

FEMINIST AWARENESS AND NARRATIVE CHANGE: Suicide and Murder as Transitional Stages toward Autonomy in Women's Protest Writings

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Suicide and murder are considered two facets of the same coin: they originate in anger. Whereas suicide is the result of turning one's anger against oneself, murder is acting it out against others. Reviewing women's protest writings before and after the feminist revolution in the 1970s, the argument is made that the suicidal heroine in women's protest writings is diagnostic of an oppressed state of mind. On the other hand, a female heroine who turns against her oppressor instead of ruining herself will be taken to manifest a more autonomic awareness. Women's self-destruction on the one hand, and protest and rebellion on the other, reflect two stages in women's evolving emancipation. The change from a suicidal to a murderous narrative seems to have been made possible by feminist awareness. Special attention is paid to the literature written in Israel. Though the data reviewed here are fictional, the real-life female offender is considered as well.

"Sometimes I also want to kill myself . . . I had nightmares in which I was killing him with a knife." [A rape victim [17] about her rapist, the businessman David Levian; *Ma'ariv*, an Israeli daily, 23 April 1992.]

"I would murder my rapists if the sentence for murder were as light as the sentence for rape." [A rape victim whose rapists were acquitted; *Hadashot*, an Israeli daily, 6 November 1992.]

"I have to say it. I killed them all because they got violent with me and I decided to defend myself." [Aileen Carol Wuornos, a prostitute accused of killing at least 5 men; *On the Issues*, Summer 1992.]

"Is Wuornos guilty of not having killed herself—the way 'good' sexual abuse victims and prostitutes are supposed to do?" (Phyllis Chesler, *On the Issues*, Summer 1992.)

"Isn't there anything a woman can do but kill herself?" . . . "She can always kill others." (Ann Jones, *Women who Kill*, 1980.)

WOMEN, SUICIDE AND MURDER

Suicide and murder are two facets of the same coin: They originate in anger (Berkowitz, 1994). Whereas suicide is the result of turning one's anger

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against oneself (e.g., Abraham, 1927; Freud, 1917; Menninger, 1938¹), murder is acting it out against others. Women often turn their anger on themselves, since female anger is prohibited: women are discouraged to feel anger and are punished for expressing it (e.g., Lerner, 1977). As a result they learn to fear their feelings of rebellion and protest. The psychological consequences of such oppression are often self-destructive (e.g., Miller, 1976; Lerner, 1977, 1985; Bernardez, 1978).

On the other hand, I suggest that women struggling to liberate themselves from the dictates of an oppressive society tend to fend for themselves. It is therefore expected that, instead of destroying themselves, they will become openly angry at those responsible for their abuse. The emancipated female is thus expected to act against her oppressor rather than destroy herself.

To test this hypothesis, I reviewed women's protest writings before and after the feminist revolution in the 1970s. Women's writings that expose and criticize the injustices done to women only because they are women are considered in this review as women's protest writings. I will argue that a suicidal heroine in such protest writings is diagnostic of an oppressed state of mind. On the other hand, a female heroine who kills her oppressor instead of killing herself will be taken to manifest a more autonomic awareness. Thus, self-destruction and protest and rebellion are viewed here as functions of the degree of women's emancipation in their society.²

The works reviewed here include literary and cinematic texts written by women. I expected the fiction written before the feminist revolution (during the 1970s) to have more suicidal heroines than female killers, and that written after the feminist revolution to exhibit more female characters who solve their problem of abuse by defending themselves.

THE FEMALE OFFENDER—A CRIMINOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Though the data reviewed here are fictional, it is useful to consider the real-life female offender. The number of female killers has been increasing, but this increase is only absolute: when compared with the number of male murderers, the gap has changed only slightly. However, when viewed from within, it is obvious that something has changed among women.

There have been a number of attempts in criminological research to establish a connection between the growing impact of the feminist movement and the increase in the rates of female murderers. To be able to assess these attempts, it is important to first note whom women kill. Women usually kill their abusive intimates, especially male partners, with whom they have experienced a long history of violence (e.g., Chimbos, 1978; Totman, 1978; Silver and Kates, 1979; Daniel and Harris, 1982). Though both women and men tend to kill male family members, their violence is distinguishable. Whereas men are the aggressors who turn the confrontation into a physical attack, women's violence is almost always a resource for self-protection (Jurik and Winn, 1990).

There is no consensus among criminologists about the causal connection between female crime and emancipation: one group denies any positive relation between the two (e.g., Crites, 1976; Datesmand and Scarpitti, 1980; deCrow, 1974; Feinman, 1979; Klein and Kress, 1976; Morris and Gelsthrope, 1981; Box, 1983; Jurik and Winn, 1990); another group argues the opposite (e.g., Adler, 1975; Simon, 1975, 1976):

As women become more liberated from the hearth and home and become more involved in full-time jobs, they are more likely to engage in the types of crime for which their occupations provide them with the greatest opportunities . . . as a function both of expanded consciousness, as well as occupational opportunities, women's participation role and involvement in crime are expected to change and increase . . . such acts typically arise out of frustration . .

When women can no longer contain their frustrations and their anger, they express themselves by doing away with the cause of their condition, most often a man, sometimes a child (Simon, 1975: 2).

The question we should be asking is not why women are committing male crimes, but what has taken them so long to start and why is the time now propitious (Adler, 1975: 11).

To which she answers:

In the same way that women are demanding equal opportunity in fields of legitimate endeavor, a similar number of determined women are forcing their way into the world of major crimes (*ibid.*: 13).³

Criminologists who try to defy the contention that the rise in women's homicide offense is related to the liberation movement rely on the differences between women and men in patterns of violence and the use of physical aggression. They show that women's style and method of killing do not resemble men's, despite their changing social roles (Jurik and Winn, 1990).⁴ To test the liberation hypothesis, they (erroneously, I believe), only compare women with men. But this is not the right direction. What is at stake is a comparison between women's past response to their abuse and their present resistance. The change brought about by the liberation movement is not in the aggressive methods as such, but in women's growing awareness that they should save their lives even at the cost of manslaughter. An emancipating spirit enables women to retaliate, to respond to aggression by using aggression, rather than to accept the traditional role of the victim.⁵

While killing is viewed here as a powerful act, suicide is considered an act of the powerless.⁶ Experience in the United States shows that the highest suicide rate is found among the lowest social classes. For instance, among young adults (25-35) of both sexes, suicide is twice as frequent among African Americans—the poorer and more powerless class—than it is among Caucasian Americans (Hendin, 1969).⁷ Similarly, female suicide outnumbers male suicide when suicide attempts and completions are taken together (Kushner, 1985). Moreover, the weaker women are more suicidal: when married unemployed women were compared with married employed women, the highest

suicide rates were found among the former; i.e., among those more submerged in the family and more dependent (Johnson, 1979).

In a study of women's role in modern society and its relation to stress (Gove and Tudor, 1973), it was found that women were suffering higher rates of mental illness than men. Apart from suicidal behavior and mental disorders, female powerlessness enhances other forms of self-destruction, such as alcoholism and drug addiction (Al-Issa, 1980; Brown and Harris, 1978; Chesler, 1972; Smith, 1974). In sum, while the socially weak and oppressed fail to act out their anger and become self-destructive, the more powerful tend to direct it against their abuser.

A recent study of women's homicidal behavior challenges the liberation hypothesis, however. Ogle, Maier-Katin and Bernard (1995) argue that, rather than being liberated, female offenders tend to be traditional in their life styles and their beliefs about the role of women, and that they not only kill abusive partners, but also children and other adults. Ogle and colleagues (1995) suggest an alternative explanation which accounts for women's homicidal behavior in terms of anger long being internalized by an over-controlled personality. Women, they argue, tend to incorporate negative affect (Agnew, 1992) and, being over-controlled (Megargee, 1966, 1973), their accumulated aggression erupts unexpectedly, particularly in situations of long-term abusive relations and in pre- or postpartum environments.

Their theory of anger does not conflict with the liberation hypothesis, however, which does not discredit such aggressive causes; rather, it assumes that there is method in this "madness." The target against which the anger is directed is not accidental. Women mostly kill their abusers. Women who kill their abusers are directing their anger against the source of their abuse. The liberation hypothesis predicts that the number of such killers will grow as feminist awareness becomes internalized. In contrast, according to the version of the liberation hypothesis proposed here, women who kill their children would be considered less liberated, since, in killing their children, they are hurting themselves—an act which resembles suicidal, rather than homicidal, behavior. It is predicted that their numbers will recede.

FROM SUICIDE TO KILLING—The Evolution of a Feminist Awareness in Women's Protest Writings

Even though it is difficult to establish a firm connection between emancipation and the increase in the number of women killers, I wish to show the validity of this claim through a study of fictional characters. For this study, I assumed that women's writings that victimize the heroine exhibit an oppressed consciousness. I therefore expected women's writings that precede the feminist revolution to have more suicidal than killing heroines. Complementarily, the choice of a heroine who kills or violates the oppres-

sor rather than herself was assumed to be the choice of the more emancipated person and was therefore expected to be more common in women's writings that follow the feminist revolution.

Suicide and killing mark two stages of emancipation in the protest writings of women; they symbolize the way women deal with anger in the process of their liberation. The category of suicide—the resort of the weak—pertains to a set of self-destructive acts, such as illness, depression, madness, killing of one's offspring, or killing oneself. The category of killing—enacted by the more powerful—pertains to a set of damages inflicted on the abuser, culminating in murder. The various writings to be reviewed here are taken to reflect the sense of emancipation of the authors and the degree of emancipation of women in the society of their time.

The association of crime and autonomy is made explicit in de Beauvoir's writings. Yanay (1990) shows that the act of crime in de Beauvoir's writing is a means of achieving independence. In her autobiographical work *The Prime of Life* (1990), de Beauvoir writes: "By releasing Françoise [the heroine of "She Came to Stay"] through the agency of crime from the dependent position in which her love for Pierre kept her, I gained my own personal autonomy" (p. 271). de Beauvoir achieved a sense of liberation (from her dependence on Sartre and from her anger at him) through a literary murder. Though de Beauvoir recognized the relation of crime to autonomy, she failed—or rather, did not dare—to direct her anger at the cause of her oppression: Her heroine killed the man's lover, rather than the man himself. As we shall see later, feminist writers of a much later period manage to wage their war against the real oppressor.

PRE-FEMINIST-REVOLUTION LITERATURE—The Suicidal Heroine

A look at feminist literature that precedes the feminist revolution reveals that, indeed, it hardly exhibits any women killers. Consider rare examples such as "A Jury of Her Peers" (Susan Glaspell, 1918), in which the killing of the abusive husband is not enacted, but inferred; or "Her Sweet Jerome" (Alice Walker, 1967: 24-29), in which the killing is metaphorical: the woman attacks her husband's books and sets the marriage bed on fire, screaming, "I kill you! I kill you!"

Rather, the literature that precedes the feminist revolution abounds in heroines who kill themselves instead of killing the abusive others. Consider, for example, "The Story of an Hour" (1899) and "The Awakening" (1899) by Kate Chopin (1976). "The Story of an Hour" is about the sense of liberation from the shackles of a "good" marriage. A young married woman gains a sense of freedom, of vitality and happiness when she learns about her husband's death. However, she does not transcend the stage of victimhood. Her anger with "that powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a

private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime..." is not acted out, but is directed inwardly against herself and brings on her self-destruction. When she realizes she has been misinformed about his death, she "chooses" to die [of a heart attack].

"The Awakening" also protests the oppression of marriage, suggesting that it is deadly to women. In this novella, a young woman who is fed up with the roles of mother and wife, revolts and decides to give up her relations with her husband and children. Her liberation from patriarchal conventions culminates in what seems a most sensuous act of suicidal merging with the sea.⁸

The protest writings of Virginia Woolf are also filled with heroines who kill themselves instead of killing the abusive others. *The Voyage Out* (1915), "A Room of One's Own" (1929), "Lappin and Lapinova" (1939) (Woolf, 1944: 60-68), *The Legacy* (1940) (*ibid.*: 107-114), are exemplary. In the novel *The Voyage Out*, the heroine's voyage ends in her death rather than in maturity. In "A Room of One's Own," the heroine, Shakespeare's sister, commits suicide because, as a woman, she cannot survive where her brother won his fame. In "Lappin and Lapinova," the heroine is so bored with her marriage that she makes up stories about herself and her husband. In her fantasy world, they are two exciting rabbits, Lappin and Lapinova. But when her fantasy world is no longer a substitute for a real life, she kills Lapinova who is a reflection of herself, and leaves her husband. In "The Legacy," the woman escapes her husband (and "joins" her lover) by killing herself.

"Kritut" [Divorce], by the Hebrew author Dvorah Baron (1943), is the story of a woman who dies of agony, having been divorced by her husband. "To Room Nineteen," (1958) by Dorris Lessing (Cahil, 1975), is about a woman who has been stifled by a "good" marriage and finds no other solution but suicide. Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1966) also portrays a suicidal heroine.

POST-FEMINIST-REVOLUTION LITERATURE—The Female Offender

The vision of self-destruction that typifies the angry heroines of feminist writings before the feminist revolution gives way to more empowering visions in the literature that follows the feminist revolution:

After the boy at the supermarket had called her those names, Evelyn Couch had felt violated. Raped by words. Stripped of everything... all of a sudden she was experiencing a feeling that she had never felt before, and it scared her. And so, twenty years later than most women, Evelyn Couch was angry... In her fantasies, she began to look like herself but with the strength of ten men. She became a superwoman. And in her mind, she beat that bad mouthed boy over and over again, until he lay in the parking lot, broken and bleeding, begging for

mercy. Ha!

Few people who saw this plump, pleasant-looking middle-aged, middle-class housewife out shopping or doing other menial everyday chores could guess that, in her imagination, she was machine-gunning the genitals of rapers and stomping abusive husbands to death in her specially designed wife-beater boots... (Fannie Flagg, 1987: 237-238.)

The fantasies of Evelyn, exhibiting anger and vengeance, are the kind of experiences projected in feminist writings that have been made possible by the feminist revolution. As predicted, the heroines of recent women's writings are much clearer about their anger than are their female predecessors: they recognize the source of their abuse, and they exercise retaliation and self-defense. Whereas in the literary writings of men, most criminal women are portrayed as the "ruined maids" (à la Thomas Hardy) or the "fallen women"—"the Charlotte Temples and Hester Prynnes and Catherine Barkleys" (to cite Adler, 1975: 17), who are punished for trespassing the law and are never heroines to emulate like criminal male heroes,⁹ criminal women of feminist female writers retaliate and even kill in self-defense and they always profit from it. Their greatest gratification is regaining a sense of self and self-esteem.

Consider, for instance, "How Did I Get Away with Killing One of the Biggest Lawyers in the State? It Was Easy," by the African-American author Alice Walker (1971: 21-26). This is a story about growing up, maturing and gaining control. Walker's heroine starts out at the lowest level, being a young, black woman and the daughter of a maid. Her opponent, on the other hand, is a white grown-up male—a professional in the legal system in whose house her mother serves as a maid. All these factors—race, gender, age, social class, and profession (which also determine economical and political stratification)—serve to weaken the heroine's initial status. But by the end of the story the wheel has turned full circle: the heroine sits on the bed of her molesting boss whom she has killed, and eats food his wife has cooked.

The Collector of Treasures, by the South African author Bessie Head (1977), is another example in which the heroine kills her husband who deserted her years before, but has returned to abuse her again. In "Baby Blue," by Edna O'Brien (1978: 17-34), the possible suicide of the man results from the woman's verbal punishment. The French film *Jeanne Dielman* by Chantal Akerman (1979) portrays a mother and a housewife who lives on prostitution, and who, in her anger, kills her client. In *Cry, the Peacock*, by the Indian writer Anita Desai (1980), the female character kills her husband, who is inattentive and indifferent to her needs. In the Dutch film *A Question of Silence*, by Marleen Gorris (1982), four women, acting out their accumulated anger with men, kill a male shop-owner just because he is a man. In the teleplay by Rose Leiman Goldemberg (1984), *The Burning Bed*, which

was based on the book by Faith McNulty, the abused woman finally sets her husband on fire, thereby terminating his battering and rapes. In Ellen Gilchrist's (1986: 146-158) "My Last Diet," the heroine is suicidal: she is dieting to death. However, her final act is lethal. She runs her Toyota sedan into a doughnut shop, killing a waitress, an overweight professor, and herself. Though the act is not intentional, this is a clear protest story about the pressure on women to keep fatally slim. In *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* by Fannie Flagg (1987), a female character kills the abusive husband of a female relative. In the films *Blue Steel* (Katherine Bigelow, 1990), and *Thelma and Louis* (Ridley Scott, 1991, screenplay by Callie Khouri), the heroines retaliate and kill abusive males.

"Un crime maternel," by Fay Weldon (1991), protests the tyrannical notion of motherhood by exposing its absurdity. It presents a mother who takes motherhood seriously, and acts by the book (of patriarchy), which includes the expectation that mothers should consider only their children's well-being. Thus, all her actions become derivative, even to killing the father who has gone astray. In "The Revenge," by the Singaporean author Catherine Lim (1993: 109-114), the heroines retaliate by mutilating the abuser's penis. In "The Golden Snake," by the Palestinian author Hanan Michaili Ashrawee (1990), the heroine is doing away with her marital bonds while at the same time trying to revolt against the Israeli occupation. The stone which she uses to destroy her marriage bracelet and free herself from her male oppressor is also turned against the Israeli soldier. The heroine of *Women at Point Zero* a novel by Egyptian author Nawal Al-Sa'adawi's (1975), kills her abuser. The trial allows the author to protest the injustices done to women in the Arab world. The heroine of another of her novels, *The Fall of the Imaam* (1988), also avenges the rape and abuse of her mother and other women by the *Imaam* [the religious ruler].

It is no wonder, then, that the life and paintings of the artist Artemisia Gentleschi are attracting the attention of contemporary audiences. A film entitled *Artemisia*, written, produced, and directed by Adrienne Clarkson (1992), was recently released by Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. It tells of Artemisia Gentleschi's artistic excellence, and of her rape and humiliation by another male artist working with her father. The film is based on the actual rape trial transcripts of 1610, on Gentleschi's letters, and on her paintings. It portrays the courageous transformation of her trauma into artistic creation, culminating in her painting of the murder of Holofernes by Judith (*Judith and Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes*). Unlike male artists' paintings on the topic—whose Judiths are frail and gentle, exhibiting only the product of the act of murder—Gentleschi's work shows the enactment of murder. It presents a determined, powerfully muscular woman cutting off Holofernes head with his own knife.

The view presented here, that recent works by feminist authors portray

more retaliating female characters than earlier works did, is similar to that of Clover (1992). Clover notes that it was only in the early 1970s that the theme of "getting even" became a mainstream topic in American movies about women. Abuse, particularly rape, became "not only a deed deserving of brutal retribution, but a deed that women themselves (not cops, boy-friends, or fathers) undertook to redress" (p. 16).

The early and recent feminist authors reviewed here portray two different female characters. It is interesting to consider this difference in terms of recent studies by Ariel and Giora (1992a,b, Forthcoming), who propose to define femininity as adopting the woman's point of view, and masculinity as adopting the man's point of view. Adopting a self (e.g., feminine, masculine, Palestinian, etc.) point of view involves identifying with the point of view of one's own group; i.e., attributing positive values to the objectives, attitudes, social status, etc., of one's own group. Ariel and Giora's analyses of the writings of early and more recent Israeli female and male writers reveal that, overall, nonfeminist women writers employ a convergence strategy (Giles, 1984): they adopt the masculine view of women, representing female characters in a manner very similar to that of male writers. Feminist writers, however, identify with women's objectives, and depict different kinds of female characters.

Along these lines, works by the earlier women writers in this study can be taken to emulate men's writings in that they introduce oppressed heroines, such as those who were prevalent in men's writings (e.g., Flaubert's suicidal heroine (1955) in *Madame Bovary*, or Tolstoi's (1951) Anna Kare-nina). The more recent feminist writings employ a divergence strategy (see Giles, 1984), portraying different heroines and creating a different narrative. In the opinion of Ariel and Giora (1992a), then, the early feminist authors examined here can be viewed as producing a rather masculine narrative. In contrast, the more recent feminist authors reviewed here, may be viewed as inducing a change toward a more feminine narrative that adopts the woman's perspective. Of the two options available, either to destroy oneself (or let oneself be destroyed) or inflict destruction on one's abuser, the latter seems to better reflect one's best interest, since it offers one the possibility of survival.

A COUNTER EXAMPLE—The Writings of Israeli Women

The literature written in Israel provides a counter example to the hypothesis tested here. Since the early writings of the 1930s to the present, heroines in Israeli women's writings respond to abuse almost exclusively by committing acts of self-destruction, rather than by directing their anger against the male abuser. The feminist revolution, which seems to have affected the writings of Western and many non-Western women, has not yet induced critical feminist awareness among Israeli women, and thus there is

no narrative change among Israeli female authors.¹⁰

In "Mah she'Haya" [What It Was] (1939), by Dvorah Baron (1951), Mina, the heroine, is the victim of her mother—the representative of patriarchy—who values her daughter only in terms of her external beauty. The daughter protests her mother's abusive attitude by ruining her own face with a knife (see also Rattok, 1994: 285-286). In her "Kritut" [Divorce], Baron (1943: 55-66) protests the injustice done to women through marriage, portraying a woman who is dying slowly of agony, having been divorced by her husband because of her inability to bear him children; and in her "Aleh Nidaf" [A Frail Leaf] (1951), a young maid who has fallen in love with her beguiling landlord, commits suicide when she finds out he is going to marry someone else.

Similarly, Amalya Kahana-Carmon's writings—e.g., *Bi'Chfifa Achat* [Under One Roof] (1966) and *Ve'Yareach be'Emek Ayalon* [And a Moon in the Valley of Ayalon] (1971)—protest the oppressive effects of marriage on women. For example, the heroine of *Ve'Yareach...*, who has tried to do away with the shackles of marriage, attempts suicide when she fails. Rattok (1994: 279) comments that Kahana-Carmon's writings abound in cemetery and jail metaphors, which allude to the mental death of women captivated in a patriarchal structure.

In many of Ruth Almog's stories, the female characters are either ill or insane, their frailty being a result of inflicting their anger upon themselves rather than upon their oppressors. In "Martha Tamati ad Netsah" [Martha, My Eternally Chaste], for instance, the heroine is the victim of her father's oppressive control (1986: 69-82). Instead of revolting against his legacy, or against her deceitful husband and scornful son, she develops an illness and becomes entirely powerless, almost insane.

Female victimization as a default strategy of those who are too powerless to kill their own oppressors is also presented in "Hessed" [Benevolence], by Savion Lybrecht (1989). True, the heroine would rather kill her husband for jailing her because she would not accept his marriage to another woman, and would rather kill her son because he is about to murder her daughter for refusing to marry an old man to whom she had been promised. Nevertheless, she finally takes action against her-"self." The choice, or rather lack of choice, is made explicit: "Were she free and her feet light, had she a knife in her hand, she would follow them down the mountain slope, stick the knife in their backs, pull it out and stick it [in] again, until they lay dead in front of her. Then she would hurl them down the abyss with her foot, avoid their faces and know: Her husband. Her son, Hibrahim."¹¹ In the end, however, in place of such a liberating act, she acts against her own kind: out of mercy, she drowns her granddaughter, her son's daughter. In her view, this is an act of benevolence—she is liberating the woman/baby from her unavoidable future plight, from an everlasting male oppression. At the same

time, however, she kills a child of her own blood—an act akin to suicide.

Suicide seems the default solution for the miseries of female characters even during the 1990s. In Ofra Ofer's (1990) *Dibur Akif* [Indirect Speech], the wife of a violent male photographer kills herself when she finds out that, while he completely ignores her, he shoots pornographic pictures of young women. His model is also on the verge of suicide because she has become so dependent on his attention, and has lost all contact with reality.

A similar pattern is found in *Daya Henig* (Bernstein, 1992). A mother and a daughter of a sexually abusive husband/father seem to have no other alternative but suicide. They fail to cooperate against the violent male. The mother, however, directs her aggression against her lover who, like her husband, is involved in turning her into a drug addict (see also Rattok, 1994: 313).

Two very recent stories by young women writers still entertain the suicide option. They both deal with a child who is sexually abused by her father, and both depict a suicidal heroine. One is "Targil be'Demyon Mudrach [A Guided-Imagination Exercise] by Lilach Soredet¹² (1995), in which the writer finds some comfort in sharing her own plight with her readers. The other is "Buba Smartuta" [Ragged Doll] by Irit Kaufman (1995),¹³ in which the sexually abused child sees no other alternative but kill her "self":

I started climbing up the tile fence which separated me from the sea. It seemed to ask me and the doll to join it in order to have rest and shelter among its waves. My feet got wounded and bled, but it did not hurt, because I climbed up and up there to the sky. Dad held my feet which were colored red, and pulled them powerfully down to the pit. I managed to reach to the top of the fence and then I forcefully threw Ragged Doll to the sea . . . Ragged Doll landed on the ground . . . The neighbors congregated in a circle around the body. Nobody ever told them that one ragged doll could bleed that much, so much red blood . . .¹⁴

At the background of this vast array of suicidal heroines and traditional male-oriented narratives prevalent in the Israeli female protest literature, an examination of few counter examples is in order. An outstanding exception is the poem "Tefillin" [The Phylacteries], by Yona Wallach (1983). According to Rattok (Forthcoming), this poem protests the abuse of women through pornography. It depicts a pornographic drama in which a woman is cruelly tortured by a man in order to sexually gratify male audiences. A surprising turn, however, is taken by the woman, who retaliates, using the Tefillin (a religious object), the rope by which she was tortured, to strangle the abuser.

Another is "Nechash ha'Kesef" [The Golden Snake], by the Palestinian author Hanan Michaili Ashrawee (1990), mentioned earlier, which is about the process of liberation of a Palestinian woman from both the shackles of a patriarchal family and from the oppression of Israeli rule. The stone she uses to break open the bracelet that physically and symbolically chains her to her male-oriented tradition is also the stone she throws at the Isra-

eli soldiers, with the intent, or at least the desire, to kill.

Most recently, two playwrights and a novelist seem to digress from the suicidal narrative plot. Daniela Carmi's (1995) play *Arten* (after the name of a sedative for the treatment of symptoms in mental patients caused by medication) portrays two female characters who were abused by a husband and a father. They plan to kill their male therapist, whose treatment represents male dominance and violence. Nava Zuckerman's (1995) play, "Dead Hours," portrays a female character who has killed her battering husband. While in jail, she tells her life story to another woman who has been misused by her male lover and, because of whom, she has been falsely accused and imprisoned. Both female characters support each other and find strength in their friendship. Finally, a recent novel by Rivka Keren (*Tita and Satan*) portrays a female heroine who kills her abusive boss and lover whom, she learns, is also her deserting father.¹⁵

The findings here which attest that Israeli women writers have not developed a narrative of their own are corroborated by other findings by Ariel and Giora (Ariel, 1986, 1988; Ariel and Giora, 1992a,b, Forthcoming), who show that, across the board, Israeli women writers from the 1930s into the 1980s have not developed a style of their own, mimicking, for instance, the patterns used by male writers to introduce their female characters to the text. This is true even of the early writings during the 1930s-1940s, which actually exhibited a more explicit protest than later writings. Likewise, women script writers portray powerless female characters in film scripts, hardly allowing them to adopt women's point of view in speech (Ariel and Giora, 1992b). Only "proclaimed" feminist writers (writing in *Noga* during the 1990s; see note 15 below) have adopted a divergent strategy, portraying female characters from a woman's perspective (Ariel and Giora, 1992b, Forthcoming).

How can this be explained? Why does the country which boasts of egalitarian social norms yield such repressed heroines and hardly any narrative change? The question actually provides its own answer to this seeming paradox. Israel is in fact a nonegalitarian society which has propagated the myth of equality between the sexes (and other minorities, of course). Because we have all been brought up on this false belief, supported by the facts that, after all, "we had Golda [a woman prime minister], and women serve in the military," the possibility that our society is discriminating, unjust, and oppressive was, and still is, doubted by many. Probably one of the most oppressive societies in which women have the least chance of equality is the kibbutz—the alleged paradigm of the Israeli socialist and egalitarian society (for a similar view, see Fogiel-Bejaoui, 1991, 1992). When myth masks facts, a revolt is much less probable compared to a situation in which evil is more apparent. It is only recently that women in Israel have developed a feminist awareness (see also Ariel and Giora, 1992a,b, Forth-

coming, Giora, 1996). But this has not yet affected their narratives. Thus, in the absence of feminist consciousness, the stories we Israeli women go on telling ourselves are only an adaptation and reflection of mainstream male ideologies and images.

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

I would like to sum up by citing Simon and Sharma (1979):

Typically, women's participation in violent criminal acts has arisen from the frustrations, the subservience, and the degradation that have characterized the traditional female role. Case histories of women who kill reveal one pattern that dominates all others. When women can no longer contain their frustrations and their anger, they express themselves by doing away with the cause of their condition, which most often is a man, sometimes a child, or an unborn child. But as women's educational and employment opportunities expand, their subjection to traditional roles decrease (as witnessed by the presence of more liberalized divorce laws and greater opportunities for legal abortion), their feelings of being victimized and exploited cease to be directed at a particular individual (or individuals), and their motivation to kill becomes muted (pp. 398-399).

If this prognosis is correct, then, when women are fully emancipated, the literature will probably contain many female characters who can relate to men from an equal standpoint, or not relate to men at all. When women are no longer an oppressed group, their art will probably reflect their power, and their anger may also be directed at more general targets.

In the meantime, however, we are witnessing "a gradual but accelerating social revolution in which women are closing many gaps, social and criminal" (Adler, 1975: 30), as well as gaps that are literary and psychological. This trend is reflected in the current feminist literature, which no longer complies with nonfeminist (male) oppressive norms by portraying weak, self-destructive women. The women who control contemporary imagination are powerful in that they recognize their needs and ambitions and act accordingly.

The powerful heroines, more prevalent in recent women's writings than before, affect not only the imagination of contemporary women, but also that of men. Women who no longer accept their oppression and kill in self-defense have recently begun to appear in men's works as well, in emulation of feminist models; e.g., the films *Sudden Impact* (Clint Eastwood, 1983), *Nuts* (Martin Ritt, 1987), *The Accused* (Jonathan Kaplan, 1988), *Mortal Thoughts* (Alan Rudolph, 1991), *Switch* (Blake Edwards, 1991), and *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991). However, deadly female characters of the type portrayed in *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987), for instance, seem to indicate the emergence of a backlash. The new trend, as contended by Holmlund (1993), is to question the femininity of heroines who kill. The feminist movement, which has helped to stimulate the rise of the emanci-

pated woman in both women's and men's works of art, has also stimulated this backlash. But backlashes usually indicate an awareness that the previously powerless are approaching some kind of parity.

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NOTES

1. For Menninger (1938: 25), suicide includes "the wish to kill and to be killed," in addition to which "the suicidal person also wishes to die."
2. For a similar approach, see Ostriker (1986), Koldony (1989), and MacDonald (1991).
3. Widom (1979) questions the assumption put forth by Adler (1975), among others, that female criminality may be a result of the feminist movement. Her findings suggest that female offenders hold more conservative and traditional views about women's roles than the control group. This, however, does not testify to the opposite. The liberation movement, which has allowed women to have more opportunities in every field, has not necessarily become their dominant and conscious ideology. It is a well-known fact that women in male roles tend to overstress their traditional femininity, since it is precisely their femininity which is socially questioned—a rather costly price for emancipation.
4. The debate concerning the liberation hypothesis concerns female crime in general. Most of the research that challenges the liberation hypothesis argues that women's criminal acts have not changed. Despite the rise in female crime, the patterns are traditionally the same. Women's crime is not serious (i.e., murderous). It involves shoplifting, theft, forgery, fraud, prostitution, and the like (see, e.g., Crites, 1976; Bowker, 1978; Steffenmeier, 1980; Gora, 1982; Chesney-Lind, 1986).
Regarding killing, it should be noted first that killers are mostly male and their victims mostly female. However, when women kill men, their methods are much less cruel than those of their male counterparts. In a recent research of sexual murder, Cameron and Frazer (1987: 24) concluded that women who are involved in "sexual" murders behave entirely differently from male sexual killers. Males (the "true" sex-killers, according to their definition) attack generic objects (women and children mostly) and not particular persons. Women, on the other hand, kill specific men—those who have abused them. Furthermore, while men's motives involve sexual gratification, women who mutilate men's genitals are motivated by jealousy and vengeance. Above all, males' crimes are by far more cruel than women's (though this may have nothing to do with the latter's lack of desire to be cruel). In fact, Cameron and Frazer found no female sex killer.
5. The association between crime and powerfulness is also suggested by Box (1983), who challenges the truth of the traditional view that powerlessness causes crime. Box maintains that the most serious crimes are committed by persons of power and privilege. Women, he argues, do not commit do not commit the more serious and violent crimes because they are a powerless group.
6. This view of suicide agrees with Durkheim's (1897/1951), who related suicide to social status and social integration. He contended that the greater the social inte-

- gration (through such institutions as marriage and church), resulting in social solidarity, the less frequent the occurrence of suicide. Note, however, the criticism concerning the lack of relationship between theory and data (e.g., Gibbs and Martin, 1964; Maris, 1969; Halbwachs, 1971; Pope, 1976).
7. At that age, Black homicide reaches the same peak as Black suicide. This means that the Black society is divided between powerless and powerful consciousness. The rate of suicide reflects the degree of their oppression. On the other hand, the rate of homicide alludes to their awareness: some African-Americans don't comply with their oppression, but rather acknowledge their ability to turn their anger against the supposed cause of their plight.
 8. On the debate as to the possible interpretations of what seems a suicidal act, see Wirth-Nesher (1990).
 9. Consider Cameron and Frazer (1987) regarding treatment of sexual killing in literature. While male sex offenders in the 19th century were discussed in sensational and moralist terms, the woman offender was either ridiculed, implicitly suggesting that she was no real menace, or she was portrayed as extremely monstrous—much more evil than her male counterpart.
 10. For a different view, see Rattok (1994).
 11. My translation (R.G.).
 12. A pseudonym meaning "Lilach survives."
 13. This story was awarded the prize for Third Best Story of the Year by *Ha'Aretz* (An Israeli daily).
 14. My translation (R.G.).
 15. Of special interest also are stories published in *Noga*, the Israeli feminist magazine first issued in 1980. Of the 20 stories that have appeared so far (some of which are translations), two deal with suicidal heroines—"The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin, 1899 (*Noga*, 8, 1984) and "Targil be'Demyon Mudrach" [A Guided-Imagination Exercise] by Lilach Soredet (*Noga*, 28, 1995); one deals with both suicide and killing—"My Last Diet" by Ellen Gilchrist, 1986 (*Noga*, 16, 1988; and three deal with killing the abuser—"How Did I Get Away with Killing One of the Biggest Lawyers in the State? It Was Easy" by Alice Walker, 1971 (*Noga*, 11, 1985), "Nechash ha'Kesef" [The Golden Snake] by Hanan Michaili Ashrawee (*Noga*, 19, 1990), and "Un crime maternel" by Fay Weldon, 1991 (*Noga*, 24, 1992). In opposition to contemporary protest writings by most Israeli women, *Noga* exhibits a complex picture, with a bias toward stories with female characters who kill their abusers rather than let themselves be killed. *Noga*, then, being a proclaimed feminist journal, is the only stage in Israel at present for radical feminist writings.

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