belonging. According to these critics, each genre constitutes a particular way of knowing the world and therefore invariably includes a set of epistemological blind spots. Each genre, that is to say, resembles Emerson’s concept of the “home-keeping wit,” which would prefer to find “all the elements of life in its own soil,” but which would quickly become dull and monotonous without salutary “foreign intrusions” (“History” 162). Put in slightly different terms: a text’s coupling of one genre with one or several others constitutes a discursive attempt to make use of various sets of knowledge in order to come to terms with particular narrative, political, and philosophical problems. *Moby-Dick*, for instance, evokes the generic tradition of allegory – with its historical link to the discourse of religion – as well as the secular empiricism of realist narration in its attempt to grapple with man’s existential place in the world. It is an uneasy combination at best, and one that helps us to relate the particular concerns of Melville’s text to broader cultural and historical rivalries.

This also implies that, in tracing the affinities and contradictions between a text’s generic lineages, we can gain a better understanding of what Mikhail Bakhtin has called the “basic social tone” of a text’s individual style (“Discourse in the Novel” 259). The discussion of *The Mill on the Floss*, for instance, has shown how the realist novel’s appreciation of the common life serves as a corrective influence on tragedy’s aristocratic prejudices, just as tragedy’s focus on intractable moral dilemmas tempers the *Bildungsroman*’s ‘realistic’ aesthetic of homecoming, compromise, and social adjustment. Similarly, if *Absalom, Absalom!* is in part a Gothic tale, it also evokes traditional versions of the historical novel (with Thomas Sutpen’s stallion explicitly “named out of [Walter] Scott”; 63), thus combining one genre’s focus on the dark recesses of the human psyche with another’s interest in the way broader political conflicts shape the individual. To the extent that a given text participates in more than one single generic tradition, it formally enacts the cognitive implications of multiple belonging: its productive opening up of new horizons, but also its potential to lead to conflict and contradictions that may prove daunting and, at times, psychologically crippling. It is this formal process of generic ‘cross-examination,’ rather than any particular theme or content, that constitutes the most productive way of linking the concept of genre to the ideas of home and belonging.

**Not-Being-at-Home: Suicide and Unbelonging**

The second underlying theme that we need to explore in this concluding chapter is the problem of suicide, which features explicitly in many of the primary texts discussed in this study: the traumatized war veteran Septimus Warren Smith, who throws himself out of a window in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Alice Bell in *Union*...
Street, who prefers to end her life rather than move to an old people’s home; or
the five Lisbon sisters, whose suicides continue to haunt a group of neighborhood
boys in The Virgin Suicides. There is, moreover, something markedly sui-
cidal about Ahab’s quest for the white whale in Moby-Dick, and we know that
Ishmael regards going to sea as a “substitute for pistol and ball” (i.e. for com-
mitting suicide; Moby-Dick 18; ch. 1). In addition, we have seen that the conclu-
sion of The Mill on the Floss in fact constitutes a fantasied fulfilment of an only
half-admitted death wish on Maggie’s part. Absalom, Absalom!, finally, is
haunted intertextually by Quentin’s suicide in Faulkner’s earlier novel The
Sound and the Fury (1929), and Quentin’s sense of despair at the end of Absalom,
Absalom! does little to lay this fearful specter to rest.7

The reason why it is important to acknowledge the pervasive presence of
suicide in the primary texts chosen for this study is that acts of suicide can be
understood as an extreme expression of unbelonging. In chapter six, we ob-
served that the Lisbon sisters’ suicides are in part a fundamental act of rejection:
a disavowal of any claims on them by other human beings, including the group
of neighborhood boys. Accordingly, when Eugenides’s narrator speaks of “the
outrageousness of a human being thinking only of herself” (248), then this is to
register that suicide not only constitutes an act of self-violation, but also – in
effect, if not necessarily in intention – a violent misdeed against all those whose
sense of self is bound up with the person who decides to put an end to his or
her life. Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet describe the “disproportionate”
effect of a suicide on the lives of others:

Mourning following a suicide is not like any other mourning. [...] It’s distinguishing
feature is an intense expression of suffering, but also of shock. It is a traumatic form
of mourning that lasts longer than other forms and is more likely to generate more
depression, anxiety, negative and painful feelings, and feelings of guilt and shame.
The scars it leaves on the suicide’s relatives remain indelible. The feeling of guilt it
generates is often so painful that it drives some to punish themselves or even to
commit suicide in an attempt to assuage their guilt. The suicide’s closest relatives are
the first to be affected, but the shock waves spread far beyond the inside circle. (2)

Accordingly, while some have argued that suicide can be seen as an assertion
of freedom (e.g. Seneca; see Dollimore 32), there are also those who, like Jennifer
Michael Hecht, emphasize that one reason why “suicide is wrong” is that “sui-

7 In addition, there is a character in Absalom, Absalom! that does not appear in the dis-
cussion of the novel in chapter four: Clytemnestra, the daughter of Thomas Sutpen and
a slave woman, who at the end of the novel sets fire to Sutpen’s plantation manor,
perishing in the flames together with her half-brother Henry.
The fact that suicide rates worldwide have increased by 60 percent in the past forty-five years (Hecht 4) could thus be read as an indicator of increasing global unhomeliness. In other words, while suicide may constitute an act of liberation or self-assertion for the person who takes their own life, it can also rend apart existing communal and affective ties, thus escalating rather than protesting against existing violent dynamics.

In addition, while on the one hand the rejection implied in suicide may forcefully unsettle the sense of home and belonging of those who are left behind, on the other hand there is also strong evidence that suicide in fact arises from problems associated with the family home and the wider community. According to Mark A. Reinecke and Elizabeth R. Didie, for instance, suicidal behavior correlates strongly not only with “stressful life events” – e.g. “work or legal problems, [...] the loss of a loved one, and changes in residence” – but also with experiences in childhood or adolescence of “negative peer relationships, abuse and neglect, family instability, and a chaotic home environment” (214). Disrupted family homes thus feature prominently among the factors that influence suicidality (as, indeed, they do in the case of Ahab and Ishmael in Moby-Dick and, to a lesser but still important extent, Maggie’s in The Mill on the Floss). At the same time, the existence of “at-risk populations” – including LGBTQ individuals, Native Americans, military personnel, the homeless, and incarcerated men and women (Worchel and Gearing 291) – suggests that larger socio-cultural factors also play a crucial role in individual experiences of unbelonging.

Moreover, in addition to unhomely pasts or socio-cultural conditions hindering belonging, the problem of suicide also involves a frequently neglected dimension of home: the future as a subjective horizon of expectations. Reinecke and Didie, for instance, emphasize the importance of hopelessness in triggering suicidal behavior (209), and other researchers agree that a persistent lack of hope is among the main indicators for an increased risk of suicide (e.g. Vaillant and Blumenthal 4; Worchel and Gearing 92–94). If, in other words, a person stops believing that he or she could ever again feel at home in the world, then suicide becomes increasingly likely (as is the case with Alice Bell in Union Street, who – unlike Kelly Brown – is no longer able to envisage a more homely future for herself).

To the extent that literary narratives can mitigate stressful life experiences or underlying feelings of alienation, fictions of home can quite literally become a matter of life and death. Coming-out narratives, for instance, may alleviate a gay or lesbian teenager’s current feelings of isolation and even help him or her to imagine a future of communal belonging. More generally, fictional genres

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