up to find her cooking. He is in a bad state and takes some bottles into the shower to drink while bathing. At meal time, she eats and he tries to. She asks him to see a doctor and gets upset. 'Do this one thing for me'. He eats an ice cube. She goes out working. Ben goes out gambling and is picked up by another prostitute. Sera finds them together in her flat and asks him to leave. She cries.
37	1.28.00	5.05	Sera is picked up by a group of friends but they get rough. She takes a taxi home and while showering, remembers the unpleasant experience of the night before. After seeing her staggering back in a bad state, her landlady asks her to leave at the end of the month.
38	1.33.05	4.05	Upset, Sera sits by the side of the road. She tries to find Ben and is asked to leave a casino. She goes home. Her phone rings: Ben.
39	1.37.10	5.35	Sera goes to Ben. He is barely alive, but says 'I want to see you'. They make love for the first time. They sleep. Ben wakes up, looks lovingly at Sera then dies. Sera wakes some time later.

40	1.42.45	0.51	<b>Sera talks about her time with Ben, 'I really loved him'.</b>
41	1.43.36		We see Ben looking healthy and attractive, before the credits begin.

## Traits and States ~ Ben

1	Ben shops for alcohol. <i>High, manic</i>
2	Ben visits an old friend to ask him for some money. <i>Needy, out-of-the-loop in terms of film studio positions</i>
3	Chats to a woman in a bar but is turned down. <i>Hyper, sorry for himself</i>
4	In a strip club, as the dancer loses more layers of clothes, Ben drinks from his hip flask even more energetically. <i>Sullen, addicted to drink</i>
5	While with a prostitute, he confesses he does not remember why he started drinking. <i>Sorry for himself, morose</i>
6	After waking on his kitchen floor, Ben remembers sections of the night before. <i>Rueful, low</i>
7	In the bank, Ben is unable to hold a pen steady enough to sign his name. <i>Introverted, subdued, embarrassed by his condition</i>
8	Ben goes to a bar to calm his shakes and argues with the bartender. <i>Confident</i>
9	When in the bank for the second time, Ben vocalises his passion for the bank clerk. <i>Extroverted, swaggering</i>
10	In his office, Ben pretends to be having an important phone call, but the phone handset is the wrong way round. He then gets the sack from his boss. <i>Unwilling to deal with reality, showing off to the secretary, meek with his boss</i>
11	Ben empties his house by throwing out or burning his personal possessions. He leaves. <i>Clear-headed, focused</i>

12	After nearly running Sera over, Ben meets her again and picks her up. They end up just talking in his motel room. He explains why he has moved to Las Vegas.
	<i>Besotted, embarrassed, committed</i>
13	Ben pawns his watch for \$500.
	<i>Excitable, manic</i>
14	Ben and Sera meet but Sera will not go to dinner with him.
	<i>Low, gloomy</i>
15	Sera changes her mind and they go out to dinner. Ben is invited to stay with Sera, first on a temporary basis, then permanently.
	<i>Grateful, happy, in love</i>
16	During a night out with Sera, Ben gets mad and causes some damage at a casino.
	<i>Angry, difficult to control</i>
17	The morning after the tantrum, Ben and Sera cuddle up as Ben has the violent shakes.
	<i>Mild, contrite</i>
18	At a bar Ben lets himself be chatted up by a woman, whose boyfriend then beats Ben up. Sera cleans him up and they go out shopping. He says something unkind about her job.
	<i>Unable to say no to a woman's advances, possessive of Sera</i>
19	At a motel in the desert, Ben and Sera embrace passionately but the drink takes over and he smashes a table and hurts himself. The moment has passed.
	<i>Affectionate, clumsy</i>
20	Back at Sera's, Ben is in bad shape. He drinks in the shower and they squabble about his refusal to go and see a doctor.
	<i>Committed to dying by alcohol</i>
21	Ben is picked up by a woman and Sera finds them together. Ben is asked to leave.
	<i>Immature, uncaring</i>
22	Ben phones Sera to make up and they sleep together for the first and last time. He dies.
	<i>Affectionate, contented</i>



## Traits and States ~ Sera

As with the Sequence Analysis, entries in **bold** relate to scenes where Sera refers back to her life with Ben.

1	Sera is adjusting her hair and appearance in a lift, on her way to a private party. <i>Concerned by how she looks</i>
2	<b>Sera talks to camera about her working days.</b> <i>Confident</i>
3	Sera and Uri talk, then sleep together. She first meets Ben in Las Vegas. <i>Forbearance, confident</i>
4	<b>Sera recounts another story from her days as a prostitute.</b> <i>Upset, sad</i>
5	Sera meets Ben again and agrees to go to his motel with him. She explains what she will and will not do and they get physical, though Ben stops her and they talk. <i>Intrigued, confident</i>
6	She ask him about his plans and is not shocked by his assertion that he means to die. <i>Happy, contented</i>
7	Sera wakes and leaves to see Uri. He hits her. <i>Scared</i>
8	<b>Talking to camera, Sera remembers Uri cutting her twice.</b> <i>Matter of fact, sad</i>
9	Sera is working and tries to pick a man up in a hotel bar but is rebuffed. <i>Confident, apologetic</i>
10	<b>Sera talks to camera about life as a prostitute and about missing Ben, a little.</b> <i>Wistful</i>
11	Sera tracks Ben down but declines his offer of dinner. She goes to see Uri but is told to leave as he suspects his life is in danger. <i>Caring</i>

12	Sera turns up at Ben's motel room and they go out to dinner. She questions him about his aim of killing himself. She asks him to move in with her and they go to her home.
	<i>Considerate, kind</i>
13	<b>Talking to camera, Sera remembers how she could just be herself with Ben.</b>
	<i>Happy, loving</i>
14	She suggests they live together permanently and promises never to ask Ben to stop drinking. When she finds Ben asleep on the step of her apartment block, she helps him inside and gives him presents.
	<i>Loving, empathetic</i>
15	While out in LV with Ben, she tries to keep him under control, but he loses his temper. Back at her house, she explains what happened, saying, 'I'm just using you. I need you'.
	<i>Caring, desperate</i>
16	After Ben gets a bloody nose in a bar, Sera cleans his face and they go out shopping. They talk about her working that night and it becomes a touchy subject.
	<i>Loving, hurt</i>
17	Sera suggests they go away to a motel in the desert to relax and while there, they nearly consummate their relationship but Ben and his drinking spoils the moment. She is told to leave by the motel staff in an unkind way.
	<i>Loving, understanding</i>
18	Sera cooks a meal for the two of them but they argue about his condition.
	<i>Concerned, worried</i>
19	Sera discovers Ben with another woman and asks him to leave her flat.
	<i>Devastated, shocked</i>
20	After being hurt by a group of youths, Sera is also asked to move out of her apartment.
	<i>Distressed, distraught, upset</i>
21	Sera searches for Ben and is eventually phoned by him. They meet and are intimate before Ben dies.
	<i>Sad, then relieved to have made contact again with Ben</i>
22	<b>In her final scene, talking about her time with Ben, Sera says 'I really loved him'.</b>
	<i>Upset, saddened</i>

## APPENDIX C. *The Killers* (1946)

### Sequence Analysis

Number	Film time (h.m.s)	Sequence length (m.s)	Description
1	0	1.20	Film begins as two people travel by car through the night into the town of Brentwood. As the two people walk through the street, the title and credits show onscreen. They survey the quiet town and then head for the diner.
2	0.1.20	7.22	In the diner, the two men menace the owner, cook and a customer. It becomes clear why they have travelled to Brentwood, 'we're gonna kill Swede'. They wait a while until told Swede is not going to turn up. They leave in order to find him at home.
3	0.8.42	1.32	The diner staff untie themselves and the customer, Nick Adams, dashes off to warn Swede that some men are after him.
4	0.10.14	2.26	At the guesthouse where Swede lives, we see him lying on his bed, in the shadows. Adams tells him the bad news and urges him to escape while there's time. He refuses, 'there's nothing I can do about it.' 'I'm through with all that running around'. Adams leaves to tell the police as the gangsters approach. Swede waits.
5	0.12.40	0.10	They burst in and fire at Swede. His arm clutches at the bedstead in pain and then he dies.
6	0.12.50	3.10	At the police station, Adams and the cook are there with the local police. An insurance man, Jim Reardon, asks them some questions. He finds a green, silk handkerchief with harps on it in Swede's personal belongings. He retains it to help with the investigation. Adams and Reardon visit the mortuary to see the body. Adams mentions that Swede had been complaining of stomach pains for a few days, since...
7	0.16.00	2.36	Flashback – at the garage where Adams and Swede worked, we see a car arrive and the driver asks for fuel. Swede checks the oil and cleans the windscreen. The driver asks for the name of the town and drives away. Swede looks suddenly troubled and leaves almost immediately, 'you close up, I'm going home'.
8	0.18.36	1.20	Back in the morgue, Adams mentions that Swede had not been to work since. Reardon telephones his office to alert them to some of the details of the case and states he is going to visit Atlantic City.

9	0.19.56	2.28	In a hotel in Atlantic City, NJ Reardon meets the beneficiary of Swede's life insurance policy (obtained through his work – the garage), May Ellen Dougherty. At first she has no idea who the deceased is, but when she sees a picture, she remembers him as Mr Nelson, 'the man in 1212', who stayed at the hotel in 1940.
10	0.22.24	0.15	During the course of the discussion, it transpires that she was worried he may have killed himself. Reardon asks why she thought that and she recounts the situation she found, six years before...
11	0.22.39	1.08	Flashback – room 1212 has been wrecked and Mr Nelson staggers around in a state of shock and desperation, 'she's gone, she's gone'. He smashes the window and attempts to throw himself out, but Dougherty pulls him back and calms him down.
12	0.23.47	2.58	Reardon visits his office in Newark, NJ and talks to his boss. Despite his boss's reluctance for the case, 'a two for a nickel shooting', Reardon is granted more time to investigate the murder. He discovers that Swede had been a boxer in Philadelphia and had spent two years in prison. He goes to see the arresting officer.
13	0.26.45	1.24	Lieutenant Lubinsky knew Swede well as their fathers had been friends. Lubinsky talks about Swede's final fight...
14	0.28.09	7.36	Flashback – despite repeated advice from his corner to use his right to punch with, Swede does not and is knocked out. There is a young lady watching the fight intently in the audience. After the fight, a doctor examines Swede and finds his right hand to be badly swollen and possibly broken, explaining why he did not use it in the fight. Swede leaves with Lubinsky and they meet the girl who had been watching. She is Lilly and is Swede's partner. He is upset that his fighting days are over and leaves them both to be alone.
15	0.35.45	1.28	Back at the Lubinsky's we see that Lilly is now married to the Lieutenant. She recalls the last time she went out on a date with Swede, when they went to a party...
16	0.37.13	3.31	Flashback – at a house party, Swede is smitten by a woman called Kitty Collins. She sings a song and Swede stands by her, enraptured by her looks. He forgets all about Lilly.
17	0.40.44	2.27	Back with the Lubinsky's, Lilly confirms that she and Swede split up after that and he started seeing Kitty. Reardon asks the Lieutenant how he came to arrest Swede and we see how...
18	0.42.11	4.43	Flashback – Lieutenant Lubinsky tracks down a stolen brooch and finds Kitty Collins wearing it in a café. Swede then turns up and prevents Kitty being arrested, firstly by stating that he stole it and secondly, by punching Lubinsky and running away. He was caught the next day and sentenced to three years hard labour.

19	0.46.54	1.33	At the funeral of Swede, Reardon finds a man named Charleston, who shared a prison cell with Swede. They go to a snooker hall to talk and Charleston reminisces about his and Swede's time together...
20	0.48.27	1.30	Flashback – in jail, Swede holds the silk handkerchief and asks Charleston to find Kitty when he gets out, to check she is OK.
21	0.50.57	0.59	Back in the snooker hall, Charleston and Reardon carry on talking. The conversation turns to the last time Charleston saw Swede...
22	0.51.56	5.11	Flashback – Charleston and some other would-be robbers wait for Swede to turn up (who has just been released from prison). Among those present are Dum Dum Clarke, Blinky Franklin, Big Jim Colfax and Kitty Collins. Swede arrives and once he has seen Kitty, is again besotted by her. While the others talk about the forthcoming robbery, he fiddles with the handkerchief. Kitty sees this. Charleston declines to be part of the job and as he leaves, warns Swede to be wary of Kitty.
23	0.57.07	1.04	Back in the snooker hall, Reardon thanks Charleston for his time. He then goes to see his boss to talk through his theory as to why Swede was killed. This concerns the robbery at the Prentiss Hat Factory in Hackensack, NJ in 1940. While his boss reads about the robbery from a newspaper report, we see the robbery take place on screen...
24	0.58.11	2.27	Flashback – sequence shot of the robbery from entering the gate to the getaway.
25	1.00.38	2.09	Reardon explains his theory, namely that Swede made off with all of the money from the heist and that he was killed because of this, six years later. Reardon believes Swede was present as the newspaper report mentioned one of the robbers wore a green, silk handkerchief with harps on it over his face. Also, on the same day, a man and a woman checked into a hotel in Atlantic City from where the female left two days later, causing Swede to wreck his room. Reardon receives a telephone call from Lubinsky and he leaves to meet him.
26	1.02.47	1.11	They go to see Blinky Franklin who has just been admitted into hospital with gunshot wounds. He is delirious and seems to be talking about the hat factory robbery six years earlier...
27	1.03.58	3.37	Flashback – the gang are waiting for a telephone call before the robbery goes ahead. They play cards and Swede is protective of Kitty, despite her now being Colfax's girlfriend. Swede ends up hitting Colfax, thinking he had cheated at cards, but he had not. Colfax squares up to Swede and tells him that after the robbery, they will have something to sort out.
28	1.07.35	1.21	Back in hospital, a bus ticket to Brentwood is found in Franklin's trousers, along with a newspaper report about Swede's death.
29	1.08.56	2.43	Flashback – Franklin, Clarke and Colfax (plus the money) meet at a farm immediately after the robbery.

			Swede turns up and takes the money from them, sabotaging their vehicles to prevent them chasing him. He claims he was excluded from their altered plans to meet there rather than the halfway house as planned.
30	1.11.39	7.21	Reardon goes to Swede's old room in Brentwood as he thinks the money might still be there. Clarke turns up and begins to tear the room apart looking for the money. Reardon stops him and questions him. Clarke claims that Colfax changed the meeting place to the farm after the robbery but before any more questions are asked, Clarke disarms Reardon and knocks him unconscious. As the police arrive, Clarke escapes.
31	1.19.00	5.04	Reardon and Lubinsky are on a train to Pittsburgh to see Colfax. Reardon questions him and brings up the possibility that Kitty double-crossed them all and fled with the money.
32	1.24.04	3.16	Reardon and Lubinsky wait in a hotel room for a telephone call. Kitty rings and asks to meet. Reardon picks the foyer of the Adelphi Theatre and they meet there. They get into a taxi and head to the Green Cat bar. They are followed. The two hitmen who shot Swede also turn up.
33	1.27.20	3.55	At the Green Cat bar, Kitty and Reardon talk. When it becomes clear how much Reardon knows, Kitty tries to make a deal. She tells him what she can about the robbery...
34	1.31.15	2.51	Flashback – Kitty goes to see Swede at his hotel room the night before the robbery and tells him the halfway-house has burnt down. She tells him that the rest of the gang are going to double cross him by meeting at a different place instead. She tells him where.
35	1.34.06	2.46	Back in the Green Cat bar, Kitty becomes nervous and wishes to leave. She goes to the bathroom. The two hitmen enter the bar and try to shoot Reardon. Lubinsky kills them. Kitty has escaped.
36	1.36.52	2.24	Reardon, Lubinsky and uniformed police officers travel in a squad car to an address 'three miles away'. They enter the house and there are gunshots. A man falls down the stairs, dead. It is Clarke. Half way up the stairs, Colfax lies, having been shot as well.
37	1.39.16	2.10	Kitty has been caught by the police and brought to Colfax's house. Reardon and Lubinsky piece the puzzle together and work out that both Colfax and Kitty were behind the double crossing of the other gang members. Kitty pleads with Colfax to tell the police she is not to blame, 'say, 'Kitty is innocent'' but he dies without doing so. Lubinsky is unimpressed by these last words to her husband, 'don't ask a dying man to lie his soul into hell!'
38	1.41.26	1.00	In Reardon's insurance office, he is congratulated by his boss for solving the mystery and is told that owing to his endeavours, the premium for next year will drop by 'one tenth of a cent'. As a further reward, he is also told, 'this is Friday; don't come in 'til Monday'. 'Thanks'.
39	1.42.26		The end.

## Traits and States ~ Swede

The numbers in the left hand column denote the order in which scenes occur in the film. The numbers on the right show the order in which the events would have actually happened if the film had played out in conventional temporal order. A second table follows this one, which shows Swede's traits as they would have been seen by others in his lifetime, that is to say, in the 'correct' order, not mixed up as per the flashbacks.

1	The first time we see Swede he is lying on his bed, cloaked in shadows. He looks unwell. Despite being told his life is in imminent danger, he chooses not to run but stays exactly where he is. Enigmatically, he says, 'I did something wrong, once'. 12
	<i>Resigned to death</i>
2	Flashback – At the garage a few days before his death, Swede serviced a car and the experience affected him badly. 'You close up, I'm going home'. He did not return to work after that. We later discover that the driver was Jim Colfax, the leader of the gang which robbed the hat factory. 11
	<i>Nauseous, helpless</i>
3	Flashback – Swede destroys his hotel room after a female companion had left him. He even tries to leap from his hotel window, but is rescued by the maid. We later learn that Kitty Collins had been with him. 10
	<i>Distraught</i>
4	Flashback – during his last fight, Swede is unable to swing his right fist and is beaten. His defeat ends his boxing career. 1
	<i>Subdued, low, downcast</i>
5	Flashback – Lilly and Swede go to a party and Swede falls madly in love with Kitty Collins, who he sees for the first time and cannot take his eyes off. 2
	<i>Love struck, focused only on Kitty to the exclusion of Lilly</i>
6	Flashback – Swede admits to stealing a brooch (which he did not do), in order to save Kitty from jail. He is well dressed, clearly successful in his new business venture and believes he can evade the police by escaping. 3
	<i>Devoted, confident</i>
7	Flashback – in his prison cell, Swede fondly handles the handkerchief that Kitty gave to him before he was sentenced. He yearns to see her again. His roommate tries to prepare him in case Kitty has moved on, leaving Swede behind. 4
	<i>Loyal, naïve</i>

8	Flashback – after leaving prison, Swede is asked to turn up for a meeting with some other ex-cons to discuss a new robbery. He arrives, sees Kitty, reveals he still has feelings for her by holding the handkerchief, and agrees to be involved with the heist. Again, Charleston cautions him against trusting Kitty too much. 5
	<i>Besotted, distracted by Kitty</i>
9	Flashback – Swede takes part in the hat factory wages robbery. 8
	<i>Professional, accomplished</i>
10	Flashback – Swede oversteps by interfering between Colfax and Kitty, and then punches Colfax after thinking he had cheated at cards. 6
	<i>Protective, impulsive</i>
11	Flashback – Swede robs the robbers of the hat factory money and escapes. He believes they were going to deny him his cut of the booty. 9
	<i>Angry, determined</i>
12	Flashback – Swede is visited in his hotel room by Kitty who tells him about the change from halfway-house to farm after the robbery, and claims the others are not going to tell him. 7
	<i>Appreciative, unforgiving</i>

If the traits and states list is reconfigured to show them sequentially – rather than mixed up as per the flashbacks – we can see that Kitty raised his spirits like nothing else could and that without her, Swede was a very different character (table follows).

Trait no.	Description of Swede's traits displayed in scenes
4	<i>Subdued, low, downcast.</i> 1
5	<i>Love struck, focused only on Kitty to the exclusion of Lilly.</i> 2
6	<i>Devoted, confident.</i> 3
7	<i>Loyal, naïve.</i> 4
8	<i>Besotted, distracted by Kitty.</i> 5
10	<i>Protective, impulsive.</i> 6
12	<i>Appreciative, unforgiving.</i> 7
9	<i>Professional, accomplished.</i> 8
11	<i>Angry, determined.</i> 9
3	<i>Distraught.</i> 10
2	<i>Nauseous, helpless.</i> 11
1	<i>Resigned to death.</i> 12



## Traits and States ~ Kitty Collins

The table shows how Collins is seen as the film progresses. Her appearances are more disordered by flashbacks than Swede's and because she appears to be loyal to Swede when she tells him about the proposed double-crossing, it comes as a bigger shock when we discover it was all an act. Points 3, 4 and 6 can be seen as her and Colfax's ploy to split the robbery money between the two of them.

1	Flashback - during her first meeting with Swede at the party, Kitty claims to abhor boxing and is offish with Lilly. As she sings, she lets Swede stand very close to her.
	<i>Enticing, coquettish</i>
2	Flashback – when caught wearing a stolen brooch, Kitty pleads with Swede to help her avoid arrest, 'they'll throw the book at me'. He obliges.
	<i>Persuasive, manipulative</i>
3	Flashback – Kitty is with Colfax and they are waiting for Swede to turn up to discuss the robbery. She makes a point of saying hello to him and notices when he starts holding the handkerchief she gave him.
	<i>Flirtatious</i>
4	Flashback – Swede steps into an argument between Kitty and Colfax and is protective of her. She rejects his concern, but it is doubtful that she really means it. 'I can take care of myself'.
	<i>Feisty, independently-minded</i>
5	Flashback – Kitty visits Swede to confide in him about the planned double-crossing by the other gang members.
	<i>Caring, honest, loyal</i>
6	Kitty and Reardon meet outside the theatre and head for the Green Cat bar. Once it becomes clear Reardon knows a lot about the robbery, she wants to make a deal.
	<i>Confident at first, but then worried about being arrested</i>
7	Kitty shrugs her shoulders when accused of welching on her deal with Swede, then asks to leave the bar as she no longer feels safe.
	<i>Unburdened by her betrayal of Swede, but then nervous</i>
8	Kitty is arrested outside Colfax's house and when the full truth about her marriage to Colfax and their double crossing of all the other members of the gang comes to light, she unsuccessfully tries to get Colfax to clear her name, 'say 'Kitty is innocent''. She cries.
	<i>Desperate, calculating, self-centred</i>

## APPENDIX D. *The Killers* (1964)

### Sequence Analysis

Number	Film time (h.m.s)	Sequence length (m.s)	Description
1	0	1.38	Credits.
2	0.1.38	2.59	Two men visit the Sage Home for the Blind. They harass the receptionist and demand to see a man called 'Jerry Nichols' (though his real name is Johnny North). They lock her in the office and head upstairs. Meanwhile, somebody tries to get into the office and finds another door to enter. They discover the receptionist and are told about the men.
3	0.4.37	1.28	We see a man teaching mechanics to an adult education group. He receives a phone call from the office to say two men are on their way up to him and that they mean to kill him. He dismisses class.
4	0.6.05	0.15	The hitmen – Charlie Strom and Lee – find North and shoot him. He does not try to escape.
5	0.6.20	3.00	On a train Charlie and Lee talk about the murder. Charlie is perturbed by North's attitude and confesses to recognising him as an ex-racing driver. Charlie knows that a few years earlier North had been involved with a Mail van robbery which netted \$1 million, though the money then went missing. He wants to find out more about who hired them and why North accepted death without a fight. They head to Miami to speak to an old friend of North called Earl Sylvester.
6	0.9.20	4.56	They arrive at a garage and enter the workshop. They question Sylvester in an aggressive manner. They discover that North stopped racing after a bad accident, four years ago. A woman named Sheila Farr is mentioned, as a bad influence on North. She is shown in a photograph on the office wall and the hitmen want to know how North met her...
7	0.14.16	6.01	Flashback – Sylvester and North are testing their car in advance of a prestigious race at the weekend. Farr arrives and chats to Sylvester, then talks to North. They flirt and he takes her round the track in the race car. They go for lunch.
8	0.20.17	2.25	In the café North is suspicious of Farr, 'you have money written all over you, so why me?' She replies that she likes winners and she knows that North is a winner. They go kart racing and Farr wins, though only after tricking North into letting her pass him.
9	0.22.42	1.36	The night before the big race – worth \$15,000 – Sylvester and North argue over the latter's involvement with Farr. He has missed a lot of testing and a lot of sleep.

10	0.24.18	4.33	At a nightclub, Farr and North dance. They josh about calling for a ceasefire, though Farr demands 'unconditional surrender'. They kiss. They go to Farr's room and drink champagne. North is still worried about the huge difference between their financial situations. Farr tells him not to worry about it.
11	0.28.51	1.15	Race day – the Western Grands Prix for Sports Cars. A PA system announcement introduces the event.
12	0.30.07	1.17	Farr arrives and gives North a silver bracelet engraved with 'Johnny the winner'. They are being watched through binoculars by a man in the crowd. He looks on disinterestedly.
13	0.31.24	4.26	North leaves the pits for the start of the race. Sylvester and Farr talk about North's lack of preparation, 'thanks to you'. The race starts and Farr is spoken to by the man who saw her through the binoculars – Jack Browning – and his associate Mickey Farmer. She is agitated by their presence.
14	0.35.50	1.46	North crashes into some bales of straw and restarts the race from the back. He has tyre trouble and comes into the pits. Even after the tyre change, there is smoke and squealing from the wheel.
15	0.37.36	1.16	The tyre blows and North suffers a massive crash. He has hurt his leg. His car is destroyed. He is taken away in an ambulance. Farr is visibly upset by the accident.
16	0.38.52	3.19	He is in bed at the hospital, covered in bandages. His peripheral vision and depth perception have been damaged and his racing days are over. He asks Sylvester if Farr has been to see him. Sylvester mentions the visit that Browning made to Farr during the race. Sylvester has discovered that Farr has dated other sports men before, but has always returned to Browning. North is upset.
17	0.42.11	2.27	Farr arrives and is kind to North, though he is harsh to her. She storms out and then Earl leaves as well.
18	0.44.38	1.03	Back in Sylvester's garage he says that was the last time he saw North. He cries.
19	0.45.41	1.52	In a restaurant, Strom and Lee are eating. Strom receives a phone call to tell him that Mickey Farmer is now running a gym in New Orleans. They decide to visit him, 'I gotta find out what makes a man decide not to run'.
20	0.47.33	2.36	They find Farmer in the steam room of his gym. They interrogate him about the \$1 million Mail van robbery. He confirms that the robbers were himself, Browning, North and a man called George Fleming. Charlie asks about the set up and Farmer recalls...
21	0.50.19	3.04	Flashback – Farmer, Browning and Farr are at a car race and Farr speaks to North in the pits. She says that there might be a need for a good driver and asks if she can contact him later. He agrees.

22	0.53.15	3.12	Browning, Farmer and Farr are in a car checking out the route and speed needed to complete the raid successfully. Browning drives the car but is too slow. Farr suggests they enlist North, 'are you sure you're thinking only of the interests of the job?' 'That's all I'm thinking about'.
23	0.56.27	3.03	Farr goes to see North at his apartment, 'if I knew you were coming I'd have set fire to the place'. She offers him \$100,000 to drive. He asks who he has to race. 'The police'. He accepts. They kiss.
24	0.59.30	2.24	North now tries to better the time set by Browning in pursuit of the dummy car. He easily catches it and overtakes it. He is now part of the caper. He says that with some mechanical tweaks he could make the car even faster.
25	1.01.54	4.16	In a workshop, North works on the car. Farr and North are openly affectionate towards one another. Farmer does not approve. Browning enters and sees Farr and North holding hands. He goes over the details of the heist with the gang. Browning tries to send Farr back to his hotel but she refuses. He hits her and North hits him. 'After the job, we'll settle this'.
26	1.06.10	4.20	Browning and North are dressed as police officers. They set up a diversion across the main road. The Mail van arrives and they insist it takes another route. Once it has gone they move the diversion signs and chase after it. They overtake it as planned.
27	1.10.30	1.02	Farmer and Fleming stage a fake traffic accident and the phoney police officers stop to deal with it, blocking the road. The four of them then rob the Mail van. North and Browning race off with the money and Browning is kicked out of the car. North escapes alone.
28	1.11.32	1.06	Back in the gym, Farmer believes North kept the money. Fleming is dead and he thinks Browning now lives in California.
29	1.12.38	4.40	Strom and Lee visit Browning. Strom believes Browning paid for the contract on North's life. They talk about Farr and give Browning a warning, 'have her call us in four hours'.
30	1.17.18	1.12	The hitmen wait in their hotel room. Farr phones and they arrange to meet at 9pm in her hotel. However, Strom and Lee leave immediately, intending to catch her by surprise.
31	1.18.30	4.30	They ask for Farr's room number at her hotel and a porter overhears their request. He slips away and makes a phone call. They meet with Farr, 'a man stood still while we burned him and I want to know why'. Lee hits Farr to intimidate her. They then dangle her out of the window to persuade her to talk. It works...
32	1.23.00	1.15	Flashback – on the night before the robbery, Farr visits North to tell him that the others plan to double cross him and leave him with nothing. He wants to go and see them, but instead listens to Farr's plan, which is to take the money from Browning following the heist.

33	1.24.15	1.28	After the robbery, North meets up with Farr to swap cars. They kiss. North says, 'from now on kid, I take orders strictly from you'.
34	1.25.43	2.52	They arrive at the motel and kiss again. As Farr switches on the light we see Browning waiting for them, holding a gun. It is a set-up. 'Get it over with, Jack'. Farr is cold towards North. Browning shoots but North manages to escape. They chase him but cannot find him. Farr is concerned about Browning, 'at least you're alright, thank god'. They leave with the money.
35	1.28.35	2.05	Back in Farr's hotel room with the hitmen, Charlie is satisfied with the explanation, 'he was dead already. You killed him'. They had already figured out that Farr and Browning had since married. They leave the hotel to go and see Browning, but as they step into the street, shots are fired and Lee is killed. Farr escapes.
36	1.30.40	3.27	Farr is at her and Browning's mansion. Browning arrives with his rifle. They talk about Lee being shot. They are trying to leave quickly. Browning empties the safe of what looks like \$1 million in cash. Strom turns up and he is bleeding. He shoots Browning. Farr pleads for clemency but is shot as well. Charlie attempts to leave but keeps falling over. The police arrive and Charlie tries to shoot them but falls over, dead. The case of money bursts open.
37	1.34.07		The end.

## Traits and States ~ Johnny North

The numbers in the left hand column denote the order in which scenes are seen in the film. The numbers on the right show the order in which the events would have actually happened if the film had played out in conventional order. A table follows this one, which shows North's traits as they would have been seen by others in his lifetime, that is to say, in the 'correct' order, not mixed up as per the flashbacks.

1	North is teaching an adult education group at the school for the blind. He has a good rapport with his students and they respond well to him. 13
	<i>Confident, happy</i>
2	North answers the phone and is told that two hitmen are on their way to kill him. He accepts this information and asks for no action to be taken on his behalf. He dismisses class instantly. He offers no resistance to the killers and is shot dead. 14
	<i>Resigned to death</i>
3	Flashback – during testing at the race circuit, North and Sylvester talk, before Farr turns up and flirts with North. 1
	<i>Friendly (with Sylvester), flirtatious and confident in his own ability (with Farr)</i>

4	Flashback – Sylvester and North argue about his preparation for the race. 2
	<i>Confident</i>
5	Flashback – in the nightclub and in Farr's apartment North is won over by her. 3
	<i>In love, happy</i>
6	Flashback – during the race, North gives everything but is injured in a crash. 4
	<i>Committed, competent, unlucky</i>
7	Flashback – at the hospital North asks after Farr and even though he is severe with Sylvester for telling him about her, he is severer still with Farr herself when she arrives. 5
	<i>Upset, harsh, abrasive</i>
8	Flashback – North and Farr talk at a low-level jalopy derby meeting. He is racing under a pseudonym. 6
	<i>Short-tempered</i>
9	Flashback – Farr and North meet at his apartment. 7
	<i>Fierce, but then loving</i>
10	Flashback – North drives the car in the dummy run and easily overtakes the other car. 8
	<i>Competent, confident</i>
11	Flashback – at the workshop, North and Farr show affection for one another. Farr is beaten by Browning, who in turn is hit by North. 9
	<i>Protective</i>
12	Flashback – during the robbery, North does everything as planned, except he also forces Browning out of the car and escapes with all the money. 11
	<i>Competent, accomplished, devious</i>
13	Flashback – Farr visits North the night before the robbery and tells him about a planned double-crossing by the others. She suggests North takes all the money himself. 10
	<i>Angry, appreciative, loving</i>
14	Flashback – after North has taken the money, he and Farr meet up and go to a motel. It's a trap. Browning is waiting and the money is taken from North and he is shot. 12
	<i>Devastated, upset, unlucky</i>

If we reconfigure the traits and states to show them in temporal order, we can view his character arc and see just how much his life was turned upside down by his association with Farr.

Trait no.	Description of traits displayed in scenes – Johnny North
3	<i>Friendly (with Sylvester), flirtatious and confident in his own ability (with Farr)</i>
4	<i>Confident</i>
5	<i>In love, happy</i>
6	<i>Committed, competent, unlucky</i>
7	<i>Upset, harsh, abrasive</i>
8	<i>Short-tempered</i>
9	<i>Fierce, but then loving</i>
10	<i>Competent, confident</i>
11	<i>Protective</i>
13	<i>Angry, appreciative, loving</i>
12	<i>Competent, accomplished, devious</i>
14	<i>Devastated, upset, unlucky</i>
1	<i>Confident, happy</i>
2	<i>Resigned to death</i>

## Traits and States ~ Sheila Farr

The numbers in the left hand column denote the order in which scenes are seen in the film. The numbers on the right show the order in which the events would have actually happened if the film had played out in conventional order. A table follows this one, which shows Farr's traits as they would have been seen by others in his lifetime, that is to say, in the 'correct' order, not mixed up as per the flashbacks.

1	Flashback – Farr and North chat each other up at the race circuits and in the café. She cheats to beat him at kart racing. 1
	<i>Flirtatious, self-assured, independently-minded, competitive</i>
2	Flashback – At the nightclub and in her apartment, Farr states her adoration of North. 2
	<i>Kind, loving</i>
3	Flashback – Farr gives North a silver bracelet before the race, to show her affection. 3
	<i>Generous</i>
4	Flashback – as North crashes, Farr is visibly shaken. 4
	<i>Upset, worried</i>

5	Flashback – Farr visits North at the hospital but is sent away. 5
	<i>Kind, soothing</i>
6	Flashback – Farr talks to North in the pits about a possible job coming up soon. 6
	<i>Awkward, caring</i>
7	Flashback – as Browning fails to drive quickly enough on their test run, Farr mentions North's name as a possible driver for them. 7
	<i>Committed, level-headed</i>
8	Flashback – Farr visits North at his apartment and despite his initial opposition to her and the job, she wins him round. 8
	<i>Loving, caring</i>
9	Flashback – Farr wants to stay in the garage with North, against Browning's wishes. 9
	<i>Fragile, in need of protection</i>
10	In her meeting with Strom and Lee, Farr is beaten into telling the truth about the caper. 13
	<i>Fragile, scared</i>
11	Flashback – Farr meets North and reveals there is a plot against him and suggests an alternative proposition for him to take all the money himself. 10
	<i>Persuasive, cunning</i>
12	Flashback – after the robbery, Farr and North meet and head to a motel of her choice. 11
	<i>Efficient, loving</i>
13	Flashback – Browning is waiting for them at the motel and Farr instantly moves to be with him. She tells Browning to shoot North. 12
	<i>Cold, uncaring, hard-hearted</i>
14	In her hotel room with Strom and Lee, she is upset once she has revealed the truth. 14
	<i>Emotional, scared</i>
15	She and Browning try to escape with the money but Strom catches them. She tries to beg for her life by saying she was forced by Browning to act to as she did. 15
	<i>Untrustworthy, disloyal, self-centredness</i>



If we reconfigure the traits to show them in sequential order, we can see that there is a degree of ambiguity about when her relationship with North changed.

Trait no.	Description of traits displayed in scenes – Sheila Farr
1	<i>Flirtatious, self-assured, independently-minded, competitive</i>
2	<i>Kind, loving</i>
3	<i>Generous</i>
4	<i>Upset, worried</i>
5	<i>Kind, soothing</i>
6	<i>Awkward, caring</i>
7	<i>Committed, level-headed</i>
8	<i>Loving, caring</i>
9	<i>Fragile, in need of protection</i>
11	<i>Persuasive, cunning</i>
12	<i>Efficient, loving</i>
13	<i>Cold, uncaring, hard-hearted</i>
10	<i>Fragile, scared</i>
14	<i>Emotional, scared</i>
15	<i>Untrustworthy, disloyal, self-centred</i>

## APPENDIX E. *The Hustler*

### Sequence Analysis

Number	Film time (h.m.s)	Sequence length (m.s)	Description
1	0	0.24	Title.
2	0.24	1.28	A car drives onto a garage forecourt and two men get out. One asks the attendant to fill it up with petrol and check the oil. They go to a bar and introduce themselves as salesmen. They see a pool table.
3	1.52	3.48	The men are playing pool and the younger man is losing and looks drunk. Other drinkers, sat at the bar, notice the younger man's behaviour. He pots a trick shot and wins the game, and bets he can do it again. He fails. The older man wants to leave but the younger man does not. They argue. The barman puts up \$105 for the trick shot and the older man leaves. The ball is potted easily.
4	5.40	0.05	The younger man gets into the car with the older man and hands over his wallet, smiling.
5	5.45	1.31	Title and credits, interspersed with still shots from the film we are about to see.
6	7.16	1.03	At Ames Billiards, the cleaners and steward get to work to open the place up for business.
7	8.19	4.15	The two men arrive. The older man is called Charlie. They set up at a table and talk about how much they are going to win. Another man speaks to them and the younger of the two men introduces himself as 'Eddie Felson. I shoot straight pool'. They talk about a pool player called Minnesota Fats.
8	12.34	2.35	Minnesota Fats arrives at the pool hall at 8pm and is smartly dressed. He watches Eddie play. They talk. We find out that Eddie is from California. Minnesota Fats has heard of him, as Eddie has heard of Minnesota Fats. They agree to play pool for \$200 a game.
9	15.09	1.29	A table is prepared for their match. A crowd gathers. Minnesota Fats washes his hands and puts talc on them.
10	16.38	1.33	Eddie wins the break but once Minnesota Fats starts potting, he pots ball after ball.
11	18.11	0.24	Eddie talks appreciatively of what he sees.
12	18.35	1.57	We see a clock face, showing a few hours have passed. They start playing safety shots. We see the clock again – midnight – and then a montage of images from a number of games begins.
13	20.32	1.05	Charlie tells Eddie to quit but Eddie disagrees, 'I've got a hunch. It's me from here in'.
14	21.37	0.52	2.30am and we see another montage of games. Eddie is winning.

15	22.29	0.56	4am and Eddie is '\$1000' up. He suggests they increase the prize money to \$1000 a game. Minnesota Fats asks for a drink, but as there is no bar at the billiards hall, a man goes out to fetch it for him. He is told to get it at Johnny's.
16	23.25	0.21	At Johnny's bar, the man enters a room where a card game is taking place and he whispers to one of the players. He looks intrigued. He leaves the card game.
17	23.46	0.44	Back at the pool game, Charlie looks tired and Eddie drinks. The man from the card game looks on.
18	24.30	1.27	The hands of the clock move rapidly round and we see snippets of games in a montage.
19	24.57	0.04	Eddie swigs from a bottle of liquor while Minnesota Fats sips from a glass. Their demeanours are very different. Brutish versus refined.
20	25.01	1.13	The man from the card game starts putting money in to the pot for Minnesota Fats. Eddie looks tired and loses his temper with the card game man for being in his eyeline. The man introduces himself as 'Bert Gordon' and moves slightly.
21	26.14	1.30	Eddie asks Charlie how much they have won: '\$11,400 cash, here in my pocket'. Charlie wants to leave but Eddie refuses, saying that the game is not over until Minnesota Fats says it is over. Minnesota Fats looks to Bert for guidance: 'stay with this kid, he's a loser'.
22	27.44	2.23	Minnesota Fats cleans up as Eddie gets his shoulders massaged by Charlie who says they have been playing for 25 hours nonstop. Eddie looks dishevelled and is still drinking. They have now won \$18,000 but Eddie is still not going to leave, despite Charlie packing the cue away. Minnesota Fats is refreshed and at the prompting of Bert invites Eddie to 'play some pool'.
23	30.07	2.20	Eddie notices that he looks a mess and demands money from Charlie so that he can stay in the game. He then has a fit of laughter, 'you look beautiful Fats, just like a baby. All pink and powdered up'.
24	32.27	2.22	Eddie is asleep and Charlie wakes him, 'we lose again'. Eddie stumbles around searching his pockets for money but only has a little amount. Minnesota Fats tells him, 'the game's over, Eddie' and gives his winnings to Bert. Eddie begs for one more game but is ignored and everybody leaves.
25	34.49	1.19	In a hotel room, opposite the billiards hall, Eddie lays awake thinking about the match he lost. He gathers his possessions and walks out the door while Charlie sleeps, leaving the car keys and some money.
26	36.08	0.51	Eddie arrives at a bus station and cleans up in the toilets.
27	36.59	0.51	A woman sits in the café. As Eddie puts his luggage in a locker she looks at him and then he looks at her.
28	37.50	2.34	Eddie sits at an adjacent table and they talk. He falls asleep and she leaves. A waitress wakes him up.
29	40.24	4.42	He enters a bar and sees the lady is there too. He buys her a drink and they talk. She said she used to be an actress who now goes to college on Tuesdays and Thursdays. When Eddie asks what she does on the other days, she says, 'I

			drink'. Her name is Sarah. He suggests getting a bottle and walking her home, which she accepts. She trips over but insists, 'I'm not drunk, I'm lame'.
30	45.06	1.39	Sarah waits outside the liquor store. They continue along the street. At her apartment Eddie touches her shoulder and then kisses her but she struggles free and he leaves.
31	46.45	1.31	Eddie rents a room and then collects his things from the bus station. He looks for Sarah but she is not there. He buys a bottle on the way home. He has very little money left.
32	48.16	1.07	Eddie enters a bar and tries to get a game of pool but they recognise him and nobody will play him. At another bar we see Eddie playing and beating somebody and they have a drink afterwards. The man says 'you know, you shoot good, but you also shoot lucky'. Eddie agrees with this sentiment.
33	49.23	1.18	Eddie is at the bus station and Sarah arrives. A takeaway bottle is prominently placed on the table. They look at each other and without words, leave together.
34	50.41	1.44	Eddie is stretched out on the bed. He opens the windows. Sarah tells him, 'I've got troubles and I think you've got troubles. Maybe it would be better if we leave each other alone'. He kisses her and then says he will fetch his things over later.
35	52.25	4.01	Sarah comes back from grocery shopping and Eddie is at home. He has forgotten that she has been at college. She has bought him a lighter as a present. He refuses to say where he goes when he goes out. She cuts her finger while preparing food and he dresses it. He asks where she gets her money from.
36	56.26	6.14	There is a knock at the door and it is Charlie. He wants to get back on the road with Eddie and maybe even face Minnesota Fats again. He tells Sarah that Eddie can 'charm anyone of anything'. Charlie is happy for Sarah to tag along. Eddie finds out that Charlie held money back during his match with Minnesota Fats and is angry. Sarah cries. Charlie leaves. Eddie says, 'everybody wants a piece of me'.
37	1.02.40	2.54	Later, in their apartment, Sarah types while drunk. Eddie tidies away empty bottle and cans. She tries to use the telephone but struggles. Eddie reads what she has been working on – 'something I'm making up' – but is not pleased. It is about two people who live together in a 'contract of depravity'. Once Sarah has sobered up a little they argue and Eddie slaps her.
38	1.05.34	6.16	Eddie goes to a bar and joins a poker game that Bert happens to be playing in. After the game, Bert buys Eddie a drink and tells him that despite having talent, Eddie lacks character. Bert proposes they work together with a 75/25 split but Eddie rejects it. As Eddie leaves, Bert tells him to be careful hustling in this area as he could get hurt. 'When did you adopt me?' 'I don't know when it was'.
39	1.11.50	4.52	Eddie goes to a pool hall on the pier and hustles. He loses his temper and shows off, winning 10-0. Three men get aggressive with him and beat him up.
40	1.16.42	1.03	Eddie arrives back at Sarah's apartment and bashes on the door. She lets him in and he collapses into her arms, telling

			her his thumbs have been broken. She has been crying while he was out.
41	1.17.45	0.54	Eddie has a cast on each hand and Sarah looks after him. He spills a drink at breakfast and gets frustrated.
42	1.18.39	1.40	Sarah continues to type while Eddie is restless. She is not drinking and Eddie is short-tempered with her.
43	1.20.19	3.39	They go out on a picnic and talk frankly with each other. She tells him she loves him. He suggests she will marry someone else.
44	1.23.58	1.53	Eddie has had the casts taken off and his hands seem ok. Back at the bar where Bert drinks, Eddie tries out a different bridge and feels almost back to normal. He agrees to work with Bert.
45	1.25.51	6.20	Eddie and Sarah go to a restaurant and at the end of the meal he tells her he is going away for a short while to play pool. She leaves in a hurry and they walk home in the rain. She is in a daze and admits to never having been an actress and that a rich father supports her because of her polio but has nothing to do with her.
46	1.32.11	1.27	Bert waits for Eddie outside and Sarah accompanies him. On the train to Louisville, they get acquainted.
47	1.33.38	0.37	In the restaurant car, Bert and Eddie sit together but when Sarah arrives she has to wait until Bert has finished before she can sit.
48	1.34.15	1.24	Back in their carriage, Bert deconstructs Eddie's defeat to Minnesota Fats. He checks Eddie's thumbs and uses the word 'cripple'. Eddie objects but Sarah shrugs it off.
49	1.35.39	3.22	In Louisville, Bert hustles an extra hotel suite, next to the one he had already reserved. It is busy, owing to the Kentucky Derby. Eddie sees some old acquaintances and goes off to have a drink. Sarah and Bert take the bags up and she closes the doors between their rooms. As she shuts the final door, Bert has a few words with her and is curt.
50	1.39.01	2.45	At the horse racing, Eddie wins some money and lets Sarah look after it. They meet a man called Findley and agree to go to his house that evening to play pool.
51	1.41.46	3.08	At Findley's house, he is having a party and after being persuaded to attend, Sarah descends the stairs cautiously. She sees Eddie talking to a girl and goes in the opposite direction. She stands near Bert but then moves away. He whispers in her ear and she throws a fit and a drink over him. Eddie takes her upstairs and she falls asleep on a bed of coats. Eddie checks on her later.
52	1.44.54	2.27	Bert and Eddie go to Findley's basement and discover he has a billiards table, not a pool table. Eddie is in a hurry and pretends he can play. After a few games they are even and the stakes are raised, despite Bert's doubts, 'I already know he <i>can</i> beat you, I asked him 'will he?' With Eddie that's two different things'.
53	1.47.21	1.34	Findley and Eddie play and Findley wins. Bert wants to leave but Eddie wants to stay. He intends to play with his own money and races upstairs to fetch it from Sarah's purse.
54	1.48.55	1.46	Sarah wakes up and goes down to the basement to find

			Eddie having lost and begging Bert for more money. He refuses. Sarah tells Eddie not to beg and he sends her away. Bert then decides to back Eddie with the stakes at \$1000 a game.
55	1.50.41	1.32	Later in the evening, with the three of them looking tired, Findley owes Bert \$12,000.
56	1.52.13	0.30	A taxi arrives but Eddie wants to walk to the hotel to clear his head. Bert goes back in the taxi.
57	1.52.43	2.45	In the hotel, Bert has a drink and then opens up one of the adjoining doors to find Sarah sat on the bed. She has packed her things. He gives her some money, pretending that Eddie asked him to do so, then kisses her. She does not respond so he leaves. However, she follows him and asks for a drink.
58	1.55.28	0.34	Sarah leaves Bert's bedroom in her underwear and goes to the bathroom. On the mirror she writes in lipstick, 'Perverted. Twisted. Crippled' [sic].
59	1.56.02	2.05	Eddie arrives back at the hotel and the receptionist is reluctant to give him his key. He enters the room but is confused by the packed cases. He sees people next door and enters Bert's room, to find Bert talking to the police. He is still confused until he looks in the bathroom. He sees Sarah on the floor and is shaken. There is blood on the sink. Bert comes in to try to explain but Eddie hits him and keeps on hitting him. Fade to black.
60	1.58.07	2.22	Minnesota Fats is in Ames Billiards, as is Bert. Eddie arrives and Bert is unsettled. He calls together his heavies. Minnesota Fats and Eddie talk. Eddie has \$3000 and wants to set the stake at \$3000 per game. He tells Bert he feels confident.
61	2.00.29	3.10	Minnesota Fats breaks with a safety shot and leaves the white ball a long way from the colours. Eddie puts talc on his hands. He talks to Bert and carries on talking to Bert while he pots the balls, 'I sure got character now. I picked it up in a hotel room in Louisville'. A montage of shots shows Bert and Minnesota Fats looking on while Eddie keeps on potting balls. Minnesota Fats has a rare chance, but misses.
62	2.03.39	0.33	We see the clock, which shows 6 o'clock and Minnesota Fats ends the match, 'I quit Eddie. I can't beat you'.
63	2.04.12	1.57	As Eddie gathers his winnings and cue together, Bert screams at him, 'you owe me money!' They talk about why and how much Bert thinks he is owed – 'half' – and Eddie is threatened. Minnesota Fats recommends Eddie pays up.
64	2.06.09	2.02	Eddie has no intention of paying, as if he does, it will be as if Sarah did not exist. Bert accedes but tells him, 'don't ever walk into a big-time pool hall again'.
65	2.08.11	1.03	Minnesota Fats and Eddie compliment each other on their game and Eddie leaves. The crowd clears and the credits roll as Bert sits down.
66	2.09.14		The end.

## Traits and States ~ Eddie Felson

1	Eddie is introduced as a salesman on his way to collect an award.
	<i>Successful</i>
2	He gets drunk during the pool game and messes a shot up, then gets it right.
	<i>Headstrong</i>
3	In Ames, Eddie talks openly with Minnesota Fats and they start to play.
	<i>Straight-talking, direct</i>
4	Eddie is impressed by Minnesota Fats' pool playing.
	<i>Keen, a fan of the game</i>
5	He wants to continue playing despite losing. He has a 'hunch' he is about to win.
	<i>Confident</i>
6	He increases the stake to \$1000.
	<i>Self-assured</i>
7	Midway through the match, Eddie suffers from fatigue and alcohol but will not stop, even though they have won \$11,400, 'I've beat him all night and now I'll beat him all day'
	<i>Stubbornness</i>
8	Charlie tells Eddie they have won \$18,000 and he packs the cue away. Eddie is dishevelled and looks a mess compared to the dapper Minnesota Fats.
	<i>Uncontrollable</i>
9	Eddie demands the stake from Charlie so he can continue playing.
	<i>Aggressive</i>
10	He is woken up by Charlie, 'we lose again'. He tries to buy another game but Minnesota Fats declares the game over.
	<i>Desperate, pathetic</i>
11	Eddie leaves Charlie in their hotel room and slips out.
	<i>Apologetic</i>

12	He meets Sarah and they talk. Eddie is attracted to her.
	<i>Libidinous</i>
13	He tries to kiss her but she sends him away, 'you're too hungry'.
	<i>Impatient</i>
14	Eddie rents a room in Ames and then goes looking for Sarah.
	<i>Keen, libidinous</i>
15	Running out of money, Eddie tries to win some playing pool but is recognised in the first bar he visits. He eventually gets a game in another venue but is summed up as 'lucky'.
	<i>Desperate</i>
16	He waits for Sarah with a takeaway bottle and they go to her apartment.
	<i>Calculating, predatory</i>
17	With Sarah, Eddie ignores her warning about them both and plans to move in.
	<i>Headstrong</i>
18	Eddie forgets about Sarah's college days and is bothered by her independence. He refrains from telling her about his pool hustling.
	<i>Hypocritical, secretive</i>
19	Charlie appears at the flat and they talk.
	<i>Agitated, annoyed</i>
20	He bullies Charlie into admitting something that is not true and then criticises him for it.
	<i>Aggressive</i>
21	Eddie tidies the apartment up and shows some kindness towards Sarah while she types.
	<i>Caring</i>
22	After reading the start of Sarah's novel, Eddie is not impressed as it seems to be about the two of them. During an argument he slaps her. 'You pool-room bum'.
	<i>Angry, controlling</i>



23	Eddie plays poker with Bert and they talk business afterwards, 'when did you adopt me?'
	<i>Cocky, confident, resistant to control</i>
24	After rejecting Bert's proposition Eddie tries to earn some money hustling pool but gets beaten up while doing so.
	<i>Over-confident, antagonistic</i>
25	He relies on Sarah to look after him while his broken thumbs heal.
	<i>Upset, frustrated</i>
26	Eddie offers Sarah a drink which she declines.
	<i>Disappointed, nervous</i>
27	Out on their picnic, Eddie refuses to say he loves Sarah, despite prompting by her.
	<i>Unromantic, uncaring</i>
28	Once his hands are back to normal he tests them out on a pool table and gets back in touch with Bert. They agree to work together.
	<i>Eager, driven</i>
29	Eddie buys Sarah a new dress and takes her to a restaurant in order to tell her he is going away for a few days. This upsets Sarah.
	<i>Hurtful, uncaring</i>
30	On the train to Louisville, Eddie objects to a remark made by Bert, directed at Sarah.
	<i>Protective</i>
31	Eddie wins some money on the Kentucky Derby and allows Sarah to look after it.
	<i>Joyous, generous, trusting</i>
32	After Sarah objects to Bert's overtures at Findley's party, Eddie escorts her upstairs.
	<i>Caring</i>
33	Eddie bluffs his way through some games of billiards with Findley.
	<i>Direct, confident</i>

34	After Bert suspends the stake, Eddie fetches his own money to carry on playing.
	<i>Headstrong, confident</i>
35	Eddie ignores Sarah's advice to stop and sends her away.
	<i>Obstinate, distant</i>
36	Eddie finally beats Findley but looks concerned about the situation with Sarah.
	<i>Victorious, contrite</i>
37	Once he has arrived back at the hotel, Eddie is unsure of what he finds, until he sees Sarah dead and he talks to Bert.
	<i>Confused, despairing, angry</i>
38	Back at Ames Billiards, Eddie arrives for a rematch with Minnesota Fats.
	<i>Direct, confident</i>
39	While playing, Eddie talks about Sarah, 'we really stuck the knife in her, didn't we Bert?'
	<i>Honest, straight-talking</i>
40	Eddie admits that he did love Sarah and also that 'I traded her in on a pool game'. Bert insists Eddie pay him half of his winnings but Eddie refuses because of Sarah.
	<i>Respectful, brave, dejected</i>
41	Eddie professes his admiration of Minnesota Fats which is reciprocated and then leaves.
	<i>Courteous</i>

### Traits and States ~ Bert Gordon

1	Bert drinks milk while he plays poker and is told about the pool match.
	<i>Unconventional, curiosity</i>
2	He watches Minnesota Fats and Eddie play pool.
	<i>Impassive</i>
3	He is asked to move by Eddie and introduces himself as Bert Gordon. He moves slightly.
	<i>In control</i>

4	During the pool game, Minnesota Fats looks to Bert for guidance and Bert replies, 'stay with this kid, he's a loser'
	<i>Confident</i>
5	While Charlie and Eddie are arguing about whether to carry on or not, Bert prompts Minnesota Fats to continue with the game.
	<i>In control</i>
6	After Minnesota Fats has beaten Eddie, he hands the winnings over to Bert.
	<i>In control</i>
7	Eddie and Bert play poker together and then Bert buys Eddie a drink. He explains he drinks milk, 'only when I work'. He outlines how wealthy he is and what his plans for Eddie are. He tells Eddie to be careful hustling pool and Eddie asks when Bert started looking out for him: he answers, 'I don't know when it was'.
	<i>Determined, successful, controlling</i>
8	Bert is tracked down by Eddie and they commence their business relationship.
	<i>Ruthlessness</i>
9	On the train to Louisville, Bert gets to know Eddie and Sarah more.
	<i>Dismissive, flippant</i>
10	In the restaurant car, Bert makes Sarah wait for him to finish before she can sit down. Bert explains how the deal will work, 'when you play for me I pick up all the tabs'.
	<i>Controlling</i>
11	Bert and Eddie talk about Eddie's defeat to Minnesota Fats and Bert makes a disparaging remark about being a 'cripple'.
	<i>Arrogant, rude</i>
12	When they arrive at the hotel it is busy due to the Kentucky Derby, but Bert bribes the receptionist to give them two adjoining suites.
	<i>Assertive</i>
13	Bert and Sarah talk in the hotel and Bert lets her know where she stands, 'you're hanging on by your nails'. He is abrupt with her. He admits he is driven by 'money and for glory'.
	<i>Dismissive, controlling</i>
14	At Findley's party, Bert says something to Sarah, <i>sotto voce</i> , which upsets her.
	<i>Impolite</i>
15	Bert is doubtful that Eddie can beat Findley at billiards.
	<i>Sceptical</i>

16	After Findley has won some money from him, Bert wants to stop.
	<i>Level-headed</i>
17	After losing his own money, Eddie begs Bert for more cash to carry on but Bert refuses, 'I know when to quit, you don't'. Sarah intervenes but is sent away by Eddie. Bert then backs Eddie and dramatically increases the stake.
	<i>Manipulative, scheming, controlling</i>
18	Bert refuses Findley's offer of a cheque and insists on 'cash'.
	<i>Dominant</i>
19	While waiting for the taxi, Bert tells Eddie he has to be 'hard' with Sarah.
	<i>Uncaring, controlling</i>
20	Back in the hotel, Bert pretends to Sarah that Eddie asked him to give her some money and then makes a pass at her. She does not respond so he leaves.
	<i>Scheming</i>
21	Bert is being questioned by the police when Eddie gets back to the hotel and tries to explain to Eddie, 'she asked me for a drink so I gave her one. Then we had a few more'.
	<i>Unsettled, unconvincing</i>
22	In Ames Billiards, Bert waits for some action while throwing dice.
	<i>Patient</i>
23	When Eddie arrives, Bert looks nervous, and he continues to look uneasy while Minnesota Fats and Eddie play pool.
	<i>Troubled</i>
24	After Minnesota Fats has conceded defeat and handed over the stake, Bert interjects to demand his cut of the winnings, 'I'm a businessman, kid'. He is drinking milk.
	<i>Unemotional, threatening</i>
25	During their conversation about the mistreatment of Sarah, Bert responds, 'if it didn't happen in Louisville it happened some place else. If it didn't happen now it happened six months from now. That's the kind of dame she was'.
	<i>Cold, heartless, blaming</i>
26	Eventually Bert accepts Eddie's words that he will not pay but tells Eddie never to 'walk into a big time pool hall again'.
	<i>Threatening, controlling</i>

## Traits and States ~ Sarah Packard

1	Sarah sits alone, reading, in the café of Ames bus station.
	<i>Independent</i>
2	She and Eddie talk. He believes she is waiting for a bus and she acts as though she is, 'what time's the bus?' '8 o'clock'. Eddie falls asleep and Sarah pays for the coffee.
	<i>Civil, polite</i>
3	Eddie and Sarah meet again in a nearby bar. He buys her a drink and they talk. He notices she drinks a lot. When asked what she does on the days she does not go to college, Sarah replies, 'I drink'. She walks with a limp. They leave together.
	<i>Relaxed, honest</i>
4	At her apartment, Sarah changes her mind about Eddie, 'you're too hungry'.
	<i>Vulnerable</i>
5	Sarah returns to the bus station café to find Eddie waiting for her with a takeaway bottle.
	<i>Helpless, needy</i>
6	Sarah asks Eddie if they are doing the right thing by getting involved with each other, 'I've got troubles and I think you've got troubles. Maybe it would be better if we leave each other alone'.
	<i>Thoughtful, concerned, perceptive</i>
7	Sarah returns with some groceries and tells Eddie how much more popular she is in the neighbourhood now that she has a partner.
	<i>Contented, happy</i>
8	During Charlie's visit to her apartment, Sarah discovers some facts about Eddie that make her cry.
	<i>Saddened</i>
9	Sarah is typing while drunk. She knocks a bottle over.
	<i>Carelessness</i>
10	Eddie reads what she has been typing - 'something I'm making up' - and is unhappy at what it says. He angrily asks her about 'a contract of depravity' but she responds by saying they just stay indoors without talking and 'we drink and we make love'.
	<i>Unhappy, dejected, desiring of more</i>

11	Sarah looks after Eddie while he is injured and even seems to be drinking less. She continues with her typing.
	<i>Caring, understanding, focused</i>
12	While out on the picnic, Sarah says, 'I love you, Eddie'. She thinks he is a winner.
	<i>Loving, romantic, committed</i>
13	Eddie and Sarah go out for a meal, 'you look pretty' 'I feel pretty' but when told Eddie is going away for a little while, Sarah breaks down and confesses she never was an actress and that her estranged father sends her money because of her polio.
	<i>Tearful, distraught, honest</i>
14	In her first few encounters with Bert, Sarah is marginalised and undermined. He keeps misremembering her name and tells her to wait until he has finished before sitting down in the restaurant car on the train to Louisville. She is called a 'cripple' but has to shrug it off.
	<i>Sensitivity</i>
15	When Bert and Sarah talk in the hotel room, she is cynical of his motives, 'you own all the tomorrows'.
	<i>Alone, defiant, scared</i>
16	After some persuasion to attend the party, Sarah avoids Eddie and tries unsuccessfully to avoid Bert. He upsets her and she throws her drink over him.
	<i>Vulnerable, alone</i>
17	Sarah goes to the billiards room in Findley's house to find Eddie imploring Bert to give him more money, 'please Eddie, don't beg him'. She likens Bert to the man who broke Eddie's thumbs earlier in the film.
	<i>Spirited, passionate, clear-sighted, saddened</i>
18	At the hotel, Sarah has packed and is waiting for Eddie. She is told that Eddie wants her to leave. She initially does not respond when Bert kisses her, but changes her mind and follows him back to his room and asks for a drink.
	<i>Self-loathing, low self-esteem</i>
19	Sarah cuts her wrists in Bert's en-suite bathroom, after writing three words on the mirror.
	<i>Single-minded, committed, angry</i>

## APPENDIX F. *The Virgin Suicides*

### Sequence Analysis

Number	Film time (h.m.s)	Sequence length (m.s)	Description
1	0	0.21	Credits.
2	0.21	0.42	We see a series of images establishing the neighbourhood of the film, such as gardens being watered, a girl eating an ice lolly, a man cooking on a bar-b-q, and a boy playing basketball. A removal notice is pinned to a tree.
3	1.03	0.57	A girl is in a bathtub and it looks as though she has cut her wrists. She is taken away in an ambulance. A voiceover explains, 'Cecilia was the first to go'. At the hospital, she talks to a doctor.
4	2.00	0.35	Film title.
5	2.35	1.10	A voiceover reveals that this film is set 25 years ago, in Michigan and we see 4 boys watching a car pull into a driveway and out get the Lisbon girls, Cecilia (13), Lux (14), Bonnie (15), Mary (16) and Therese (17) and their parents, Mrs Lisbon and Mr Lisbon (a maths teacher at the local high school).
6	3.45	0.45	The 4 boys talk to Paul, who claims to have seen Cecilia just after she had cut her wrists.
7	4.30	0.56	Women talk on the telephone or face to face about Cecilia's suicide attempt, with one of them saying 'she wanted out of that house'.
8	5.26	0.14	Dominic, a young boy living in the same street, jumps from a ledge on his house in order to prove his love for another of the local girls. Cecilia watches this from the pavement.
9	5.40	1.40	Cecilia is with a psychologist, who shows her some images and asks her to say what they remind her of. Afterwards, the psychologist talks to Mr and Mrs Lisbon and recommends that 'Cecilia would benefit with having a social outlet'. He also says 'I know you're very strict'. We see them drive home.
10	7.20	1.08	A boy, Peter, is invited round to the Lisbon's for dinner. The voiceover explains that he had recently done some extra curricular work with Mr Lisbon and so was considered a suitable guest. Despite wearing a generously-sized vest, Lux is told to cover her shoulders by Mrs Lisbon. While they talk over dinner, two of the girls play footsie with Peter under the table.

11	8.28	2.22	After eating, Cecilia tells her mother that another animal - the Brazilian turbot frog - has just been made extinct. Peter goes to the bathroom, which is en-suite from Cecilia's room. He looks in some cupboards and thinks about Lux. She then knocks at the door to ask why he was taking so long. He dashes off home.
12	10.50	0.10	The girls sunbathe on the front lawn.
13	11.00	3.35	It is party time at the Lisbons'. The girls get ready. Guests arrive. They all assemble in the basement. Cecilia sits alone and fiddles with the bandages which cover her scars. The awkward silence is punctuated by routine questions and one word answers. Mr Lisbon shows off one of his model aeroplanes. Paul flirts with Mrs Lisbon.
14	14.35	2.13	Joe, a boy with learning difficulties, arrives at the party and speaks to Cecilia. The other boys tease him mildly. Cecilia excuses herself and goes upstairs to her room.
15	16.48	1.07	There is a sudden noise and Mrs Lisbon screams. Everybody rushes outside and sees Cecilia impaled on the garden railings that were underneath her bedroom window. The party ends.
16	17.55	1.05	The funeral cortege drives through a picket line into the cemetery. Mr Lisbon has to get out and explain before they let him through.
17	19.00	3.02	Father Moody, their priest, visits the Lisbons. He talks to Mr Lisbon before going upstairs to see Mrs Lisbon. The remaining 4 girls are lying together on the floor of a bedroom. The priest tells Mrs Lisbon he has listed Cecilia's death as an 'accident'.
18	22.02	0.59	The railings are removed by being ripped out by a truck.
19	23.01	2.52	The narrator talks about the boys' collection of Lisbon girls' memorabilia and the camera pans across an array of receipts, school letters, magazines and Cecilia's diary which was given to Parker by a plumber who found (and stole) it from the Lisbons' house. They flick through it, looking for juicy sections, and pictures relating to the text are seen onscreen. We see and hear about going out boating and Lux writing a boy's name on her underwear and being caught by her mum. As the voiceover sums up, 'we knew that they knew everything about us and that we couldn't fathom them at all'.
20	25.53	2.01	A woman steps across an untidy porch containing uncollected and out-of-date newspapers and knocks at the door of the Lisbons'. She introduces herself to Bonnie and Mary as Lydia Perl, a journalist, but is told to leave by Mrs Lisbon. Lydia Perl's news report is seen on TV and various families around the neighbourhood watch it.
21	27.54	1.31	Women talk on the telephone about Mrs Lisbon and we see her drying the dishes in her kitchen. Mr Lisbon goes to speak to the girls, but is unable to do so. He turns off the light and 'sees' Cecilia, but it turns out to be another daughter.



22	29.25	0.41	Tim wakes up, to find Cecilia sat on his bed telling him he snores really loud. A few seconds later, his alarm goes off and he really wakes up. On the way to school Chase 'sees' Cecilia sat in a tree, watching as he passes by in the car.
23	30.06	1.44	At school, the Lisbon girls arrive. We see Mr Lisbon teaching maths and the girls in their lessons as well. Chase tries to talk with Mary but she responds with a one word answer. Bonnie works with some classmates but the atmosphere becomes awkward when they talk about the death of a character in the novel they are reading.
24	31.50	0.15	The Lisbon girls retreat to the bathroom to escape by smoking and hanging about to pass the time.
25	32.05	0.35	A female speaker, standing at a lectern, talks about the fact that no counselling had been offered following Cecilia's death and so with that in mind, a booklet has been produced to help identify suicidal signs in students. As the school assembles for a group photo, the voiceover highlights some statistics, and then talks about dilated pupils, losing interest in hobbies, withdrawing from peers and other warning signals to look out for.
26	32.40	2.10	Mary and Chase talk again, but she is curt this time. In class, some of the boys see Lux joking with another boy and they wonder how he made her laugh. Then 3 boys are mock-interviewed about their experiences with Lux but the voiceover confirms their testimonies should be treated with suspicion. Then we meet Trip Fontane, who did get to know Lux well. He arrives late to school, sweet-talks the receptionist into giving him a pass and then walks down the corridor to admiring glances from numerous female students.
27	34.50	1.16	Trip is in his swimming pool when a girl calls round to give him her homework and some cakes. The voiceover tells us that he only met Lux for the first time by accident, after arriving stoned at school and entering the wrong classroom in a hurry.
28	36.06	0.39	We see a much older Trip – in the present – talking about how he was driven 'crazy' by Lux.
29	36.45	1.25	Back at school, Trip tries to speak to Lux but she ignores him. At home, he receives advice from his father and his father's partner about how to deal with Lux.
30	38.10	2.15	In a lecture hall, during a science film, Trip sits next to Lux and they touch hands. He says he is going to ask her out, then he leaves.
31	40.25	3.39	Trip is at the Lisbon's house, and they are all watching a nature programme on TV. Mrs Lisbon is sat between Trip and Lux. Towards the end of the evening, Trip is prompted to leave and after an awkward moment at the front door, wanders to his car wishing he had kissed Lux goodnight. A few seconds later, she dashes out and kisses him.

32	44.04	2.11	At school, Trip asks Mr Lisbon whether he can take Lux to the homecoming dance. Mr Lisbon says no, but is predisposed to a group date, if Trip and some friends take all the girls to the dance. He tells Trip, 'I'll take it up with the wife'.
33	46.15	1.03	Mr and Mrs Lisbon discuss the invitation and seem to agree it would be OK. The girls are very excited. Trip is told the good news.
34	47.18	1.17	At football training, the bartering begins as other boys try to impress upon Trip their reasons for him picking them to go with a Lisbon girl to the dance. We see the girls get ready in their new dresses, which the voiceover describes as '4 identical sacks' after Mrs Lisbon added 'an inch to the bust line and 2 inches to the waist and hem'. Dad takes a photo of the girls.
35	48.35	2.50	Trip and 3 other boys arrive. The voiceover explains how they were chosen – Parker for his access to a car; Jake for his supply of marijuana to Trip; and Kevin for his outstanding academic record, which would impress Mr and Mrs Lisbon. As the girls descend the stairs the camera focuses on Lux. The boys pin flowers on their dates. In a close up (and in a cartoon-esque way) we see Lux has written 'Trip' on her underwear.
36	51.25	1.35	During the car journey, the girls pass comment on their neighbours' gardens and houses. Some of the group smoke in the car.
37	53.00	3.40	At the dance, other guests are surprised to see the girls. Lux and Trip escape to a quiet corner to drink peach schnapps and kiss. Parker and Bonnie join them too, but do not stay very long.
38	56.40	4.01	It is announced that Trip and Lux are king and queen of homecoming. Trip refuses to wear the crown so as to protect his hairstyle and the room continues in a party mood. Trip and Lux go for a walk across the football pitch and become intimate. The others of their group look for them, but then drive home.
39	1.00.41	2.08	We see Lux and Trip asleep on the grass as the other 3 sisters are dropped off by the boys, who drive round the block and then check back on the house. Lux wakes up on her own and wanders off. She arrives home in a taxi.
40	1.02.49	0.44	Trip in the present day narrates as we see him get up off the grass back then and leave Lux alone. 'I didn't care how she got home that night. It was weird'. Intercut with this is a shot of Trip immediately after leaving Lux and he sits on his bed at home with his head in his hands. A 'bing-bong' sound is heard, and then a partially-seen nurse leans into shot to tell Trip 'it's time for your 6 o'clock group meeting'. He leaves.
41	1.03.33	2.36	The narrator announces that they expected a curfew for the girls but nothing as drastic as what happened. The girls were taken out of school and, after Mrs Lisbon returned from a church service about the evils of rock music, Lux's rock records were burnt, or at least, a few of them were until the toxic fumes filled the house and the remainder were thrown out with the rubbish.

42	1.06.09	1.26	The voiceover explains that after the harsh curfew was brought in, Lux took a number of separate boys up on to the roof and had some moments of passion with them. The 4 boys who have been obsessively watching the Lisbon girls since before Cecilia's death, spy on this nocturnal activity through a telescope. They manage to interview one of the boys who brags about the experience. We see Lux up on the roof again.
43	1.07.37	0.59	At school, Mr Lisbon talks to himself and then to a plant. He seems oblivious to questioning by a colleague about the girls' absence from their lessons.
44	1.08.36	2.04	People with chainsaws arrive at the Lisbon's house to take down the diseased elm tree. The girls surround the tree but as a news van arrives with Lydia Perl in it, they abandon the tree and run inside. The tree is cut down. We see more removal notices on other trees.
45	1.10.40	2.00	We see the seasons pass quickly as the camera focuses on the Lisbon's house. The narrator fills in the details for us – as the girls were grounded, they ordered holiday magazines such as 'Encounters Overseas' and 'African Adventures' in order to 'escape'. The boys ordered the same magazines and imagined themselves on holiday with the Lisbon sisters. We see a fake photo slideshow of imagined holiday pictures.
46	1.12.40	1.01	It is clear the boys are still collecting anything they can of the girls so as not to lose touch with them. We see rock albums, perfume bottles, photos and so on. And a note which says 'watch for our lights'. They follow the instructions that evening and indeed, see the girls' light flash off and on. Using Morse code, the message received is 'help send bobo'. The boys are unsure what to make of this statement.
47	1.13.41	2.44	The boys receive cards from the girls, and the boys thought for a week about how they could contact the girls, before somebody suggested they use the telephone. They rang them up and played a record. The girls then did the same. We see the boys and girls choosing, playing and enjoying each other's music.
48	1.16.25	1.15	At the Lisbon's, Mr Lisbon is deep in thought while Mrs Lisbon talks to Lux. The boys ring, but there is no answer. Later on, Tim receives a message saying 'wait for signal'. The 4 of them wait for night and the girls' lights to flash and then go across to the house.
49	1.17.40	2.21	They go round to the back and Lux opens the door for them. They talk about driving somewhere. She says 'I'll go wait in the car. You guys wait here for my sisters'. We see an imagined journey with the 8 of them out on a trip together.
50	1.20.01	0.47	They hear something in the basement and head down there. Then they see a body hanging from the rafters. Rushing out through the kitchen they step over another body and the sound of gas can be heard. They run away.
51	1.20.48	0.57	The narrator tries to explain what happened, admitting that even now, they argue about the exact order in

			which the events took place. It seems as though Bonnie hung herself in the basement, while Mary gassed herself in the kitchen and Therese had already taken a bottle of sleeping pills, probably before they arrived. Lux had indeed gone to wait in the car, killing herself with exhaust fumes. Ambulances fetch the bodies.
52	1.21.45	2.15	We see various TV reports about the tragedy. Mr and Mrs Lisbon leave in their car. The narrator explains that following the 'suicide free-for-all', the house was sold and items in it either sold or thrown out. The boys added to their collection by rescuing some photos from the rubbish bins.
53	1.24.00	2.25	The voiceover talks about life after the Lisbons, with adults getting on with golf, tennis and drinks while their offspring attended debutantes' parties and social gatherings. Owing to a chemical spillage at a local industrial site, the town was engulfed in a putrid stink which spoiled some parties for some people. Alice O'Connor's debutante party takes the theme of 'asphyxiation' and encourages guests to wear gas masks in order to incorporate the stink into the evening. The boys have grown up a little by now and have girlfriends and we see them at this party. A man jokes he is tired of this world and plunges into the swimming pool, exclaiming 'you don't understand me, I'm a teenager! I've got problems!'
54	1.26.25	1.05	The narrator ends by saying that the boys were left with a saddened outlook on life as they wish the girls had heard the love they held for them. They stand opposite the Lisbon's house, with Chase holding a flame aloft in the air. The camera tracks away.
55	1.27.30		The end.

### Traits and States ~ Mr Lisbon

1	Mr Lisbon is introduced to the viewer's as the maths teacher at the local school, and father of the Lisbon girls.
	<i>Unclear – though expectation might be that he is austere or strict</i>
2	In the office of the psychologist, he says to Mr and Mrs Lisbon 'I know you're very strict' before outlining his recommendations for Cecilia.
	<i>Disciplined, formal</i>
3	Over dinner, Mr Lisbon asks Peter, a guest, various school-related questions and then they talk about aeroplanes while looking at a model aeroplane.
	<i>Old fashioned and hobbyist</i>

4	At the party, Mr Lisbon tries to interest the boys in one of his model aeroplanes, but fails to do so.
	<i>Hobbyist</i>
5	Confronted with the death of his youngest daughter, Cecilia.
	<i>Devastated</i>
6	Mr Lisbon needs to negotiate with picketers in order to get the funeral cortege into the cemetery.
	<i>Calm, persuasive</i>
7	While talking with the priest, Mr Lisbon has trouble diverting his attention away from the baseball game on television and cannot find the right words when speaking.
	<i>Distracted, distant</i>
8	Mr Lisbon attempts to talk to his four remaining daughters, but struggles to speak and so does not say anything. He then thinks he sees Cecilia but his eyes have tricked him.
	<i>Distracted</i>
9	Mr Lisbon is briefly seen teaching a maths class.
	<i>Competent, skilful</i>
10	He follows his wife's wishes and ushers Trip out after an evening spent in front of the TV.
	<i>Dutiful</i>
11	Trip and Mr Lisbon talk about Lux and the homecoming dance. Mr Lisbon makes no promises and says he has to check with Mrs Lisbon about the girls attending the dance.
	<i>Firm but reasonable to Trip and Mrs Lisbon.</i>
12	Talks to Mrs Lisbon and convinces her the group night out is acceptable.
	<i>Persuasive</i>
13	Mr Lisbon explains the situation to Trip.
	<i>Fair, competent, confident</i>
14	On the night of the dance, Mr Lisbon takes a photograph of the girls in their new dresses.
	<i>Proud</i>

15	Mr Lisbon is also at the dance, in his role as a teacher at the school.
	<i>Contented</i>
16	When Lux returns home the morning after the dance, Mr Lisbon is anxious to check how she is, though he seems unable to go near her without Mrs Lisbon in attendance.
	<i>Concerned</i>
17	At school, Mr Lisbon talks to a pot plant but is unable to talk seriously to a colleague.
	<i>Distracted, oblivious to others around him</i>
18	He tries to argue against the tree being cut down by asking if an alternative treatment can be tried, but is told it does not work. He stands slightly behind Mrs Lisbon as they talk to the supervisor,
	<i>Polite, rational, accepting</i>
19	Mr Lisbon is seen staring into the middle distance, while sat at home.
	<i>Distant</i>
20	After his daughters have all killed themselves, he helps Mrs Lisbon into their car and they drive away.
	<i>Caring, silent</i>

### Traits and States ~ Mrs Lisbon

1	Introduced by the narrator as the mother of the Lisbon girls.
	<i>No trait evident and little suggestion either</i>
2	In the office of the psychologist, he says to Mr and Mrs Lisbon 'I know you're very strict' before outlining his recommendations for Cecilia.
	<i>Disciplined, formal</i>
3	During dinner, Mrs Lisbon tells Lux to cover her shoulders, presumably as there is a boy dining with them.
	<i>Firm</i>
4	After dinner, Mrs Lisbon listens to Cecilia talk about a frog becoming extinct.
	<i>Mildly concerned</i>

5	Mrs Lisbon plays the hostess at the party and excuses Cecilia when she leaves.
	<i>Functional</i>
6	She is left in a bad way after Cecilia has committed suicide.
	<i>Devastated</i>
7	When visited by the priest, Mrs Lisbon is still upset but relieved when told that Cecilia's death has been registered as an 'accident'.
	<i>Grief-stricken</i>
8	The narrator tells us that Lux once had a crush on a boy and wrote his name on her underwear, which Mrs Lisbon found and bleached out.
	<i>Stern</i>
9	Mrs Lisbon tells a journalist to leave her family alone.
	<i>Private</i>
10	While Trip watches television at the Lisbons' house, Mrs Lisbon plays chaperone by sitting in between Lux and Trip. She is clearly uncomfortable with the idea of Lux having a boyfriend.
	<i>Old-fashioned</i>
11	When Mr Lisbon brings home Trip's proposal for all four girls to go to the dance, Mrs Lisbon is not keen on the idea but relents under pressure from Mr Lisbon and the girls.
	<i>Safe in her outlook</i>
12	After the girls have chosen the material for their dresses, Mrs Lisbon adds inches to the bust and hemline to make them less flattering.
	<i>Old-fashioned</i>
13	When the four boys visit to collect the four sisters before the dance, Mrs Lisbon explains the dangers of car travel and asks about the driving credentials of Parker.
	<i>Anxious</i>
14	When Lux finally gets home, Mrs Lisbon is visibly upset.
	<i>Concerned</i>
15	Mrs Lisbon makes Lux burn / throw out her rock records, believing they have corrupted her daughter.
	<i>Austere</i>

16	Mrs Lisbon is supportive of her daughters as they try to stop their tree from being cut down. She stands in front of Mr Lisbon as they talk to the supervisor.
	<i>Forceful, defiant</i>
17	Mrs Lisbon and Lux talk about the permanent grounding of the girls.
	<i>Concerned but unrelenting</i>
18	After the four remaining daughters had killed themselves, Mrs Lisbon is heard saying that 'none of our girls lacked love' and that 'there was plenty of love in our house'. 'I never understood why'.
	<i>Desperately sad, but unclear as to why the girls killed themselves</i>

### Traits and States ~ Cecilia

1	'Cecilia was the first to go'. She cuts her wrists in the bath but does not die.
	<i>Suicidal</i>
2	When asked why she had tried to take her own life, she responds 'obviously doctor, you've never been a 13 year old girl'.
	<i>Affected by something, though not clear what</i>
3	Introduced in freeze frame by the narrator as she steps from the car with her sisters.
	<i>Not as happy as the other girls</i>
4	During a visit to a psychologist, Cecilia responds to a series of images by stating what they remind her of.
	<i>Flippant</i>
5	Cecilia does not engage in the conversation with Peter during dinner.
	<i>Bored</i>
6	Cecilia talks to her mother about the recently-extinct Turbot frog.
	<i>Upset</i>
7	During the party, Cecilia sits on her own, despite it being a gathering for her.
	<i>Shy, reserved</i>



8	When Joe arrives, she briefly interacts with him, but leaves soon after once the other boys begin teasing him.
	<i>Sensitive</i>
9	Throws herself out of her bedroom window onto a set of garden railings below.
	<i>Dissatisfied with life</i>

### Traits and States ~ Lux

1	Along with her sisters, Lux is introduced by the narrator in freeze-frame as she steps from the car.
	<i>Happy</i>
2	During dinner, she strokes Peter's leg with her foot and asks him if he likes to wrestle.
	<i>Playful, seductive</i>
3	When Peter uses the bathroom in Cecilia's room, Lux goes to find him as they think he has lost his way.
	<i>Blunt</i>
4	Through Cecilia's diary, read by the boys, we learn that Lux wrote the name of a boy she liked a lot on her underwear but was caught and reprimanded by her mother.
	<i>Becoming sexually aware</i>
5	At school, Lux gets a reputation for being 'sociable' with the boys.
	<i>In need of male companionship</i>
6	She meets Trip for the first time and he keeps trying to speak to her after that. He asks her out during a lesson in a lecture hall.
	<i>Interested, flirtatious</i>
7	When Trip visits the house and they watch television with the family, she flirts a little. Trip leaves and Lux dashes out to kiss him in his car.
	<i>Passionate</i>
8	After the girls have dressed for the party, the camera focuses on Lux as she descends the stairs, wearing a huge smile. As the flower is attached to her dress, we 'see' the word 'Trip' written on her underwear.
	<i>In love with Trip</i>

9	At the dance, her and Trip find a quiet corner to kiss.
	<i>Passionate</i>
10	She is announced as queen of homecoming!
	<i>Very happy</i>
11	Trip and Lux venture out for a walk and they make love on the football field.
	<i>In love</i>
12	Lux wakes up the next morning to find herself alone. She goes home in a taxi.
	<i>Upset, downhearted</i>
13	Lux cries as she is forced to get rid of her rock albums.
	<i>Distressed</i>
14	After being taken out of school along with her sisters, Lux starts to engage in random acts of passion with local boys.
	<i>Confused</i>
15	Lux and her sisters try to prevent their tree from being cut down, but as soon as a news van arrives, they all run inside the house.
	<i>Brave, defiant, scared</i>
16	During the telephone calls when records were played between the girls and boys, Lux listens but looks as though she longs for freedom.
	<i>Stifled</i>
17	Lux tells her mother they are 'suffocating' in the house and sends a note to one of the boys, addressed to 'whoever', stating she thinks Trip is a 'creep'.
	<i>Imprisoned</i>
18	Lux meets the boys in her house when they respond to the girls' request to visit during the night. She talks to them about going on a trip and she then goes to the garage.
	<i>Flirtatious, confident</i>

## Traits and States ~ Trip Fontane

1	The first glimpse we get of Trip is of him leaning against his sporty car. <i>Cool, concerned with his looks</i>
2	Though late to school, he sweet-talks the receptionist into allowing him through. <i>Persuasive</i>
3	He walks down the school corridor, to the admiring glances of several school girls. <i>Confident</i>
4	Trip relaxes in the swimming pool at home and answers the door to a girl from school with her homework and a cake for him. He accepts both. <i>Appreciative</i>
5	While stoned, Trip sees Lux for the first time and likes what he sees. <i>In love</i>
6	Trip now – sat at a table with a takeaway cup and he says 'that girl drove me crazy'. <i>Disbelieving, rueful</i>
7	Trip tries to talk to Lux but is ignored by her. <i>Helpless</i>
8	He is schooled by his father and his father's partner about how to deal with Lux: 'It's all about subtlety. It's all about nuance'. <i>Lacking energy, apathetic</i>
9	He asks Lux out and they briefly touch hands. <i>Confident, charming</i>
10	At the Lisbons' house, Trip fits in well. He is pleased with kiss in the car. <i>Polite, loving</i>
11	Trip asks Mr Lisbon if he can take Lux to the dance. This is refused, but a compromise is suggested whereby all the girls might be able to go together. <i>Well-mannered</i>

12	Once he has been told that the dance invitation has been accepted, Trip sets about selecting his three friends for the big night.
	<i>Wheeler-dealing</i>
13	During the car journey to the dance, one of the boys makes a crude remark and Trip tells him to 'grow up'.
	<i>Mature, responsible</i>
14	At the dance, Trip and Lux escape to kiss and drink peach schnapps: 'babes love it'.
	<i>Confident, loving</i>
15	Despite being named King of Homecoming, Trip will not allow his hair to be messed up and refuses to wear the crown.
	<i>Vain, overly concerned with his appearance</i>
16	He sweet-talks Lux into leaving the party with him and they have a moment of passion together. They then cuddle up and fall asleep.
	<i>Loving, passionate</i>
17	Trip now – 'I didn't care how she got home that night. It was weird'. That was the last time he saw her. He struggles to put a positive spin on the situation and then he is told by a nurse-like figure that 'it's time for your six o'clock group meeting'. He leaves.
	<i>Dejected, despondent</i>

## APPENDIX G. Films by Category by Decade by %

Table 3

Decade	Melancholic			Occasioned			Totals%
	F%	M%	Tot%	F%	M%	Tot%	
1910-1949	0	1	1	2	5	7	8
1950s	0	0	0	2	1	3	3
1960s	0	0	0	2	5	7	7
1970s	1	2	3	3	7	10	13
1980s	0	1	1	3	6	9	10
1990s	2	3	5	7	11	18	23
2000s	3	6	9	5	22	27	36
Totals	6	13	19	24	57	81	100

Table 3 shows how numbers of films in each category increase decade by decade, to the extent that nearly 60% of all the films in this dataset were released post-1990.

Table 4

Decade	Melancholic			Occasioned			Totals%
	F%	M%	Tot%	F%	M%	Tot%	
1910-1949	0	7	7	31	62	93	100
1950s	11	22	33	49	18	67	100
1960s	3	3	6	37	57	94	100
1970s	12	22	34	25	41	66	100
1980s	3	13	16	32	52	84	100
1990s	14	14	28	23	49	72	100
2000s	12	16	28	17	55	72	100

Table 4 shows the row percentages between males and females on a decade by decade basis. There are more males in each category and in each decade with the exception of the 1950s for Occasioned Suicide, though the actual numbers of films are small (seven films for this decade).

## FILMOGRAPHY

*10 Things I Hate About You* (Gil Junger, 1999, USA)  
*A Few Good Men* (Rob Reiner, 1992, USA)  
*A Single Man* (Tom Ford, 2009, USA)  
*A Star is Born* (George Cukor, 1954, USA)  
*About A Boy* (Chris and Paul Weitz, 2002, UK/USA/France/Germany)  
*Airport* (George Seaton, 1970, USA)  
*Albino Alligator* (Kevin Spacey, 1996, USA/France)  
*Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979, USA/UK)  
*All Fall Down* (John Frankenheimer, 1962, USA)  
*Amants, Les* (Louis Malle, 1958, France)  
*Amen* (Costa Gavras, 2002, France/Germany/Romania)  
*Anna Karenina* (Clarence Brown, 1935, USA)  
*Apartment* (Billy Wilder, 1960, USA)  
*Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998, USA)  
*Baader-Meinhof Complex, The* (Uli Edel, 2008, Germany, France, Czech Republic)  
*Beach, The* (Danny Boyle, 2000, USA/UK)  
*Bedazzled* (Stanley Donen, 1967, UK)  
*Big Heat, The* (Fritz Lang, 1953, USA)  
*Black Dahlia, The* (Brian De Palma, 2006, Germany, USA)  
*Blade* (Stephen Norrington, 1998, USA)  
*Bourne Supremacy, The* (Paul Greengrass, 2004, USA, Germany)  
*Breakfast Club, The* (John Hughes, 1985, USA)  
*Broadway Musketees* (John Farrow, 1938, USA)  
*Bulworth* (Warren Beatty, 1998, USA)  
*Caché* (Michael Haneke, 2006, France/Austria/Germany/Italy/USA)  
*Cast Away* (Robert Zemeckis, 2000, USA)  
*Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941, USA)  
*Cléo de 5 á 7* (Agnes Varda, 1962, France)  
*Come Undone* (Sebastien Lifshitz, 2000, France/Belgium)  
*Consequences of Love* (Paolo Sorrentino, 2004, Italy)

*Constant Gardener, The* (Fernando Meirelles, 2004, UK, Germany)  
*Control* (Anton Corbijn, 2007, UK/USA/Australia/Japan)  
*Core, The* (Jon Amiel, 2003, USA, UK)  
*Cruel Intentions* (Roger Cumble, 1999, USA)  
*Dancer Upstairs, The* (John Malkovich, 2002, Spain/USA)  
*Days of Wine and Roses* (Blake Edwards, 1962, USA)  
*Dead Poets Society* (Peter Weir, 1989, USA)  
*Death on the Nile* (John Guillermin, 1978, UK)  
*Death Wish* (Michael Winner, 1974, USA)  
*Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, 1998, USA)  
*Deer Hunter, The* (Michael Cimino, 1978, UK/USA)  
*Delicatessen* (Marc Carot and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1991, France)  
*Descent: Part 2, The* (Jon Harris, 2009, UK)  
*Dil Se...* (Mani Ratnam, 1998, India)  
*Doomsday* (Neil Marshall, 2008, UK, USA, South Africa, Germany)  
*Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944, USA)  
*Downfall* (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2005, Germany/Italy/Austria)  
*Dr. Monica* (William Keighley, 1934, USA)  
*Dragnet* (Jack Webb, 1951-1959 and 1967-1970, USA)  
*El Cid* (Anthony Mann, 1961, Italy/USA/UK)  
*Election* (Alexander Payne, 1999, USA)  
*Encino Man* (Les Mayfield, 1992, USA)  
*Event Horizon* (Paul WS Anderson, 1997, UK/USA)  
*Expendables, The* (Sylvester Stallone, 2010, USA)  
*Falling Down* (Joel Schumacher, 1989, France/USA/UK)  
*Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987, USA)  
*Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (John Hughes, 1986, USA)  
*Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999, USA/Germany)  
*Final Destination II* (David R Ellis, 2003, USA/Canada)  
*Flower of the Arabian Nights* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1974, Italy/France)  
*Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick, 1987, UK/USA)  
*Full Monty, The* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997, UK)  
*Fugitive, The* (Roy Huggins, 1963-1967, USA)  
*Game, The* (David Fincher, 1997, USA)

*Getaway, The* (Sam Peckinpah, 1972, USA)  
*Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946, USA)  
*Girl Interrupted* (James Mangold, 1999, Germany/USA)  
*Glengarry Glen Ross* (James Foley, 1992, USA)  
*Goodnight and Good Luck* (George Clooney, 2006, USA/France/UK/Japan)  
*Grace of my Heart* (Allison Anders, 1996, USA)  
*Gran Torino* (Clint Eastwood, 2009, USA)  
*Great Gatsby, The* (Jack Clayton, 1974, USA)  
*Hanging Garden, The* (Thom Fitzgerald, 1997, UK/Canada)  
*Hannah and her Sisters* (Woody Allen, 1996, USA)  
*Happiness* (Todd Solondz, 1998, USA)  
*Hard Candy* (David Slade, 2006, USA)  
*Hard, Fast and Beautiful* (Ida Lupino, 1951, USA)  
*Harvey* (Henry Koster, 1950, USA)  
*Head On* (Fatih Akin, 2004, Turkey/Germany)  
*Heathers* (Michael Lehmann, 1989, USA)  
*Hills Have Eyes, The* (Alexandre Aja, 2006, USA)  
*Hours, The* (Stephen Daldry, 2002, USA/UK)  
*House* (Steve Miner, 1986, USA)  
*House of Flying Daggers* (Yimou Zhang, 2005, China/Hong Kong)  
*House of Mirth* (Terence Davies, 2000, UK/France/Germany/USA)  
*Hustler, The* (Robert Rossen, 1961, USA)  
*I am Legend* (Francis Lawrence, 2007, USA)  
*Igby Goes Down* (Burr Steers, 2002, USA)  
*In Bruges* (Martin McDonagh, 2008, UK/USA)  
*Isle, The* (Ki-Duk Kim, 2000, South Korea)  
*It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946, USA)  
*Japon* (Carlos Reygadas, 2002, Mexico/Germany/Netherlands/Spain)  
*Kidulthood* (Menhaj Huda, 2006, UK)  
*Killers, The* (Don Siegel, 1964, USA)  
*Killers, The* (Robert Siodmak, 1946, USA)  
*Lady From Shanghai, The* (Orson Welles, 1947, USA)  
*Lady of the Tropics* (Jack Conway, 1939, USA)  
*Last of the Mohicans, The* (Michael Mann, 1992, USA)



*Le Feu Follet* (Louis Malle, 1963, France)  
*Le Jour se Lève* (Marcel Carne, 1939, France)  
*Leaving Las Vegas* (Mike Figgis, 1995, France/USA/UK)  
*L'emmerdeur* (Edouard Molinaro, 1973, France/Italy)  
*Lemming* (Dominik Moll, 2005, France)  
*Let the Right One In* (Tomas Alfredson, 2009, Sweden)  
*Lethal Weapon* (Richard Donner, 1987, USA)  
*Lift to the Scaffold* (Louis Malle, 1958, France)  
*Lilith* (Robert Rossen, 1964, USA)  
*Lilja 4-Ever* (Lukas Moodysson, 2002, Sweden/Denmark)  
*Little Children* (Todd Field, 2006, USA)  
*Lives of Others, The* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2007, Germany)  
*Lolita* (Stanley Kubrick, 1962, UK, USA)  
*Long Day's Journey into Night* (Sydney Lumet, 1962, USA)  
*Lost Weekend, The* (Billy Wilder, 1946, USA)  
*Luzhin Defence, The* (Marleen Gorris, 2000, UK/France)  
*Mad Love* (Antonia Bird, 1995, USA)  
*Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999, USA)  
*Man on Fire* (Tony Scott, 2004, UK/USA)  
*Man Who Shot Liberty Valence, The* (John Ford, 1962, USA)  
*Man Who Wasn't There, The* (Joel Coen, 2001, UK/USA)  
*Man with the Golden Arm, The* (Otto Preminger, 1956, USA)  
*Manchurian Candidate, The* (John Frankenheimer, 1962, USA)  
*Manchurian Candidate, The* (Jonathan Demme, 2004, USA)  
*Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* (Peter Weir, 2003, USA)  
*Matrix Trilogy, The* (Andy and Lana Wachowski, 1999-2003, USA/Australia)  
*Milk* (Gus Van Sant, 2009, USA)  
*Million Dollar Baby* (Clint Eastwood, 2005, USA)  
*Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002, USA)  
*Mist, The* (Frank Darabont, 2008, USA)  
*Morvern Callar* (Lynne Ramsay, 2002, UK/Canada)  
*Mouchette* (Robert Bresson, 1967, France)  
*Never Ending Story, The* (Wolfgang Petersen, 1984, West Germany/ USA)  
*Never on Sunday* (Jules Dassin, 1960, Greece, USA)

*Ninth Gate, The* (Roman Polanski, 1999, Spain/France/USA)  
*Omen, The* (John Moore, 2006, USA)  
*Once Were Warriors* (Lee Tamahori, 1994, New Zealand)  
*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Milos Forman, 1975, USA)  
*Open Water* (Chris Kentis, 2003, USA)  
*Ox-Box Incident, The* (William A Wellman, 1943, USA)  
*Paradise Now* (Hany Abu-Assad, 2005, Occupied Palestinian Territory/France/Germany/Netherlands/Israel)  
*Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960, UK)  
*Pépé le Moko* (Julien Duvivier, 1936, France)  
*Petrified Forest, The* (Achie Mayo, 1936, USA)  
*Phaedra* (Jules Dassin, 1962, France, Greece, USA)  
*Piano, The* (Jane Campion, 1993, Australia/New Zealand/France)  
*Piccadilly* (Unknown, 1929, UK)  
*Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir, 1975, Australia)  
*Pierrot Le Fou* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1965, France)  
*Play Misty For Me* (Clint Eastwood, 1971, USA)  
*Pledge, The* (Sean Penn, 2001, USA)  
*Predator* (John McTiernan, 1987, USA)  
*Prestige, The* (Christopher Nolan, 2006, USA/UK)  
*Pretty Persuasion* (Marcos Siega, 2005, USA)  
*Pretty In Pink* (John Hughes, 1986, USA)  
*Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960, USA)  
*Rapture, The* (Michael Tolkin, 1991, USA)  
*Reader, The* (Stephen Daldry, 2008, USA/Germany)  
*Redbelt* (David Mamet, 2008, USA)  
*Robin and Marian* (Richard Lester, 1976, USA)  
*Romeo and Juliet* (George Cukor, 1936, USA)  
*Rosetta* (Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, 1999, France/Belgium)  
*Rules of Attraction* (Roger Avary, 2002, USA/Germany)  
*Sayonara* (Joshua Logan, 1957, USA)  
*Scent of a Woman* (Martin Brest, 1992, USA)  
*School Ties* (Robert Mandel, 1992, USA)  
*Scum* (Alan Clarke, 1979, UK)

*Shawshank Redemption, The* (Frank Darabont, 1994, USA)  
*She's All That* (Robert Iscove, 1999)  
*Shootist, The* (Don Siegel, 1976, USA)  
*Sin City* (Frank Miller and Robert Rodriguez, 2005, USA)  
*Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973, USA)  
*Spartacus* (Stanley Kubrick, 1960, USA)  
*Spellbound* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1945, USA)  
*Splendor in the Grass* (Elia Kazan, 1961, USA)  
*Stage Door, The* (Gregory La Cava, 1937)  
*Star Trek: Wrath of Khan* (Nicholas Meyer, 1982, USA)  
*Stealth* (Rob Cohen, 2005, USA)  
*Stolen Holiday* (Michael Curtiz, 1937, USA)  
*Strange Love of Martha Ivers, The* (Lewis Milestone, 1946, USA)  
*Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937, USA)  
*Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950, USA)  
*Sunshine* (Danny Boyle, 2007, UK/USA)  
*Sweeney Todd: Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (Tim Burton, 2007, USA/UK)  
*Sylvia* (Christine Jeffs, 2003, UK)  
*Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, 2005, USA)  
*Taking of Pelham One Two Three, The* (Joseph Sargent, 1974, USA)  
*Talk to Her* (Pedro Almodovar, 2002, Spain)  
*Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (James Cameron, 1991, USA/France)  
*Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The* (Marcus Nispel, 2003, USA)  
*Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991, USA)  
*Three Godfathers* (Richard Boleslawski, 1936, USA)  
*Torch Singer* (Alexander Hall, George Somnes, 1933, USA)  
*Trois Coleurs: Bleu* (Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1993, France/Poland/Switzerland)  
*Tunes of Glory* (Ronald Neame, 1960, UK)  
*Turtle Beach* (Stephen Wallace, 1992, Australia)  
*Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959, USA)  
*Victim* (Basil Dearden, 1961, UK)  
*Virgin Suicides, The* (Sophia Coppola, 1999, USA)  
*Wetherby* (David Hare, 1985, UK)  
*White Fawn's Devotion* (unknown, 1910, USA)

*White Ribbon, The* (Michael Haneke, 2009, Austria/Germany/France/Italy)

*Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself* (Lone Scherfig, 2002, Denmark/UK/Sweden/France)

*Wild Bunch, The* (Sam Peckinpah, 1969, USA)

*Young Warriors* (Lawrence D Foldes, 1983, USA)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexander, V.D. (2003) *Sociology of the Arts*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing

Archer, J. and Lloyd, B. (2002) *Sex and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Aronowitz, S. (1995) My masculinity. In M. Berger et al, eds. *Constructing Masculinity*. New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 307-321.

Asberg, M., Nordstrom, P. and Traskman-Bendz, L. (1986) Cerebrospinal fluid studies in suicide. *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 487, (Dec.), pp. 243-255.

Atkinson, J.M. (1978) *Discovering Suicide*. London: Macmillan.

Atkinson, J.M. (1971) Suicide statistics. In A. Giddens, ed. *The Sociology of Suicide*. London: Frank Cass Co. Ltd, 1971, pp. 86-96.

Atkinson, M. (2008) Exploring male femininity in the 'crisis': men and cosmetic surgery. *Body Society*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 67-87.

Barrett, F.J. (2001) The organisational construction of hegemonic masculinity: the case of the U.S. navy. In S.M. Whitehead and F.J. Barrett, eds. *The Masculinities Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, pp. 77-99.

Barry, R.L. (1994) *Breaking the Thread of Life*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.

Baudelot, C. and Establet, R. (2008) *Suicide. The Hidden Side of Modernity*. Translated by Macey, D. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Berger, M. et al (eds.) (1995) *Constructing Masculinity*. New York: Routledge.

**Beynon, J. (2002) *Masculinities and Culture*. Buckingham: Open University Press.**

**Bille-Brahe, U. (2000) Sociology and suicidal behaviour. In K. Hawton and K. van Heeringen, eds. *The International Handbook of Suicide and Attempted Suicide*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, pp. 193-207.**

**Birke, L. (1999) *Feminism and the Biological Body*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.**

**Bordwell, D. and Thompson, K. (1993) *Film Art. An Introduction*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.**

**Bordo, S. (1997) The body and the reproduction of femininity. In K. Conboy, N. Medina & S. Stanbury, eds. *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, pp. 90-110.**

**Bradley, H. (2007) *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.**

**Bresler, R.J. (2000) *Us vs. Them. American Political and Cultural Conflict from WW II to Watergate*. Wilmington, DE; Scholarly Resources Inc.**

**Brittan, A. (2001) Masculinities and masculinism. In S.M. Whitehead and F.J. Barrett, eds. *The Masculinities Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, pp. 51-55.**

**Brittan, A. (1989) *Masculinity and Power*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.**

**Brock, A. and Griffiths, C. (2003) Trends in suicide by method in England and Wales, 1979 to 2001. *Health Statistics Quarterly* 20, Winter 2003, pp. 7-18.**

**Brod, H. and Kaufman, M. (1994) *Theorising Masculinities*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications**

**Brown, R.M.** (2001) *The Art of Suicide*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd.

**Brubaker, S.J. and Johnson, J.A.** (2008) 'Pack a more powerful punch' and 'lay the pipe': erectile enhancement discourse as a body-project for masculinity. *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, June 2008, pp. 131-146.

**Buchbinder, D.** (2008) Enter the schlemiel: the emergence of inadequate or incompetent masculinities in recent film and television. *Canadian Review of American Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 227-245.

**Butler, J.** (1990) *Gender Trouble*. London: Routledge.

**Canetto, S.S. and Sakinofsky, I.** (1998) The Gender Paradox in Suicide. *Suicide and Life Threatening Behaviour*, Vol. 28 (1), Spring 1998, pp. 1-23.

**Capote, T.** (1986) *Answered Prayers: The Unfinished Novel*. London: Penguin Classics.

**Casty, A.** (1966) The films of Robert Rossen. *Film Quarterly*, (1966), Vol. 20, No. 2 (Winter), pp. 3-12.

**Charles, M. and Bradley, K.** (2009) Indulging our gendered selves? Sex segregation by field of study in 44 countries. *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 114, No. 4 (Jan. 2009), pp. 924-976.

**Chatman, S.** (1978) *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press

**Clare, A.** (2000) *On Men*. London: Chatto & Windus.

**Coltrane, S.** (1994) Theorising masculinities in contemporary social science. In H. Brod and M. Kaufman, *Theorising Masculinities*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1994, pp. 39-60.

**Connell, R.W.** (2001) The social organisation of masculinity. In S.M. Whitehead and F.J. Barrett, eds. *The Masculinities Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, pp. 30-50.

**Connell, R.W.** (2000) *The Men and the Boys*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

**Connell, R.W.** (1987) *Gender and Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

**Connell, R.W. and Messerschmidt, J.W.** (2005) Hegemonic masculinity. Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, Vol. 19, No. 6, December 2005, pp. 829-859.

**Conway-Long, D.** (1994) Ethnographies and masculinities. In H. Brod and M. Kaufman, *Theorising Masculinities*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1994, pp. 61-81.

**Copes, H., and Hochstetler, A.** (2003) Situational construction of masculinity among male street thieves. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 32, Number 3, June 2003, pp. 279-304.

**Curran, J. and Porter, V.** (eds.) (1983) *British Cinema History*. London: Weidenfield and Nicolson.

**Davenport, R.J.** (1996) One drink minimum. *American Cinematographer*, 1996, Vol. LXXVII, Part 2, February, pp. 28-33.

**Davidoff, L.** (1998) Regarding some 'Old Husbands' Tales': public and private in feminist history. In J.B. Landes, ed. *Feminism. The public and the private*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 164-194.

**Dawson, G.** (1991) The blond Bedouin. In M. Roper and J. Tosh, eds. *Manful Assertions*. London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 113-144.



- Demetriou, D.Z.** (2001) Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity: a critique. *Theory and Society*, 30, 2001, pp. 337-361.
- Doherty, T.** (2002) *Teenagers and Teenpics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Donald, R.R.** (2001) Masculinity and machismo in Hollywood's war films. In S.M. Whitehead and F.J. Barrett, eds. *The Masculinities Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, pp. 170-183.
- Douglas, J.D.** (1967) *The Social Meaning of Suicide*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Durkheim, E.** ([1897] 2002) *Suicide*. London: Routledge.
- Dyer, R.** (2002) *The Matter of Images*. London: Routledge.
- Edley, N. and Wetherall, M.** (1995) *Men in Perspective*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall / Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Ehrenreich, B.** (1995) The decline of patriarchy. In M. Berger, B. Wallis and S. Watson, eds. *Constructing Masculinity*. New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 284-290.
- Erickson, T.** (1996) Kill me again: movement becomes genre. In A. Silver & J. Ursini, eds. *Film Noir Reader*, New York: Limelight Editions, pp. 307-329.
- Fairbairn, G.J.** (1995) *Contemplating Suicide. The Language and Ethics of Self-Harm*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Farrimond, K.** (2011) Bad girls in crisis: The new teenage *femme fatale*. In M. Walters, ed. *Women on Screen*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 77-89.
- French, P.** (ed.) (1993) *Malle on Malle*. London: Faber and Faber.

**Freud, S.** ([1917] 2005) Mourning and Melancholia. In *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*. London: Penguin Books, pp. 201-218.

**Frey, H.** (2004) *Louis Malle*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

**Fulcher, J., and Scott, J.** (2003) *Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Gardiner, J.K.** (2002) Theorising age with gender. In J.K. Gardiner, ed. *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory*. Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2002, pp. 90-118.

**Goodwin, R.D., Marusic, A. and Hoven, C.W.** (2003) Suicide attempts in the United States: the role of physical illness. *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 56, pp. 1783-1788.

**Gorely, T.** (2003) Muscularity, the habitus and the social construction of gender: towards a gender-relevant physical education. *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 24, Number 4, Sept. 2003, pp. 429-448.

**Granger, H.** (2004) Cinematic philosophy in *Le Feu Follet*: The search for a meaningful life. *Film and Philosophy*, Vol. 8, 2004, pp. 74-90.

**Grant, B.K.** (2011) *Shadows of Doubt. Negotiations of Masculinity in American Genre Films*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

**Gutterman, D.S.** (2001) The Interrogation of masculinity. In S.M. Whitehead and F.J. Barrett, eds. *The Masculinities Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, pp. 56-72.

**Halbwachs, M.** (1978) *The Causes of Suicide*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

**Harding, J.** (1998) *Sex Acts. Practices of Femininity and Masculinity*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Harris, O. (2003) Film noir fascination: outside history but historically so. *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 43, No. 1 (Autumn 2003), pp. 3-24.

Harvey, K. (2005) The history of masculinity, circa 1650 – 1800. *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 44, April 2005, pp. 296-311.

Harvey, K. (2002) The Substance of sexual difference: change and persistence in representations of the body in eighteenth-century England. *Gender & History*, Vol. 14, No. 2, August 2002, pp. 202-223.

Harwin, J. and Otto, S. (1979) Women, alcohol and the screen. In J. Cook and M. Lewington, eds. *Images of Alcoholism*. London: British Film Institute, pp. 37-50.

Haskell, M. (1987) *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hatty, S.E. (2000) *Masculinities, Violence and Culture*. London: Sage Publications.

Healy, R. (2006) Suicide in early modern and modern Europe. *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 3, pp. 903-919.

Hearn, J. and Collinson, D.L. (1994) Theorising unities and differences between men and between masculinities. In H. Brod and M. Kaufman. *Theorising Masculinities*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1994, pp. 97-118.

Hearn, J. (1996) Is masculinity dead? A critique of the concept of masculinity / masculinities. In M. Mac An Ghail, ed. *Understanding Masculinities*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996, pp. 202-217.

Hirsch, F. (1999) *Detours and Lost Highways*. New York: Limelight Editions.

**Hopkins, P.E.** (2009) Responding to the 'crisis of masculinity': the perspectives of young Muslim men from Glasgow and Edinburgh, Scotland. *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol. 16, No. 3, June 2009, pp. 299-312.

**Hylar, S.E. & Moore, J.M.** (1996) Teaching Psychiatry? Let Hollywood help! Suicide in the cinema. *American Psychiatry*, Vol. 20, December 1996, pp. 212-219.

**Jagger, G.** (2008) *Judith Butler. Sexual Politics, Social Change, and the Power of the Performative*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge.

**Jancovich, M.** (2009) Thrills and chills: horror, the women's film and the origins of *film noir*. In *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 7:2, pp. 157-171.

**Jarvie, I.** (2006) Knowledge, morality and tragedy in *The Killers* and *Out of the Past*. In M.T. Conrad, ed. *The Philosophy of Film Noir*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, pp. 163-185.

**Jeffreys, M.D.W.** (1997) Samsonic suicides: or suicides of revenge among Africans. In A. Giddens, ed. *The Sociology of Suicide*. London: Cass, 1997, pp. 185-196.

**Jewkes, J.** (2002) *Captive Audience*. Cullompton, Devon: William Publishing.

**Jones, L.** (2002) Understanding gender divisions: feminist perspectives. In P. Braham and L. Jones, *Social Differences and Divisions*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2002, pp. 101-141.

**Kaveney, R.** (2006) *Teen Dreams*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.

**Kennedy, T.** (2010) Off with Hollywood's head: Sofia Coppola as feminine auteur. *Film Criticism*, (2010), Vol. 35, No. 1 (Fall), pp. 37-59.

**Kirkham, P.** (1996) Fashioning the feminine: dress, appearance and femininity in wartime Britain. In C. Gledhill & G. Swanson, eds. *Nationalising Femininity*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 152-174.

**Kirkham, P. and Thumin, J.** eds. (1995) *Me Jane. Masculinity, Movies and Women*. London: Lawrence & Wishart Limited.

**Krutnik, F.** (1991) *In a Lonely Street*. London: Routledge.

**Kupers, T.A.** (2005) Toxic Masculinity as a barrier to mental health treatment in prison. *Journal of Clinical Health Psychology*, Vol. 61, No. 6, pp. 713-724.

**Leenaars, A. et al** (2000) Ethical and legal issues. In K. Hawton and K. van Heeringen, eds. *The International Handbook of Suicide and Attempted Suicide*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, pp. 421-435.

**van Leeuwen, N., Rodgers, R., Régner, I. and Chabrol, H.** (2010) The role of acculturation in suicide ideation among second-generation immigrant adolescents in France. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, Vol. 47, No. 5, pp. 812-832.

**Lester, D.** (1988) A regional analysis of suicide and homicide rates in the USA; a search for broad cultural patterns. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* (1988), 23, pp. 202-205.

**Lewis, J.** (1992) *The Road to Romance and Ruin*. London: Routledge.

**Lindgren, S. and Lélievre, M.** (2009) In the laboratory of masculinity: Renegotiating gender subjectivities. MTV's *Jackass* in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Vol. 26, No. 5, December 2009, pp. 393-410.

**Lovell, A.** (1975) *Don Siegel. American Cinema*. London: British Film Institute.

**Mac an Ghail, M.** ed. (1996) *Understanding Masculinities*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

**MacInnes, J.** (2001) The crisis of masculinity. In S.M. Whitehead and F.J. Barrett, eds. *The Masculinities Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, pp. 311-329.

**Mackinnon, K.** (2003) *Representing Men. Maleness and Masculinity in the Media*. London: Arnold.

**Maris, R.W. et al** (2000) *A Comprehensive Textbook of Suicidology*. New York: Guilford Press.

**McArthur, C.** (1972) *Underworld USA*. London: Secker & Warburg.

**McIntosh, J.L.** (2009) *U.S.A. Suicide: 2006 Official Final Data*. Available at <[http://www.suicidology.org/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?folderId=228&name=DLFE-142.pdf](http://www.suicidology.org/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=228&name=DLFE-142.pdf)> [Accessed 24 January 2012]

**McNair, B.** (2002) *Striptease Culture*. London: Routledge.

**Messner, M.** (1991) Masculinities and athletic careers. In J. Lorber and S.A. Farrell, eds. *The Social Construction of Gender*. London: Sage Publications Limited, 1991, pp. 147-162.

**Milestone, K. and Meyer, A.** (2012) *Gender and Popular Culture*. Polity Press: Cambridge.

**Millar, D.** (1972) The method of Rossen's late films. *Journal of American Studies* (1972), Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 309-316.

**Minois, G.** (1999) *History of Suicide. Voluntary Death in Western Culture*. Trans. Lydia G. Cochrane. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

**Monaco, J.** (2000) *How to Read a Film. Movies, Media, Multimedia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Monaco, J.** (1976) *The New Wave*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Moore, R. and Gillette, D.** (1990) *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover. Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Morgan, D.** (2006) The crisis in masculinity. In K. Davis, M. Evans & J. Lorber, eds, *Handbook of Gender and Women's Studies*, London: SAGE Publications, pp. 113-124.
- Morgan, D.H.J.** (1994) Theatre of war. Combat, the military and masculinities. In H. Brod and M. Kaufman, *Theorising Masculinities*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1994, pp. 165-182.
- Neale, S.** (2000) *Genre and Hollywood*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge.
- Newsinger, J.** (1995) Do you walk the walk? Aspects of masculinity in some Vietnam War films. In P. Kirkham and J. Thumin, eds. *Me Jane. Masculinity, Movies and Women*. New York: St. Martin's Press, pp. 253-276.
- Neuport, R.** (2007) *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*. London: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Nowell-Smith, G.** (2008) *Making Waves. New Cinemas of the 1960s*. London: Continuum.
- O'Donnell, I. and Farmer, R.** (1995) The limitations of official suicide statistics. *BJP*, (1995), 166, pp. 458-461.
- Onderdonk, T.** (2004) Tarantino's deadly homosocial. In S.J Schneider, ed. *New Hollywood Violence*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. pp. 286-303.
- Paechter, C.** (2006) Masculine femininities / feminine masculinities: power, identities and gender. *Gender and Education*, Vol. 18, No. 3, May 2006, pp. 253-263.

**Paechter, C.** (2003a) Learning masculinities and femininities: power / knowledge and legitimate peripheral participation. *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 26, Number 6, 2003, pp. 541-552.

**Paechter, C.** (2003b) Power, bodies and identity: how different forms of physical education construct varying masculinities and femininities in secondary schools. *Sex Education*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 47-59.

**Pampel, F.C.** (1998) National context, social change and sex differences in suicide rates. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 63, No. 5, pp. 744-758.

**Parker, D.** (1926) Resumé. Available at < <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/r-sum-i-ii-parody-dorothy-parker-r-sum/>> [Accessed 24 January 2012].

**Payne, S., Swami, V. and Stanisleet, D.L.** (2008) The social construction of gender and its influence on suicide: a review of the literature. *Journal of Men's Health*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Mar. 2008), pp. 23-35.

**Pescosolido, B.A. and Georgianna, S.** (1989) Durkheim, suicide and religion: toward a network theory of suicide. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 54, No. 1, pp. 33-48.

**Perkins, T.** (1996) Two weddings and two funerals: the problem of the post-war woman. In C. Gledhill & G. Swanson, eds. *Nationalising Femininity*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 264-281.

**Pinkert, A.** (2008) Can melodrama cure? War trauma and crisis of masculinity in early DEFA film. *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, Vol. 44, No.1, February 2008, pp. 118-136.

**Place, J.** (1998) Women in film noir. In E.A. Kaplan, ed. *Women in Film Noir*, London: British Film Institute, pp. 47-69.



**Place, J. and Peterson, L.** (1996) Some visual motifs of *film noir*. In A. Silver & J. Ursini, eds. *Film Noir Reader*, New York:Limelight Editions, pp. 65-76.

**Porfirio, R.G.** (1996) *The Killers: expressiveness of sound and image in film noir*. In A. Silver & J. Ursini, eds. *Film Noir Reader*, New York:Limelight Editions, pp. 177-188.

**Pyke, K.D. and Johnson, D.L.** (2003) Asian American women and racialized femininities: 'doing' gender across cultural worlds. *Gender & Society*, Vol. 17, No. 33, pp. 33-53.

**Rachlin, S.** (1993) Anatomy of a film revolution. *Poetics* 21 (1993), pp. 429-442.

**Rehling, N.** (2007) Spotlight on horror: everyman and no man. White, heterosexual masculinity in contemporary serial killer movies. *Jump Cut*, [online], Vol. 49, Spring 2007, no pagination. Available at <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/Rehling/index.html>> [Accessed 24 January 2012].

**Reynders, A., Scheerder, G. and van Audenhove, C.** (2011) The reliability of suicide rates: an analysis of railway suicides from two sources in fifteen European countries. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 131, (2011), pp. 120-127.

**Rogers, R.** (2008) Beasts, burgers and Hummers: meat and the crisis of masculinity in contemporary television advertisements. *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 281-301.

**Roper, M. and Tosh, J.** eds. (1991) *Manful Assertions*. London: Routledge.

**Rossow, I.** (1996) Alcohol and Suicide – beyond the link at the individual level. *Addiction*, Vol. 91, No. 10, pp. 1413-1416.

**Rovisco, M.L.A.** (2003) *European 'Films of Voyage': Nation, Boundaries and Identity*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of York.

**Russell, B.** ([1967] 2000) *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*. London: Routledge.

**Saavedra, M.** (2005) Sport. In P. Essed, D.T. Goldberg and A. Kobayashi, eds. *A Companion to Gender Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2005, pp. 437-454.

**Sangar, S. and Veach, P.M.** (1998) The interpersonal nature of suicide: a qualitative investigation of suicide notes. *Archives of Suicide Research*, Vol. 21, Issue 4, October 1998, pp. 352-365.

**Sarris, A.** (1968) *The American Cinema*. New York: Octagon Books.

**Schneider, S.J.** ed. (2004) *New Hollywood Violence*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

**Schrader, P.** (2003) Notes on *film noir*. In B.K. Grant, ed. *Film Genre Reader III*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, pp. 229-242.

**Schwartz, R.** (2005) *Neo-Noir*. Oxford: Scarecrow Press Inc.

**Scourfield, J.** (2005) Suicidal masculinities. *Sociological Review Online*, Vol. 10, No. 2. Available at < <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/10/2/scourfield.html>> [Accessed on 24 January 2012].

**Segal, L.** (1990) *Slow Motion. Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*. London: Virago Press Limited.

**Shary, T.** (2002) *Generation Multiplex*. Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press.

**Sher, L.** (2006) Alcohol consumption and suicide. *Q J Med*, Vol. 99, pp. 57-61.

**Silver, A.** (1996) Son of noir: neo-noir and the neo-B picture. In A. Silver & J. Ursini, eds. *Film Noir Reader*, New York: Limelight Editions, pp. 331-338.

**Skog, O.J.** (1991) Alcohol and suicide: Durkheim Revisited. *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 193-206.

**Smith, M.** (1995) *Engaging Characters. Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

**Sobchack, V.** (1998) Lounge time. In N. Browne, ed. *Refiguring American Film Genres*. London: University of California Press Ltd, pp. 129-170.

**Sorenson, S.B. and Berk, R.A.** (1999) Young guns: an empirical study of persons who use a firearm in a suicide or a homicide. *Injury Prevention*, 1999, 5, pp. 280-283.

**Sparks, R.** (1996) Masculinity and heroism in the Hollywood blockbuster. *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 36, Number 3, pp. 348-360.

**Stack, S.** (1987) The effect of female participation in the labor force on suicide: a time series analysis 1948-1980. *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 22, pp. 257-277.

**Stack, S.** (1981) Divorce and suicide: a time series analysis 1933-1970. *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 77-90.

**Stickley, A., Jukkala, T. and Norstrom, T.** (2011) Alcohol and suicide in Russia, 1870-1894 and 1956-2005: evidence for the continuation of a harmful drinking culture across time? *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, Vol. 72, pp. 341-347.

**Stillion, J.M., McDowell, E.E., and May, J.H.** (1989) *Suicide Across the Life Span – Premature Exits*. New York and London: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation.

**Studlar, G.** (1996) *This Mad Masquerade. Stardom and Masculinity in the Jazz Age*. New York: Columbia University Press.

**Tague, I.** (2002) *Women of Quality. Accepting and contesting ideals of femininity in England, 1690-1760.* Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press.

**Tasker, Y.** (1998) *Working Girls. Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema.* London: Routledge.

**Tasker, Y.** (1993) *Spectacular Bodies. Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema.* London: Routledge.

**Taylor, S.** (1982) *Durkheim and the Study of Suicide.* London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd.

**Tolson, A.** (1977) *The Limits of Masculinity.* London: Tavistock Publications.

**Trachtenberg, S.** (1962) The hustler as hero. *The Antioch Review*, (1962), Vol. 22, No. 4 (Winter), pp. 427-434.

**Tudor, A.** (1989) *Monsters and Mad Scientists. A Cultural History of the Horror Movie.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

**Tudor, A.** (1974) *Image and Influence.* London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

**Walker, M.** (1992) Robert Siodmak. In I. Cameron, ed. *The Movie Book of Film Noir*, London: Studio Vista, pp. 110-151.

**Whitehead, S.M. and Barrett, F.J.** eds. (2001) *The Masculinities Reader.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

**Whitehead, S.M.** (2002) *Men and Masculinities.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

**Wilkins, A.C.** (2009) Masculinity Dilemmas: Sexuality and intimacy talk among Christians and Goths. *Signs*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Winter), pp. 343-368.

**Williams, L. S.** (2002) Trying on gender, gender regimes, and the process of becoming women. *Gender & Society*, Vol. 16, No. 29, pp. 29-52.

**Winlow, S.** (2001) *Badfellas: Crime, Tradition and New Masculinities*. Oxford: Berg.

**Woodward, R. and Winter, P.** (2004) Discourses of gender in the contemporary British Army. *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 30, Number 2, Winter 2004, pp.279-301.

**Wray, M., Miller, M., Gurvey, J., Carroll, J. and Kawachi, I.** (2008) Leaving Las Vegas: exposure to Las Vegas and risk of suicide. *Social Science and Medicine*, 67, (2008), pp. 1882-1888.

**Wymer, R.** (1986) *Suicide and Despair in the Jacobean Drama*. Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited.