

Prospero

Rivista di Letterature e Culture Straniere

**The past present of *Bildung*: new perspectives on and
of the *Bildungsroman***
**Il passato presente della *Bildung*: nuove prospettive del
*Bildungsroman***

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Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici
Università degli Studi di Trieste

Prospero

RIVISTA DI LETTERATURE E CULTURE STRANIERE

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XXVI/2021

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*Bildungsroman***

Per Anna Zoppellari

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And Prospero the prime duke, being so reputed
In dignity, and for the liberal Arts
Without a parallel; those being all my study,
The government I cast upon my brother,
And to my state grew stranger, being transported
And rapt in secret studies.

W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I.ii. 72-77



Anna Zoppellari: un ricordo

Roberta Geftter Wondrich, Maria Carolina Foi

*N*on è facile ricordare con poche parole una persona cara, per molti anni stimatissima collega, compagna in tanti progetti comuni, sodale, amica. Le parole sono poca cosa, ma sentite, e necessarie. Anna Zoppellari ci ha lasciati il 4 febbraio 2021; per molti anni abbiamo condiviso il lavoro di docenti nelle rispettive discipline nel Corso di studi in Lingue e letterature straniere del Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, numerose ricerche interdisciplinari e, infine, ma non da ultimo, il lavoro editoriale per *Prospero*. Già nel 2006 Anna aveva curato un bel numero monografico della rivista dedicato a Paul Morand, e dal 2011 aveva assunto il ruolo di condirettore editoriale. Dal 2012, con la direzione scientifica di Maria Carolina Foi, *Prospero* aveva intrapreso una importante ridefinizione delle proprie aree di specializzazione e Anna aveva fornito un contributo decisivo per il rafforzamento della sezione di francesistica. Il suo apporto è stato importante e prezioso per la riflessione attenta e costante, la visione strategica, il rigore con cui esaminava e avanzava lei stessa proposte, progetti, selezioni, idee.

Anna ci manca molto e continuerà a mancarci. Lavorare con lei è stato un privilegio, per la generosità, la serietà, il rigore e la passione con cui l'abbiamo vista sempre all'opera, al nostro fianco, anno dopo anno. Questo numero, in parte già avviato quando è mancata, dedicato al 'passato presente' del *Bildungsroman*, ospita i ricordi di due colleghi a lei molto vicini, Daniel-Henri Pageaux e Francesca Todesco, che ritraggono in modo

toccante e insieme lucido la sua personalità e il suo itinerario intellettuale. E questo *Prospero XXVI*, non può che essere dedicato a lei.

Per noi colleghe e colleghi, e amici, per le sue allieve e i suoi allievi, Anna Zoppellari resterà un esempio autentico di come si dovrebbe vivere la professione accademica in un equilibrio arduo, e per questo ammirevole: nella quotidianità, ma anche nello slancio ideale che lei ha saputo sempre mantenere, convinta, come amava ripetere con un sorriso, che fosse ‘il lavoro più bello del mondo’.

“Soave sia il vento”, Anna.

Roberta Gefter Wondrich

Maria Carolina Foi

“Soudaine sera la fin/comme il en a été du commencement”

In Memoriam Anna Zoppellari

Daniel-Henri Pageaux

Sorbonne Nouvelle/Paris III

*C'è a Trieste una via dove mi specchio
Nei lunghi giorni di chiusa tristezza
Si chiama via del Lazzaretto Vecchio*

*P*endant de longues années j’ai eu la chance – le privilège – de donner des séminaires sur les francophonies d’Europe, d’Afrique noire et des Amériques à l’Università degli studi di Trieste. C’était l’occasion, chaque jour, d’une longue promenade par la ville. Je réservais pour le retour, dans l’après-midi, le bord de mer; le matin, j’empruntais un itinéraire qui m’amenait jusqu’à la Piazza Venezia; de là, j’entrais dans la via del Lazzaretto Vecchio jusqu’au palais qui était occupé, à gauche, par la Faculté des Lettres. Je croisais souvent dans les couloirs Juan Octavio Prenz pour une petite *tertulia* improvisée; puis, je retrouvais, dans son bureau de directrice, celle qui me faisait l’amitié de m’inviter, Giovanna Trisolini. C’est là que j’ai rencontré, au début des années 90 du siècle dernier, une jeune assistante qui venait d’achever un long stage d’études et de recherches à l’EHESS de Paris, Anna Zoppellari. Elle s’était déjà, à l’époque, spécialisée dans les littératures maghrébines – domaine qui ne m’était guère familier.

S’il m’était donné aujourd’hui de revenir à Trieste – ville qui fut, pour moi, si riche en moments de joie, de flâneries, d’échanges en trois langues,

italienne, française et espagnole – je ne rencontrerais, en entrant dans cette via del Lazzaretto Vecchio, que les ombres de ces trois êtres chers, disparus, qui sont montées des ténèbres jusqu'à nous. Et cette "*chiusa tristezza*" évoquée par le poète Umberto Saba, cette tristesse recluse sur laquelle j'ai laissé parfois vagabonder ma réflexion, portée par la cadence des vers et par cette sorte de chiasme sonore (*ch/zz, zz/ch*), prend soudain une résonance toute particulière, plutôt amère, bien au-delà de tout effet esthétique.

C'est à l'occasion d'un colloque international, en mars 2006, consacré à ce Triestin d'adoption que fut Paul Morand – on se reportera aux pages superbes qui concluent *Venises* – que des relations amicales et de mutuelle estime intellectuelle se sont nouées entre Anna Zoppellari et moi. Je ne crois pas que nous ayons eu, auparavant, à échanger quelques vues sur cet écrivain talentueux et controversé, mais Anna Zoppellari avait eu, avec l'édition de la Pléiade des *Romans* de Morand, une sorte de guide ou d'annuaire. Aussi avait-elle convié le maître d'œuvre, Michel Collomb (il fut remplacé par Guy Dugas), mais aussi Catherine Douzou, Jacques Lecarme et moi-même.

Anna ne fut pas seulement la parfaite organisatrice de cette très sympathique rencontre, placée sous le signe de l'amitié: elle tint à présenter une communication sur les traductions italiennes de Morand, ou plutôt sur sa "*fortune*" en Italie, utilisant à dessein un terme, "*fortune*" qui s'inscrivait dans une tradition d'études et de recherches chère à la littérature comparée (cfr. Zoppellari 2006). Elle fit découvrir à quelques participants un riche éventail de traductions de 1928 à 2002 et deux noms italiens tout autant prestigieux qu'inattendus: Tomasi di Lampedusa pour sa lecture critique des nouvelles *Ouvert la nuit, Fermé la nuit*, reprise dans le volume intitulé *Letteratura francese*, et le jeune Michelangelo Antonioni, traducteur en 1944 d'une nouvelle, *Monsieur Zéro/Il Signor Zero*, qui rejoindra, dans certaines éditions, le recueil *Les Extravagants*.

Ce fut le début de relations suivies, et pas seulement épistolaires. Après la disparition de Giovanna Trisolini, nous nous sommes retrouvés, en décembre 2009, dans le jury de la *tesi di laurea* de Katia Bottos qui, conquise par la présentation que j'avais faite de la romancière acadienne Antonine Mailet (Prix Goncourt 1979 pour *Pélagie la Charette*), avait choisi cette romancière comme sujet d'une excellente thèse que j'ai publiée par la suite dans la collection que je dirige aux Editions l'Harmattan. C'était, pour Anna, une expédition dans des terres plutôt exotiques et nous

avons bien plaisanté sur l'incursion qu'elle faisait, avec talent, jusqu'aux "arpents de neige" du Canada français ou plutôt de l'Acadie.

En mars 2010, à l'occasion d'un passage que je fis à Trieste, pour le plaisir, Anna prépara, avec la directrice de l'Alliance française, Véronique Goffin, une conférence-table ronde sur les "Francophonies d'aujourd'hui." Elle en profita pour me demander, pour le prochain numéro de *Prospero* (XVI, 2011), un article sur un sujet de mon choix: ce fut "Médiation et poétique du regard." Quelques années plus tard, elle me persuadait de coordonner un nouveau numéro sur *Letteratura e storia* (*Prospero*, XXI, 2016). L'année suivante, nous présentions ce numéro à l'occasion d'une autre table ronde, à Trieste, bien sûr, suivie le lendemain de deux interventions chez le collègue et ami "hispanique" Gianni Ferracuti et à l'Alliance française, en abusant de l'hospitalité de Véronique Goffin, pour cette fois les "Francophonies de l'Océan Indien," enfin une mémorable séance avec la projection du film que Mario Rizzarelli (RAI) avait réalisé sur Paul Morand.

On l'aura compris: j'ai tenu à égrener quelques souvenirs bien agréables pour différer, autant que faire se peut, le moment d'aborder, plus académiquement, la carrière d'Anna Zoppellari, c'est-à-dire de faire le bilan d'une trajectoire qui s'annonçait prometteuse et qui, soudain, a été cruellement interrompue. Je veux commencer par un petit ouvrage auquel elle tenait beaucoup parce qu'il rappelait qu'elle n'était pas seulement spécialiste des francophonies d'Afrique du Nord – Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc – mais qu'elle avait aussi une formation cinématographique ou plutôt intersémiotique qui l'avait amenée à s'intéresser de près aux rapports entre littérature et image. En 2012 Anna a publié, dans une des collections fondées et dirigées par le très dynamique Giovanni Dotoli, une étude sur ce genre hybride appelé "ciné-roman," centrée sur *L'Immortelle* (1963) d'Alain Robbe-Grillet (cfr. Zoppellari 2012).

C'est lors d'un passage à Paris qu'elle m'offrit ce petit volume et j'avoue avoir été touché en tombant, dès le début, sur plusieurs mentions de mon manuel, *La littérature générale et comparée* (A. Colin, 1994), au chapitre consacré aux rapports entre "Littérature et arts" et, plus spécialement: "De la poétique comparée à l'intersémiotique." Ce n'était là que des généralités autour de l'appellation de "genre hybride," proposée par Marguerite Duras. J'aurais pu citer aussi *La Guerre est finie* d'Alain Resnais et Jorge Semprun qui avait retenu mon attention par une autre dimension: celle du dialogue conflictuel entre France et Espagne. Anna

le mentionnait, bien sûr, dans sa volonté de conforter et d'illustrer une catégorie esthétique aussi nouvelle que complexe où *Hiroshima mon amour* (1958) apparaissait comme texte prototype. Mais *L'Immortelle*, à ses yeux, était ce qu'elle considérait fort justement comme un "texte-charnière," un "texte pivot."

Son analyse examinait en premier lieu la notion de "personnage," fortement remise en question dans *Pour un nouveau roman*, sorti la même année que *L'Immortelle*, et elle insistait de façon très pertinente sur "la rhétorique des noms" (noms propres et initiales). Puis elle envisageait les problèmes de l'énonciation pour aborder une lecture très serrée des "regards" (entre personnages, mais aussi à l'adresse de la caméra) et consacrait de belles pages à la bande son, au "récit sonore." Un dernier temps justifiait ce qu'elle avait appelé d'entrée de jeu un "récit-limite" et qui se transformait en "récit en surface," avec de passionnantes remarques sur "la production d'un espace "narratif," la topologie de la ville, en l'occurrence "Istanbul," évoluant vers la thématique de la "ville-labyrinthe" et annonçant, par exemple, *L'Eden et après* (1968), "situé" à Djerba.

J'ai beaucoup apprécié les diverses "lectures" proposées par Anna, singulièrement celles où l'on voit comment elle passe de problèmes théoriques, esthétiques, relevant d'une certaine littérature "générale" à des questions plus spécifiquement "comparatistes" portant sur le "regard," sur le "cliché," pour opérer, au bout du compte, des synthèses, en proposant la notion de "spectacle" ("ensemble de choses qui s'offrent au regard") ou celle de "texte culturel ou pseudo-culturel" ou encore en dégageant de la "fiction," textuelle et filmique, "l'émergence d'une conscience métalinguistique."

Je souhaiterais insister sur la variété des thèmes d'études et des approches pratiquées par Anna, en mentionnant des travaux, souvent collectifs, qui ressortissent à des questions d'interculturalité, de dialogues interculturels qui, rappelons-le, ont été systématiquement abordés par Giovanna Trisolini, en particulier dans les multiples livraisons de sa revue, *Letteratura di frontiera*. Je cite, dans cette optique, un numéro de la revue en ligne *Trans*, "revue de littérature générale et comparée" (21/2017) que Anna a coordonné avec Dominique Constantini et Giulia Zanfabro, consacré à "Trieste ville transfrontalière." Et là encore j'ai été surpris de lire les références que Anna, dans son texte introductif, avait tenu à faire, à certaines notions qui me sont chères, en ce qu'elles

définissent en profondeur l'esprit "comparatiste:" non pas la comparaison, mais l'analogie, la parenté, l'influence, la traversée, le passage ou les formes de "transmigrations," enfin la "dimension étrangère" comme base et horizon de nos études. De même, je citerai le bel ouvrage qu'elle a contribué à mettre sur pied, dans toute sa complexité, *Genealogie d'Europa* (2009).

Si j'ai insisté sur la réalité de ce travail intellectuel qu'est la "lecture," la lecture critique, c'est qu'elle apparaît comme l'une des activités essentielles d'Anna qui a multiplié les recensions d'ouvrages, avec finesse, rigueur et générosité. Je retiens tout spécialement deux participations à *Etudes littéraires africaines* (n° 21/2006 et n° 27/2009) portant respectivement sur le roman maghrébin et sur les "sources narratives" en sciences sociales relatives à l'Afrique ainsi que trois comptes rendus donnés à *Studi francesi* (3/2011, 3/2013 et 1/2016) consacrés au numéro 58/2010 de *Francofonia* sur "Exilées, expatriées, nomades" et les deux autres sur Claude Simon.

Et j'en viens, pour finir, aux contributions qu'a données Anna sur les lettres maghrébines, en rappelant d'abord la coordination d'un dossier sur l'Algérien Jean Pélégri (*Expressions maghrébines*, hiver 2007) et plus encore ses travaux sur le "Tunisien" Abdelwahab Meddeb qui a quitté cette terre qu'il aimait tant en 2014. Il a été, à lui tout seul, un univers "comparatiste" – il a enseigné la discipline à l'Université de Paris-Nanterre – et un modèle remarquable de pensée humaniste et authentiquement universelle, nourrie de lectures infinies et de rencontres innombrables, depuis "les deux rives de la mer intermédiaire" jusqu'au monde entier qu'il a parcouru, comme on peut le voir – en le suivant – dans *Portrait du poète en soufi*.

Anna a traduit son admirable *Tombeau d'Ibn Arabi* (2012) et je retiens, dans les études qu'elle a consacrées au poète de l'errance et de la trace, trois contributions majeures sur le *Tombeau d'Ibn Arabi* (cfr. Zoppellari 1995), sur le bilinguisme de l'écrivain (cfr. Zoppellari 2001) et sur le "voyage en Occident" (cfr. Zoppellari 2002). Anna a travaillé également sur le Franco-marocain Tahar Ben Jelloun et sur le grand romancier algérien Mohammed Dib. Elle devait participer à une décade de Cerisy sur Dib en 2020. Pour "cause de Covid," la rencontre a été reportée en septembre 2021. Mais, entre-temps, Anna nous avait quittés.

Je ne peux oublier que, peu de temps après avoir participé en visioconférence, le 15 octobre 2020, à l'hommage rendu à Juan Octavio

Prenz, organisé par Sergia Adamo, Gianni Ferracuti et Cecilia et Betina Prenz, j'apprenais de celles-ci la brutale disparition d'Anna Zoppellari.

Disparition brutale, mais aussi cruelle et surtout injuste, si l'on songe à tout ce qu'auraient pu nous apporter le talent, la finesse et la passion de la recherche qui animaient l'universitaire, tout à la fois modeste et exemplaire, que fut Anna Zoppellari.



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“Pour tous ceux dont l’esprit se promène”:
in memoriam Anna Zoppellari

Francesca Todesco

Università di Udine

“*Q*uand je danse devant toi, Occident, sans me dessaisir de mon peuple, sache que cette danse est de désir mortel, ô faiseur de signes hagar”¹: Anna prende a prestito le parole di uno dei più raffinati scrittori e intellettuali marocchini, Abdelkebir Khatibi, per l’incipit di due sue belle lezioni, all’Università di Venezia, a novembre 2018, e all’Università di Udine, a dicembre 2019. E condensa in una metafora coreografica, dinamica, corporale e musicale il senso delle letterature alle quali ha consacrato la sua ricerca: le letterature francofone del Maghreb, in cui la consapevolezza del valore fluttuante delle parole e della lingua si mescola al sentimento forte dell’impossibile rinuncia alla propria identità. E la necessità di raccontarsi va all’unisono con il desiderio di rivolta, formale e linguistica, in una scrittura che è il luogo di un’articolazione complessa di spazi culturali diversi, in tensione e in trasformazione continua.

Da qualche mese Anna non è più fra noi, ma i miei pensieri, da amica e collega che con lei ha condiviso la formazione e la passione per queste letterature, mi portano spesso alla sua persona e al suo operato: ai suoi sorrisi sinceri ed accoglienti, al suo sguardo sagace e sereno, alla sua ironia delicata e sorniona così come alla sua energica e instancabile dedizione alla ricerca e all’affabile caparbità che contraddistingueva il suo impegno istituzionale e le sue relazioni. E la sua immagine laboriosa e attenta si sovrappone nel mio ricordo a quella che Jean Pélégri, lo scrittore e poeta algerino di cui è la studiosa internazionale più autorevole, celebra nelle

pagine di un romanzo: quella del *kateb*, dello scriba “qui, assis à l’ombre d’un mur, devant ses plumes et son écritoire [...] rédige sous la dictée de ceux qui ne savent pas écrire”². Perché Anna, interprete orgogliosa della complessità, della fluidità e della tormentata pluralità dei nostri tempi, ha intuito, fin dagli inizi dei suoi studi, la forza e il potere trasformatore della letteratura, il valore plasmante delle parole e si è messa all’ascolto dell’Altro, delle voci più controverse e marginali, fra problematiche identitarie e smarrimenti, esclusioni e devianze.

È attorno a queste riflessioni che interloquii con lei la prima volta, in occasione di un Convegno organizzato a Marrakech, nel 1996, su Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, “l’enfant terrible” della generazione moderna e contestataria degli autori francofoni del Maghreb: scrittore e poeta errante che nella sua opera ardita e virulenta, con uno stile crudo e immaginifico, celebra, in contrasto con la cultura imposta dal colonizzatore, l’autenticità del suo Sud aspro e genuino e la purezza della sua origine berbera. Ci unì subito una fascinazione e un comune sentire di fronte all’originalità di questa scrittura ‘inclassable’, com’è definita, che iscrive nella sovversione delle forme narrative e in discorsi frammentati e spesso al limite della comunicazione, turbamenti e interrogativi esistenziali profondi. Anna sarebbe diventata di lì a poco ricercatrice e da dottoranda al suo primo convegno, quale ero, le fui subito grata per la simpatia e l’intesa amicale che mi manifestò. Era con noi la professoressa Giuliana Toso Rodinis che, all’Università di Padova, ci aveva entrambe avviate a questi studi, suggellando una sorellanza e una complicità che negli anni si sarebbe accresciuta.

A Padova Anna si era laureata nel 1986 con una tesi dal titolo “*L’Immortelle* d’Alain Robbe-Grillet. Problématiques narratives à travers la lecture d’un texte filmique”: il cinema è stato il primo interesse della giovane studiosa che avrebbe, negli anni immediatamente successivi (1986-1991), frequentato presso l’École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales di Parigi i seminari di *Théorie du film* del Prof. Christian Metz. Con una tesi su «L’evento e la narrazione. Un approccio all’opera letteraria di Jean Pélégri» conseguì nel 1992 il titolo di Dottore di ricerca all’Università degli studi di Milano, per approdare poi all’Università di Trieste che la accolse prima come ricercatrice (1997), poi come Professore Associato (2014). E questa “ville frontalière” o, meglio, “transfrontalière”, come Anna intitola un suo editoriale (“Trieste, une ville transfrontalière”, in *Trans. Revue de Littérature générale et comparée*, Paris: Université Paris III, 2017) quasi metonimicamente riassume l’itinerario speculativo e di studio di Anna:

dialogico, esplorativo, decentrato e alla costante ricerca di aperture e di prospettive nuove. Intensa la sua attività istituzionale in questa sua amata Università. Capace di uno sguardo conciliante verso le tensioni e i piccoli crucci quotidiani e umani, efficiente ed efficace nelle soluzioni, Anna si distingue anche per l'ottima conduzione delle sue numerose responsabilità, istituzionali e scientifiche: dopo essere stata membro del Collegio di dottorato in Scienze umanistiche di Bologna (2009-2013), diventa membro del Collegio di dottorato in Studi linguistici e letterari dell'Università di Udine e Trieste (dal 2013) per poi assumere nella sua Università anche l'incarico di coordinatrice del Corso di Studi di Lingue e Letterature straniere (2014-2017) e, subito dopo, di Delegata alla Ricerca e membro del Collegio di Disciplina. Rappresentante per l'Università di Trieste del Centro interuniversitario di Studi Quebbechesi (CISQ), supervisore di diverse tesi di dottorato, faceva parte del comitato scientifico di importanti riviste come *Expressions maghrébines*, *Il Tolomeo*, *Interfrancophonies*. Ma era, anche, direttore editoriale di *Prospero*, la rivista letteraria del suo Dipartimento, per la quale l'energia e l'impegno profusi erano per lei motivo di orgoglio e un ulteriore viva manifestazione del suo sentimento di appartenenza.

La fitta rete di relazioni istituzionali intessute rivela anche l'internazionalità di questa professoressa amata da studenti, studentesse, colleghi e colleghe: ideatrice e organizzatrice di vari tipi di tirocini per studenti (presso l'Università di Lione per la collaborazione alla raccolta dati bibliografici con il prof. Charles Bonn, presso la Biblioteca francofona multimediale di Limoges per la collaborazione all'edizione critica delle opere di Emmanuel Roblès), ricopre con grande competenza, dal 2001 al 2009, il ruolo di vice-presidente CICLIM (Coordination internationale des chercheurs sur les littératures du Maghreb).

In dialogo con il mondo, Anna amava anche far dialogare le arti. Curiosa e libera, piena di sogni e capace di visioni, sapeva coniugare incanti e meraviglie con il rigore del suo scrupoloso lavoro scientifico. "La parola non è mai esclusivamente lineare, ma parte di una 'grande architettura' e di una densità polverosa che sono appunto l'origine del fascino di una visione", scrive Anna nel bel saggio "Il piacere della visione. Lettura dell'*Embarquement de la reine de Saba* di M. Butor"³. E in un *ut pictura poesis* in linea con la sua sensibilità, dedica una parte della sua ricerca al rapporto fra la letteratura e le arti visive, come documentano alcune produzioni scientifiche (fra le altre, *Écrire le cinéma. Le ciné-roman*

selon Robbe-Grillet, Paris, Hermann, «Coll. Vertige», 2012) e il dialogo, creativo e fruttuoso, con l'arte della pittura: quella del marito Vanni, in particolare, a cui, com'egli mi racconta, le sue parole sapevano suscitare "imprevedibili folgorazioni". "Tracce d'assenza" è il titolo che ella scelse per quella che sarebbe stata la loro ultima mostra, quasi racchiudendo in un ossimoro stridente e profetico l'annuncio dell'evento doloroso e la consapevolezza rassicurante del potere trascendente e infinito dell'arte. E, realizzata proprio a Trieste, questa mostra fu da lei accuratamente allestita e amplificata nella sua risonanza artistica dal *finissage* di un ampio accompagnamento poetico, veneto, friulano e sloveno.

"L'arte come punto di incontro: l'arte islamica e l'arte occidentale": questo il titolo di una conferenza che Anna organizzò, nel 2005, a Trieste con lo scrittore tunisino Abdelwahab Meddeb, a cui tanti studi critici appassionati e innovativi ha dedicato fin dal suo primo incontro con la letteratura magrebina. Dal tempo degli studi patavini fino agli *entretiens* degli ultimi anni di vita dello scrittore, Anna non interrompe mai il dialogo con questo artista visionario, a cui si sentiva legata anche da un sodalizio amicale capace di illuminare la sua scrittura critica. Studia, investiga lo stretto legame della letteratura con il mondo contemporaneo attraverso le stratificazioni culturali e l'originalità della poesia mistica ed erotica, contemporanea ed arcaica ad un tempo, di questo poeta che celebra la modernità per far risuonare e rinnovare la tradizione della cultura araba antica. Anna legge ed interpreta sapientemente il gusto della distorsione delle forme, la ricerca della "langue invisible", la musicalità della recitazione coranica, il ritmo oscillante e le sonorità irregolari all'origine della sua prosa poetica e dei suoi componimenti lirici, luogo dell'ibridazione e del "passage interminable de la parole entre ses limites et sa renaissance"⁴, come lei stessa scrive (e come testimonia con tutta una serie di studi, fra i quali "Le sentiment du sublime dans l'oeuvre d'Abdelwahad Meddeb" in *Francophonie plurielle*, Lasalle (Québec): 1995, e la cura e traduzione di: Abdelwahad Meddeb, *Poema di un sufi senza Dio. Sulla tomba d'Ibn Arabi*, Aprilia: Ortica editrice, 2012).

Parlava spesso di Meddeb, Anna, nelle nostre occasioni di incontro, non frequenti, a dire la verità, ma recentemente aumentate grazie agli appuntamenti del comitato della rivista *Interfrancophonies*, per la quale, fra l'altro, stava curando un numero monografico. Questo volume, dedicato a "L'écriture de la ville maghrébine dans l'imaginaire du Maghreb", uscirà presto e ci parlerà di Anna forse più intensamente di prima: farà risaltare

anche quell'interesse per la problematica dello spazio e per l'analisi semiotica che ha rappresentato per lei una linea di lettura importante fin dagli inizi della sua ricerca ("Dynamique de l'espace dans *Agadir* de M. Khair- Eddine", in *Stratégies de l'interculturel: Mohammed Khair-Eddine, texte et prétexte*, Marrakech: Publications des Affaires culturelles, 1999; "Une approche au motif urbain dans l'oeuvre d'Abdelwahab Meddeb", in *Il Tolomeo*, 2017; "Symbolique des espaces urbains chez Khatibi", in *Interculturel Francophonies*, 2018).

Mohammed Dib, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Habib Tengour, Malika Mokaddem, Tahar Bekri, Mahi Binebine, Abdelkader Djemaï, Driss Chraïbi, Yasmine Traouls: nutrito il *corpus* della ricerca di Anna su questa giovane letteratura impregnata di valori d'avanguardia, spesso sperimentalista e di rottura e costantemente alla ricerca di nuove forme. E le figure e le strategie discorsive più opportune, dalla parodia al pastiche, dalle enunciazioni polifoniche ai giochi intertestuali, oggetto delle sue minuziose esplorazioni linguistiche, vengono da lei utilizzate come puntuali strumenti di analisi.

Per gli scrittori e intellettuali del Maghreb, la narrazione non è mai solo finzione, ma è conoscenza, sfida, accettazione dell'altro, scoperta e trasformazione di sé: "Ce passage du même à l'autre est vécu comme un combat interne au moment de l'écriture, plus que comme point d'arrivée"⁵, scrive Anna commentando l'opera di Jean Pélégri, scrittore, poeta, filosofo e scenarista attorno cui non hai smesso di interrogarti e di proporre letture e analisi raffinate e innovative.

A Pélégri ha dedicato la curatela di un dossier per la rivista *Expressions maghrébines*⁶: un lavoro paziente e rigoroso di raccolta, organizzazione e commento a riflessioni e contributi che in questi giorni ho ripercorso ritrovando tutta la finezza critica e il piacere del confronto e del dialogo della mia preziosa e ora dolorosamente lontana interlocutrice. Il volume è un omaggio monumentale al grande scrittore che, al tempo, era da poco scomparso. Testi critici che riflettono sul legame fra la sua scrittura e la sua terra d'origine, sul valore etico della sua opera, sull'ambiguità della doppia eredità francese ed algerina da lui rivendicata e su "le pièges heureux de la langue" che trasforma i testi in opere politiche, precedono una sezione di inediti dell'autore stesso: una novella sconosciuta, una lettera inviata all'amico M. Dib e "l'entretien" concesso ad Anna, qualche anno prima, a Parigi, nel suo appartamento nel XVI^e arrondissement. "Nous le reproduisons dans la quasi-totalité dans l'espoir qu'il puisse ajouter du

matériel utile aux chercheurs”⁷, annota la nostra curatrice, cogliendo nel profondo il senso del suo lavoro.

E incontriamo poi tutta una serie di altri documenti che Anna introduce come “des mots fraternels”: diciannove lettere e una cartolina della corrispondenza di Pélégri con l’amico Emmanuel Roblès, “l’intarissable bavard”: uno scambio epistolare trentennale, prova di una grande amicizia ma anche importante documento storico, biografico ed estetico; e, ancora, parole “qui respirent le lien filial, l’estime, l’amitié”⁸ con le quali altri scrittori hanno voluto omaggiare l’uomo e l’opera, o immagini - una copia di un dipinto, una foto - che ritraggono e raccontano visivamente il segno che egli aveva lasciato sul cammino di tanti artisti.

Romanziere e scenarista impegnato, cantore della poesia roca del paesaggio algerino, il *pied-noir* su cui Anna ha così tanto indagato, ci rende spettatori, nel suo romanzo *Le Maboul* (letteralmente “l’homme dont l’esprit se promène”), della ricerca angosciata di una ragione e di una verità che, inspiegabilmente, “est comme cachée dans une pierre... Comme des fois l’Escargot”⁹. E così è per noi ora, che non troviamo una spiegazione all’evento che tanto ci rattrista, né una risposta alle nostre inquietudini. Ma ringraziamo infinitamente Anna per il generoso patrimonio intellettuale e umano che ci lascia e sorridiamo con lei che ha dedicato questo suo importante volume su Pélégri a quanti scrutano e interpellano la realtà con un po’ più di libertà degli altri: a “tous ceux dont l’esprit se promène”¹⁰.

Grazie, Anna, per il tuo talento e il tuo lavoro. Cercheremo, con la tua stessa umiltà, passione e coraggiosa libertà, di percorrere le “tracce” non della tua assenza ma della tua ineludibile, sempre viva presenza.



- 1 Abdelkebir Khatibi, *La mémoire tatouée*, Paris, Denoël, 1971, p. 188.
- 2 Jean Pélégri, *Ma mère, l'Algérie*, Arles, Actes du Sud (suivi de «La parole de la rose», 8 poèmes de 1956), 1990, p. 48.
- 3 Anna Zoppellari, "Il piacere della visione. Lettura dell'*Embarquement de la reine de Saba di M. Butor*", in *Le due sponde del Mediterraneo. L'immagine riflessa*, Quaderni del Dipartimento di lingue e Letterature dei paesi del Mediterraneo, n.2, Trieste, Università degli studi di Trieste, 1999, p. 122.
- 4 Anna Zoppellari, "Notes sur Tombeau d'Ibn Arabi" in *Voix tunisiennes de l'errance*, Palermo, Palumbo, 1995, p. 124.
- 5 Anna Zoppellari, "Jean Pélégri et la transformation du sujet" in *Littérature di Frontiera/Littératures Frontalières*, Trieste, Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2003, p. 199-200.
- 6 "Jean Pélégri, dossier coordonné par Anna Zoppellari", in *Expressions maghrébines*. Revue de la Coordination Internationale des Chercheurs sur les Littératures Maghrébines, vol. 6, n. 2, 2007.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Jean Pélégri, *Le Maboul*, Paris, Gallimard, 1963, p. 1963, p. 289.
- 10 Jean Pélégri, dossier coordonné par Anna Zoppellari", cit., p. 5.



Vanni Cantà, "*Un cuore nuovo*"
2021, tecnica mista su carta

**The past present of *Bildung*: new
perspectives on and of the *Bildungsroman***

**Il passato presente della *Bildung*: nuove
prospettive del *Bildungsroman***

Der Bildungsroman ist tot – es lebe der Bildungsroman? Überlegungen zur Begriffsbestimmung einer bedrohten Gattung

Rolf Selbmann

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Bei studentischen Abschlussprüfungen erfreut sich das Bürgerliche Trauerspiel größter Beliebtheit. Warum ist das so? Die Zahl der betroffenen Texte ist höchst begrenzt, denn nach Friedrich Hebbels *Maria Magdalena* von 1844 ist nichts mehr hinzugekommen; danach ist die Gattung ausgestorben und nur mehr literaturhistorisch zu verstehen. Denn wenn es das Leitmedium dieses spezifischen Bürgertums des 18. Jahrhunderts, dem die Gattung ihren Namen verdankt, nicht mehr gibt, enden auch die darauf bezogenen Texte. Gilt, was die Studierenden ganz intuitiv auf ihren praktischen Umgang mit Literatur übertragen, auch für den Bildungsroman? Ist auch er eine schon ausgestorbene Gattung, zumindest eine vom Aussterben bedrohte, die nur mehr in der Literaturgeschichte existiert? Sollte der Bildungsroman für die Romanwelt der Gegenwart (oder gar der Zukunft) keine Rolle mehr spielen? Ob ein solcher Befund zutrifft, soll der folgende Statusbericht klären. Er beginnt mit der Frage, was ein Bildungsroman eigentlich ist (1); er fragt dann, was Bildung im Bildungsroman bedeutet (2) und versucht am Ende eine Antwort zu geben: Lebt der Bildungsroman noch, hat er vielleicht sogar eine Zukunft (3)?

1. Bildungsroman-Definitionen

Erst recht in Zeiten mit globaler Perspektive steht der Bildungsroman unter kritischer Beobachtung, stellt er doch eine ganz besondere Romanart

dar. Einerseits reklamiert er innerhalb der deutschen Nationalliteratur die bekanntesten Prosatexte des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts für sich, andererseits gilt er mancherorts sogar als symbolische Romanform der Moderne (vgl. Moretti; Selbmann 1994; zuletzt Gutjahr). Es hat also durchaus seinen Sinn, die Maßstäbe zu überprüfen, an denen alte und neue Bildungsromane gemessen werden sollen. Gelten die althergebrachten Begriffsdefinitionen noch oder braucht es neue, die den geschichtlichen Wandel von immerhin bald drei Jahrhunderten einschließen? Ein kurzer Blick in die Begriffsgeschichte zeigt sehr schnell, dass auch die Geschichte des Bildungsroman-Begriffs von einer Phasenverschiebung bestimmt ist: literarische Gattungsbegriffe entstehen immer erst nachträglich, sie sind ein Ergebnis der Rezeption, nicht der Produktion von Texten. Als Friedrich von Blanckenburg 1774 mit seinem *Versuch über den Roman* seine Abtastbemühungen an den ersten auftauchenden Beispielen des neuen Individualromans unternahm, gab es noch keinen Bildungsroman, an dem er sich erproben konnte – außer man möchte Samuel Richardsons *Pamela* von 1740, Henry Fieldings *Tom Jones* von 1749, Sophie von LaRoches *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* von 1771, Goethes *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* von 1774 oder die erste Fassung von Christoph Martin Wielands *Geschichte des Agathon* von 1766/67 schon als Bildungsromane klassifizieren. Dennoch verlangte Blanckenburg auch für diese Romane schon ein neues Konzept, das dann den Kern aller Bildungsroman-Definitionen ausmachte. Der Autor solcher Romane, so verlangte Blanckenburg, habe das Erzählinteresse ganz auf die „innre Geschichte“ des Helden zu richten (Blanckenburg 388); das war nicht so neu, denn es galt für die meisten der innovativen Romane seiner Epoche. Blanckenburg ging aber in seinem Anspruch darüber hinaus, wenn er forderte: „Der Dichter soll die Empfindungen des Menschen *bilden*“ (435). Diese neu zu schaffende Romanart verlangte also, dass sowohl der Autor als auch der Leser in den Bildungsprozess der Heldenfigur involviert sein sollten.

Als zwei Jahrzehnte später 1796 mit Goethes *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* der erste Band eines Bildungsromans vorlag, der diese Vorgaben punktgenau erfüllte, konnte er sogleich zum Muster einer Gattung erhoben werden, die er durch sich selbst begründete. Wieder folgte die Rezeption der Produktion auf treuem Fuß. Friedrich Schlegel, der den *Wilhelm Meister* mit Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre und der Französischen Revolution zu den drei „größten Tendenzen unsres Zeitalters“ erhoben hatte (Schlegel 1988, Bd. 2, 124), rechnete Goethes Roman unter die „Bildungsexperimente“ (Schlegel

1988. Bd. 3, 140) und bezeichnete den *Wilhelm Meister* als das „schlechthin neue und einzige Buch, welches man nur aus sich selbst verstehen kann“ (Schlegel 1973, 334). Schlegel entdeckte in Goethes Bildungsroman eine Grundstruktur, „in einfache Grundsätze zusammengedrängt“, wenn er von einem „Stufengange der Lehrjahre“ sprach (338), der sich nicht bloß auf den Bildungsweg des Helden beschränkte:

Wir sehen auch, daß diese Lehrjahre eher jeden andern zum tüchtigen Künstler oder zum tüchtigen Mann bilden wollen und bilden können, als Wilhelm selbst. Nicht dieser oder jener Mensch sollte erzogen, sondern die Natur, die Bildung selbst sollte in mannichfachen Beyspielen dargestellt und in einfache Grundsätze zusammengedrängt werden. (323)

Kritischer und scharfsichtiger urteilte Friedrich Schiller, den man als Goethes ersten Mitleser und Kommentator, vielleicht sogar als heimlichen Mitautor betrachten darf (vgl. Selbmann 2008, 194-199). Schiller wies auf eine Gelenkstelle in Goethes Bildungsroman hin: „*Lehrjahre* sind ein Verhältnisbegriff, sie fodern ihr Correlativum, die *Meisterschaft*, und zwar muß die Idee von dieser letzteren jene erst erklären und begründen“ (Brief Schillers an Goethe vom 8. Juli 1796, Goethe/Schiller 1984, 196). Schiller erfasste, präziser als Schlegel, die Erzählkonstruktion von Goethes Roman und zugleich die Gattungsstruktur des Bildungsromans:

Wilhelm Meister ist zwar die notwendigste, aber nicht die wichtigste Person; eben das gehört zu den Eigentümlichkeiten Ihres Romans, daß er keine solche wichtigste Person hat und braucht. *An* ihm und *um* ihn geschieht alles, aber nicht eigentlich *seinetwegen*; eben weil die Dinge um ihn her die Energien, *er* aber die Bildsamkeit darstellt und ausdrückt, so muß er ein ganz ander Verhältnis zu den Mitcharakteren haben, als der Held in andern Romanen hat. (Brief Schillers an Goethe vom 28. November 1796, ebd. 199)

Schiller entdeckte wie auch Schlegel „Nüancen und Stufen“ im *Wilhelm Meister*. Doch ging er mit dem Begriff der „Krise“ darüber hinaus, indem er den Bildungsprozess als einen Verlauf, nicht als ein fixiertes oder fixierbares Ziel bestimmte: „dieses nenne ich die Krise seines Lebens, das Ende seiner Lehrjahre, und dazu scheinen sich mir alle Anstalten in dem Werk auf das vollkommenste zu vereinigen“ (Brief Schillers an Goethe vom 8. Juli 1796, ebd. 199). Mit dem Begriff der „Krise“ nahm Schiller übrigens eine Formulierung aus Goethes Roman selbst auf. Schon dort hatte sich

der Begriff jeder Eindeutigkeit entzogen: „Alle Übergänge sind Krisen, und ist eine Krise nicht Krankheit?“ (Goethes Werke I, 23, 142), fragte der distanzierte Erzähler des *Wilhelm Meister*, ohne selbst eine endgültige Antwort zu geben. Goethe und sein Leser Schiller konnten mit Hilfe dieses Krisenbegriffs den Bildungsroman von platter Eindeutigkeit freihalten. Sie konnten aber nicht verhindern, dass künftigen Bildungsromanen statt einer „Krise“ eine Zielorientierung eingeschrieben wurde.

Wie dem auch sei: Mit der Rede von der Mustergültigkeit des *Wilhelm Meister* stand fürderhin ein Modell für den Bildungsroman bereit, an dem die Interpreten ihre Gattungsdefinitionen erproben konnten. Dennoch dauerte es eine ganze Generation, bis der Dorpater Ästhetikprofessor Karl Morgenstern, noch dazu in drei sehr abgelegenen publizierten Vorträgen, mit der Begriffsprägung ans Licht trat: „die mir mit einem, meines Wissens bisher nicht üblichen Worte, *Bildungsroman* zu nennen erlaubt sey“ (zit. nach Selbmann 1988, 13). In seinen neu erfundenen Begriff bezog Morgenstern Romane wie Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, wie Friedrich Heinrich Jacobis *Woldemar*, Wielands *Agathon* und Romane von Tieck, Wackenroder und Schlegel in die Gattung mit ein, bezeichnete sie aber im Vergleich zu Goethes *Lehrjahren* als „etwas Ähnliches, wenn gleich in kleinerem Umfange“ (15). Der Gattungsbegriff war damit zwar begründet, jedoch zugleich so sehr verengt, dass man noch bis ins 20. Jahrhundert davon sprechen konnte, der Bildungsroman stelle letztlich „eine unerfüllte Gattung“ dar (Jacobs 271-278). Die in den ersten beiden Jahrzehnten des 19. Jahrhunderts tatsächlich geschriebenen Romane konnten sich davon nur zum Teil getroffen fühlen und blieben daher von einer solchen Gattungsbestimmung nur bedingt abgedeckt.

Schärfer erfasste Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel den Bildungsroman, ohne den Begriff zu gebrauchen. Hegel beschrieb ihn in seinen zwischen 1818 und 1829 gehaltenen *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* aus dem „Konflikt zwischen der Poesie des Herzens und der entgegenstehenden Prosa der Verhältnisse“ (Hegel 983):

Diese Kämpfe nun aber sind in der modernen Welt nichts weiteres als die Lehrjahre, die Erziehung des Individuums an der vorhandenen Wirklichkeit, und erhalten dadurch ihren wahren Sinn. Denn das Ende solcher Lehrjahre besteht darin, daß sich das Subjekt die Hörner abläuft, mit seinen Wünschen und Meinen sich in die bestehenden Verhältnisse und die Vernünftigkeit derselben hineinbildet, in die Verkettung der Welt eintritt und in ihr sich einen angemessenen Standpunkt

erwirbt. Mag einer auch noch soviel sich mit der Welt herumgezankt haben, umhergeschoben worden sein, – zuletzt bekommt er meistens doch sein Mädchen und irgendeine Stellung, heiratet und wird ein Philister so gut wie die anderen auch: die Frau steht der Haushaltung vor, Kinder bleiben nicht aus, das angebetete Weib, das erst die Einzige, ein Engel war, nimmt sich ohngefähr ebenso aus wie alle anderen, das Amt gibt Arbeit und Verdrießlichkeiten, die Ehe Hauskreuz, und so ist der ganze Katzenjammer der übrigen da. (558)

Hegel führte den Bildungsromanhelden aus seiner ganzheitlichen Sozialisation in die Ernüchterung, zu „Verdrießlichkeiten“, zum „Hauskreuz“ und schließlich zum „Katzenjammer“. Man erkennt in der wörtlichen Anspielung, dass Hegel zwar Goethes *Lehrjahre* weiterhin als Modellfall betrachtete. Im Gegensatz zur kritiklosen Huldigung seiner Vorgänger schrieb Hegel diesen Bildungsroman aber über das übliche Romanende hinaus. Dadurch entstand nicht nur eine bissige Kritik des Bildungsromanmusters in der Utopie seiner ungeschriebenen Fortsetzbarkeit. Hegel parodierte auch schon, was die zahllosen Romane im Gefolge von Goethes *Wilhelm Meister* vorlegen würden – trivialisierte Lebensläufe. Die Karikatur war so wirkungsvoll, dass nach ihr jede naive Erfüllung des tradierten Bildungsromanmusters obsolet erscheinen musste. Die Romane des weiteren 19. Jahrhunderts, die sich überhaupt noch dem Strukturmuster des Bildungsromans anschließen wollten, konnten dies nur noch, indem sie sich an solchen Vorgaben kritisch rieben und/oder als Antibildungsromane angelegt waren, man denke an Jean Pauls *Titan* (1800/03), Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802), Eichendorffs *Ahnung und Gegenwart* (1815), E. T. A. Hoffmanns *Kater Murr* (1819/21), Mörikes *Maler Nolten* (1832), Immermanns *Die Epigonen* (1836), Kellers *Grüner Heinrich* (1854/56), Stifters *Nachsommer* (1857) oder Raabes *Hungerpastor* (1864), um nur die bekanntesten zu nennen. Man mag daraus sogar die These ableiten, dass diejenigen Romane des 19. Jahrhunderts, die am ehesten das herkömmliche Bildungsromanschema ausfüllten wie Gustav Freytags *Soll und Haben* (1855), genau dadurch zwangsläufig ins Fahrwasser des Trivialen gerieten. Noch stärker der Moderne verpflichtete Romanautoren wie Theodor Fontane taten alles, um nicht in den Sog eines solchen Modells zu geraten. Fast alle Romane Fontanes handeln von Bildung, lassen ihre Erzählstruktur davon aber nicht bestimmen.

Im 20. Jahrhundert angekommen, sieht der Bildungsroman wie ein Anachronismus aus. Erst jetzt, also im spätesten Nachhinein, führte

Wilhelm Dilthey diese Romanbezeichnung in die Literaturwissenschaft ein, als er den Bildungsroman in seinem Buch *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* von 1906 endgültig definierte. Solche Bildungsromane stellten

den Jüngling jener Tage dar; wie er in glücklicher Dämmerung in das Leben eintritt, nach verwandten Seelen sucht, der Freundschaft begegnet und der Liebe, wie er nun aber mit den harten Realitäten der Welt in Kampf gerät und so unter mannigfachen Lebenserwartungen heranreift, sich selber findet und seiner Aufgabe in der Welt gewiß wird. (zit. nach Selbmann 1988, 120)

Zur Abgrenzung vom Entwicklungsroman, den er als zeitlose Gattung zu den „biographischen Dichtungen“ rechnete, verstand Dilthey den Bildungsroman als eigentlich schon überholte, in der Gegenwart ausgestorbene Romanform; Dilthey sprach von den „damaligen“ Bildungsromanen und verspürte bei ihrem Lesen den „Hauch einer vergangenen Welt“ (ebd. 120f). Gleichzeitig aber glaubte er im Bildungsroman eine ganz besondere Struktur erkennen zu können:

Eine gesetzmäßige Entwicklung wird im Leben des Individuums angeschaut, jede ihrer Stufen hat einen Eigenwert und ist zugleich Grundlage einer höheren Stufe. Die Dissonanzen und Konflikte des Lebens erscheinen als die notwendigen Durchgangspunkte des Individuums auf seiner Bahn zur Reife und zur Harmonie. (ebd. 121)

Der Bildungsweg als „gesetzmäßige Entwicklung“ in aufeinander aufbauenden „Stufen“ bis hin zu einem Ziel in „Reife“ und „Harmonie“: Dieses Stufenmodell war erkennbar immer noch an Goethes *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* abgelesen und der gesamten Gattung so aufgezwungen, als habe es seither keine anderen Bildungsromane gegeben, als habe die Abnabelung von diesem Schema nicht stattgefunden.

Noch Thomas Mann orientierte sich bei seiner Arbeit am Hochstaplerroman *Felix Krull* an einer solchen Bildungsromandefinition. In einer eigens verfassten Vorrede zur Lesung aus seinem *Felix Krull* geriet ihm 1916 „der autobiographisch erfüllte Bildungs- und Entwicklungsroman“ ins Visier, eine „Spielart“ des Romans, die eigentlich „keine sehr deutsche Gattung“ sei, es dann aber doch sein sollte: „deutsch, typisch-deutsch, legitim-national“ (Mann 174). Für Mann konnte gerade ein solcher Roman zum „Gradmesser“ gesellschaftlicher Entwicklungen werden, freilich mit einem Doppelgesicht. Auf der einen Seite stand dieser

Bildungsroman für Werte wie „Demokratie“ und „Fortschritt“ ein, die vom Verfasser der *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* natürlich abzulehnen waren; „auf der anderen Seite“ konnte einer so altertümlichen Gattung aber durch „Zersetzung“ eine neue Dimension abgewonnen werden. Als „Mittel und Werkzeug“ sollte ein solcher Bildungsroman „zu intellektualistischer Zersetzung“ dienen und in seine eigene „Parodie“ münden. Genau so wollte Thomas Mann seinen *Felix Krull* verstanden wissen: „Der deutsche Bildungs- und Entwicklungsroman, parodiert und der Schadenfreude des Fortschritts ausgesetzt als Autobiographie eines Hochstaplers und Hoteldiebes“ (176).

Die Frage, wozu ein Gattungsbegriff taugt, wenn er nur noch im Modus von „Zersetzung“ und „Parodie“ funktioniert, beantwortete Walter Benjamin 1936 mit seiner Bildungsromanbestimmung. Benjamin erhob gerade die Abweichungen von der „Grundstruktur“ des Romans zum Wesenskern der Gattung:

Der Bildungsroman dagegen weicht von der Grundstruktur des Romans in gar keiner Weise ab. Indem er den gesellschaftlichen Lebensprozeß in der Entwicklung einer Person integriert, läßt er den ihn bestimmenden Ordnungen die denkbar brüchigste Rechtfertigung angedeihen. Ihre Legitimierung steht windschief zu ihrer Wirklichkeit. Das Unzulängliche wird gerade im Bildungsroman Ereignis. (Benjamin 443)

Vielleicht ist es genau dieses Brüchige, dieses „Unzulängliche“ und Windschiefe, das jede Systematik Sprengende, das dem Bildungsroman seine Zugehörigkeit zur Romangeschichte der Moderne erlaubt.

2. Bildung im Bildungsroman

Auf jeden Fall gehören Bildungsromane einer historischen Gattung an, die einen der komplexesten kulturbestimmenden Begriffe seiner Entstehungszeit zum Mittelpunkt hat. Auch wenn dieser Bildungsbegriff sich einer wörtlichen Übersetzung aus dem Deutschen entzieht, bleibt doch die Sache, die Bildung, nicht auf Deutschland beschränkt, sondern ist ein gesamteuropäisches Phänomen (vgl. Dumont). Die wechselhafte und bewegte Geschichte des Bildungsbegriffs,¹ der bis ins Mittelalter zurückreicht, kann hier nicht einmal andeutungsweise nachgezeichnet

werden (vgl. Selbmann 1994, 1-6). Dieser Bildungsbegriff fungiert so lange als unhinterfragte Leitlinie, bis er am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts zu seiner eigenen Parodie wird, weil dann Bildung zum Zitatenschatz und zum Ausweis gesellschaftlichen Ranges verkommen ist. Seine Außerkraftsetzung steht an. Sein zähes Weiterleben, weil er in vielen Bereichen unersetzbar erscheint, verwickelt diesen Bildungsbegriff bis in die Gegenwart in grundsätzliche und dauerhafte Diskussionen. Für die Zeit um 1800, die für die Entstehung des Bildungsromans die Grundlagen lieferte, wurde diese ‚Bildung‘ in einem gesamteuropäischen Kontext verhandelt und gründete auf einer Gesellschaftsformation, die durch komplexe Aufstiegsprozesse dieses Bürgertums innerhalb der Ständegesellschaft des Ancien Régime charakterisiert war. Innerhalb Deutschlands, das als Staat noch gar nicht existent war, kamen noch partikulare Interessen zusätzlich verwickelnd hinzu: konfessionelle, regionale und mentalitätsgeschichtliche. Sie waren vielleicht noch einflussreicher als die Frage nach einer nationalen Identität.

Diese enge Bindung an den zuerst ökonomischen, dann administrativen und zuletzt sozialen Aufstieg des Bürgertums steckt ein literarisches Feld von so medialer Dominanz ab, dass der junge Roman noch lange im Hintergrund bleiben muss. Denn in Kultur und Literatur stellen zuerst das Theater und das Drama die Leitmedien bürgerlicher Selbstversicherung dar. Mit der Epochenkrankheit der sog. Theatromanie gehen beide ein wirkungsvolles Bündnis ein. Der Roman dockt an diese Aufstiegs Geschichte des Theaters an, ohne seine eigene Herkunftsgeschichte zu verleugnen (vgl. Selbmann 1981). Auf dieser Linie entwickelt sich aus dem Abenteuerroman, der seine Wurzeln bis ins Mittelalter und bis zum höfischen Barockroman zurückführen kann, die neue, ganz unerhörte Gattung. Frühe literaturgeschichtliche Synopsen wollten daran die Geschichte eines Entwicklungsromans ablesen, der sich bis auf Wolfram von Eschenbachs *Parzival* und Grimmelshausens *Simplizissimus* zurückführen lässt (vgl. Gerhard). Zunächst taucht, nach dem Auslaufen des höfischen Barockromans, der Abenteuer- oder Picaroroman auf, der sich um die Lebensgeschichte eines einzigen Helden rankt; er prägt eine Vielzahl unterschiedlicher Romanformen aus. Dieser Roman unterscheidet sich vom Reiseroman, vom Schelmenroman und vom komischen Roman. Die Nähe zur Autobiografie ist dabei auffällig. Gleichzeitig dockt diese Romanart an die europäische Romangeschichte, vor allem die englische an. Der sich dabei herauskristallisierende Individualroman – es gibt im 18. Jahrhundert nur wenige Romane, die nicht den Namen ihres Helden im

Titel tragen – zeichnet sich durch Diskurse und Abenteuer aus, die um bürgerliche Werte kreisen. Spätestens jetzt wird aus den moralisch noch fragwürdigen Abenteuern eine Reihe von Heldentaten. Der Roman wird dadurch eine „bürgerliche Epopeë“, wie es in der Vorrede von Johann Carl Wezels *Herrmann und Ulrike* von 1780 dann heißen wird.

Der Übergang dieser Romane zum Bildungsroman verläuft fließend. Er folgt den Veränderungen des Persönlichkeitsideals. Mit ihm wandeln sich auch die Romanhelden vom Hofmann zum Gentleman, zum Bürger oder gar zum Citoyen. Hinzu kommen Vorstellungen einer ganzheitlichen Persönlichkeit, die keinen Idealzustand mehr beschreiben, sondern eine Persönlichkeitsentwicklung erfassen wollen, die den Weg hin zu einer mehr oder weniger vollkommenen Reife unternimmt. Es wird gezeigt, wie sich angeborene Anlagen durch Lebenserfahrung und Weltkontakt immer weiter ausfalten. Den ideologischen Höhepunkt solcher Lebensentwürfe fasst man zweifellos in dem Bildungsprogramm, das Goethe seinen Helden Wilhelm Meister im Bildungsbrief seiner *Lehrjahre* programmatisch postulieren lässt: „Daß ich dir's mit Einem Worte sage: mich selbst, ganz wie ich da bin, auszubilden, das war dunkel von Jugend auf mein Wunsch und meine Absicht“ (Goethes Werke I, 22, 149). Der hohe Ton überdeckt, dass Wilhelm eigentlich nur den Gegensatz von Bürger und Edelmann durch das Theater versöhnt. Wilhelms Anspruch, „zu jener harmonischen Ausbildung meiner Natur, die mir meine Geburt versagt“, zu kommen, bleibt ganz im Rahmen der gegebenen „Verfassung der Gesellschaft“ gefangen (151). Wilhelms und damit Goethes Vorreiterrolle kann das Defizit des deutschen Sonderwegs nicht abschütteln,² bürgerliche Bildungswerte innerhalb einer starren Ständegesellschaft ohne sozio-politische Veränderungen zu verfechten. Die sich daraus entwickelnde Gesellschaftsutopie mit ihrem Zukunftseuphemismus, der in der Betonung eines solchen Bildungsziels enthalten ist, mag erklären, dass Nachbarländer wie Frankreich und England solche Bildungsromane, wie sie sich dann im 19. Jahrhundert vermehren werden, nicht haben. Der deutsche Bildungsroman ist das Produkt eines grundsätzlichen Defizits durch ökonomisch-soziale Rückständigkeit (im Vergleich mit England) und durch das politische Verharren in vorrevolutionären Zuständen (im Vergleich zu Frankreich). Die deutsche Ständegesellschaft bleibt gottgewollt und dadurch moralisch abgesichert. In Deutschland ist der Adelige nicht nur ein Angehöriger eines höheren Standes, sondern immer auch ein Edelmann im Wortsinn. Es lohnt sich also, am Ende eines

gelungenen Bildungswegs in den Adel aufzusteigen oder zumindest eine adelsgleiche Position zu erringen.

Der darauf fußende Bildungsbegriff in Deutschland ist zudem vor-naturwissenschaftlich. Selbst Goethes naturwissenschaftliche Grundlegungen, man denke an seine *Metamorphose der Pflanzen* als eine Art Allegorie des menschlichen Bildungsprozesses, oder seine lebenslangen optischen Studien, ausdrücklich gegen Newtons physikalisch-mathematische Optik gerichtet, ändern daran wenig. Mehr noch: Man sollte meinen, dass spätestens seit Darwins *On the Origin of Species* von 1859, erst recht nach dessen schneller Rezeption und Durchsetzung in Deutschland, das Entwicklungsmodell des Bildungsromans eine naturwissenschaftlich-philosophische Unterfütterung erhalten hätte. Denn das Erzählmodell des Bildungsromans hätte daraus doch eine Bestätigung durch die wissenschaftliche Bewahrheitung ableiten können. Doch bei den nach Darwin erschienenen Romanen ist davon nichts zu spüren. Vielmehr wird das Bildungsroman-Modell genau zu diesem Zeitpunkt grundsätzlich in Frage gestellt. Das für 1800 innovative Bildungsroman-Erzählmuster verliert seine Überzeugungskraft genau zu dem Zeitpunkt, als es in Naturwissenschaft und Realität seine Bestätigung findet. Es sieht so aus, als nehme die real-lebensweltliche Erfüllung solcher Entwürfe dem Bildungsroman seinen fiktiv-utopischen Charakter. Auch andere Folgeerscheinungen wie die Darwin fortschreibende Vererbungslehre schließen sich mit Diskursen um „Entartung“, „Dekadenz“ oder „Vitalismus“ darin ein (vgl. Bender). Im Bildungsroman der Zeit finden sie aber keinen Wiederhall.

Deutsche Bildung ist ausdrücklich vor-industriell. Sie beruft sich auf die Antike durch die Augen Winckelmanns und institutionalisiert sich im humanistischen Gymnasium, das mit Latein und Altgriechisch auf das Leben in einer Industriegesellschaft vorbereiten soll. Deutsche Bildungsromanhelden machen um Fabriken und um das Industrieproletariat einen weiten Bogen, etwa der Held Heinrich Lee in Gottfried Kellers *Der grüne Heinrich*, der sich lieber dem Künstlertum hingibt – auch wenn er dadurch wider Willen in die serielle Massenproduktion hineingerät. In den meisten Fällen nehmen sie die zeitgenössischen Industrialisierungstendenzen gar nicht zur Kenntnis. Wenn sich ein Roman wie Gustav Freytags *Soll und Haben* von 1855 auf moderne Wirtschaftsformen einlässt, dann tut er dies in einer so vergangenheitszugewandten Form des Bedauerns, dass es schon an Augenwischerei grenzt. Aus dieser Weltabgewandtheit der

deutschen Romanproduktion wird Erich Auerbach im 20. Jahrhundert dann den Vorwurf an die deutsche Literatur ableiten, sie habe trotz ihres Anspruchs auf ‚Realismus‘ die Wirklichkeit ihrer Zeit nicht zur Kenntnis genommen und verharre in einer Butzenscheibenwelt des Altfränkischen (vgl. Auerbach, zuerst 1946). Dem ist freilich entgegenzuhalten (und wäre anderenorts näher zu begründen), dass die Bildungsromane des 19. Jahrhunderts sehr wohl den Puls des Zeitgeists abfühlen, freilich nicht ‚stofflich‘, sondern in erzählerischen Innovationen, die in die Moderne hinüberführen. Was thematisch rückständig aussieht, kann in seiner ästhetischen Gestalt durchaus zukunftsweisend sein.

Deutsche Bildung ist vor-global. Dieses Defizit ist nicht nur durch die politische Kleinstaaterei bedingt, die allerhöchstens eine nationale Zukunftsperspektive erlaubt. Selbst wenn die Blicke deutscher Romane doch einmal über den europäischen Tellerrand hinausgehen wie in der Idee einer Auswanderung nach Amerika (in Goethes *Lehrjahren* und in den *Wanderjahren*), nach Südamerika (wie in Kellers *Martin Salander*) oder nach Südafrika (wie in Raabes *Abu Telfan* oder *Stopfkuchen*), sind sie doch auf die Rückkehr in die Heimat bezogen. Außereuropäisches bleibt immer ein Exotikum.

So gründet die Gattung Bildungsroman in einer Paradoxie, bei der zu fragen ist, ob sie vielleicht sogar das Wesen des Bildungsromans ausmacht. Der Roman hat sich zu einer Zeit ausgebildet, durchgesetzt und geradezu normative Bedeutung erreicht, als der ihm zugrunde liegende Bildungsbegriff längst überholt war. 1906, im selben Jahr, in dem Wilhelm Dilthey den Bildungsroman als literaturwissenschaftliche Kategorie eingeführt hat, ist daher bei dem peripheren Zeitgeistbeobachter Herm. Anders Krüger zu lesen, der Bildungsroman sei

eine Romanart, die ein ganz ausgesprochen nationales Gepräge trägt, wie sie eigenartiger, individueller kein anderes Volk aufzuweisen hat, den deutschen Bildungsroman, der im letzten Jahrhundert ganz eigentlich der Roman der Dichter und Denker war und es voraussichtlich auch bleiben wird. (Krüger 270)

Wenn das keine Ideologie ist: Aus den nationalen Defiziten sind uneinholbare Vorsprünge geworden, die Qualen der Entstehungsbedingungen haben sich zu Stolz verkehrt.

Vor diesem Hintergrund hat es nicht an Versuchen gefehlt, den Bildungsroman als Gattung zu erhalten und ihn jenseits dieser

ideologischen Implikationen seriös abzusichern, indem man ihn von seinem ominösen Bildungsbegriff befreit. Die Frage ist allerdings, ob das bloße Austauschen von Begriffen wie ‚Bildung‘, nur weil man mit ihnen nichts (mehr) anfangen kann, irgendeinen Zugewinn an Erkenntnis bringt, außer einer möglichst abgehobenen Begrifflichkeit, die mit den tatsächlich geschriebenen Romanen wenig zu tun hat (vgl. Menke/Glaser). Zurück bleibt eine Rudimentärform, ein ‚klassischer‘ Bildungsroman, der als ein anachronistischer Individualroman aufgefasst wird, den man dann als einen ‚modernen‘ Bildungsroman zu einer literaturgeschichtlich weiterexistierenden Gattung fortschreiben kann. Dabei handelt es sich im Grunde um nichts anderes als um eine „biographical novel“, die sich selbst thematisiert. Ein zu erzählender Entwicklungsprozess wird dann von einer Individualgeschichte ganz abgekoppelt: „separating adolescence from the dictates of ‚Bildung‘, modernist writing created an autonomous value for youth and cleared space for its own resistance to linear plots while registering the failure of imperialism as a discourse of global development“ (Esty 25). Zu „failure of imperialism“ und „global development“ am Ende mehr.

Es gibt auch andere Versuche, den Bildungsroman als Gattung beizubehalten, ohne den historisch belasteten Bildungsbegriff mitzuschleppen, etwa in der Betonung der Heldenentwicklung, so dass sich Bildungsromane als Adoleszenzromane lesen lassen (vgl. Titzmann). Auch an Versuchen, den Bildungsroman in einen internationalen Lebensentwurf-Roman einzugemeinden, hat es nicht gefehlt (vgl. Hillmann/Hühn). Diese Tendenz zur Einebnung der mühsam gezogenen Abgrenzung des Bildungsromans vom Entwicklungsroman lässt sich auch anderenorts beobachten (vgl. Gutjahr). Spannender erscheinen dagegen literaturwissenschaftliche Versuche, den Bildungsroman als eine Unterart des utopischen Romans zu verstehen und dabei dessen Betonung des pragmatischen Erzählens und seine „Finalität des Erzählens“ zu untersuchen (Voßkamp 22-26). Eine breite Untersuchung der Nexus-Formen des Erzählens im Roman der Goethezeit kommt denn auch zu dem Ergebnis, dass es erhebliche Zweifel an der Tragfähigkeit des Bildungsroman-Begriffs gibt, dass dieser aus pragmatischen Gründen aber „wohl unverzichtbar“ sei (Engel 247).

Einen weiblichen Bildungsroman kann man herauspräparieren, wenn man als typisch weiblich markierte Verhaltensweisen wie Tugendhaftigkeit und Sittlichkeit, Unschuld und Gefühlsdominanz hervorhebt und nach

Autorinnen im Umfeld von Jane Austens *Emma* (1816) sucht. Hier wird man, die Geschichte des Bildungsroman-Begriffs verhindert anderes, nur außerhalb Deutschlands fündig (vgl. Schweitzer/Sitte 144-165). Dabei hat man es im Grunde mit Individualromanen zu tun, die sich zentral mit Prozessen wie der Sozialisation ihrer Heldinnen auseinandersetzen, hilfswise auch als „novel of subject formation/education/apprenticeship“ angelegt sind oder diese Vorgänge thematisieren. Solche Romane als Bildungsromane zu bezeichnen, nährt daher den Verdacht des Etikettenschwindels, wenn das Vorgehen darauf hinausläuft, möglichst viele moderne Romane darunter einzugemeinden, um sie dem Vorwurf des Trivialen zu entziehen, dem sie sonst ausgesetzt sein könnten.

3. *Hat der Bildungsroman eine Zukunft?*

Die Bemühungen, neue Blicke auf ein traditionelles Gattungsmuster zu werfen oder umgekehrt das alte Modell für zeitgenössische Romanarten benutzbar zu machen, haken, erst recht, wenn diese postkolonial, genderfokussiert, auf die Darstellung von Trauma-Erfahrungen ausgerichtet oder ökologisch orientiert sind.³ Vom Willen getrieben, eine alte Gattung substantiell abzusichern, neu zu definieren und der heutigen Zeit anzupassen, besteht immer die Gefahr, die Substanz der Gattung zu verwässern. Bei der Frage, ob der Bildungsroman mehr als eine historisch gewordene, vom Aussterben bedrohte Gattung darstellt, lohnt sich der eingangs angerissene Vergleich mit dem Bürgerlichen Trauerspiel. Denn das ist tatsächlich ausgestorben. Ohne einer kurzschlüssigen sozialgeschichtlichen Betrachtung das Wort zu reden: Die sozialen, ökonomischen und politischen Bedingungen, von denen die Theaterstücke zwischen Lillos *The London Merchant* von 1731 und Friedrich Hebbels *Maria Magdalena* von 1844 zeugten, gibt es nicht mehr. Während das europäische Festland noch ganz in der höfischen Welt versunken war, existierte im ökonomisch und sozial weiter entwickelten England ein bewegliches Bürgertum – der Titel des ersten bürgerlichen Trauerspiels spricht für sich. Neue brennende Problemstellungen um Geld und Liebe, um Moral, Anstand und Charakterstärke traten an die Stelle der höfischen Intrigen und der heroischen Haupt- und Staatsaktionen, neue Lebensformen verlangten nach neuen Kunstformen. Sein Drama sei, so Lillo in der Widmung seines Initialstücks, „founded on moral tales of private life“ (zit. nach Guthke 23).

In der Übertragung auf Deutschland war die Bezeichnung „Bürgerliches Trauerspiel“ nach den Bedingungen der Gattungsentstehung ein astreines Paradoxon. Nur in Deutschland widersprachen sich die beiden Begriffshälften so grundsätzlich: ein Trauerspiel konnte qua Definition niemals in einer Welt angesiedelt sein, die bürgerliche Werte verhandelte. Im Erfinderland England gab es für dieses innovative Theater auf Grund des nur begrenzt provokativ wirkenden Stoffes keine eigene Gattungsbezeichnung für „almost a new species of tragedy“ (Guthke 23). Die französischen Begriffe „comédie larmoyante“ oder „tragédie bourgeoise“ und „tragédie domestique“ waren nur analog, nicht deckungsgleich. Mädchen, die ihren Gefühlen folgen und gegen die starren gesellschaftlichen Vorstellungen ihrer Eltern opponieren, gibt es zwar weiterhin. Sie kommen auch weiterhin auf die Bühne; daraus wird aber keine Tragödie, sondern höchstens ein sentimentales Lustspiel.

Ist der Bildungsroman ebenso tot wie das bürgerliche Trauerspiel, soll heißen: nur mehr von literaturgeschichtlichem Interesse? Oder kann er weiterleben, ja lebt vielleicht sogar noch? Zu einer Rettung der Gattung ist es nötig, beim Kernbegriff der Bildung anzusetzen. Man kann den Bildungsbegriff so ausweiten, dass er alle Formen kultureller Sozialisation umfasst, von den institutionalisierten Bildungsabschlüssen bis zu erlernten einfachen Kulturtechniken wie dem fachgerechten Umgang mit Messer und Gabel. Der Bildungsroman wäre dann deckungsgleich mit jedem Entwicklungsroman, wenn er den Lebensweg eines Protagonisten von seinem Ausgangspunkt bis zu einem wie immer gearteten Endpunkt verfolgt. Ein solcher Bildungsroman zeichnete sich durch Einsträngigkeit aus, wäre also auch Individualroman im Gegensatz zum Gesellschaftsroman. Offen wäre dieser Bildungsroman gegenüber dem Erziehungs-, dem didaktischen und dem pädagogischen Roman. Von ihnen unterschiede er sich höchstens durch das Fehlen einer Erzieher-Instanz, die die Leitlinie des Romangeschehens vorgibt. Man sieht, dass wir es dann mit einer sehr offenen, geradezu universalen Romanart zu tun hätten, die die meisten Romane der Weltliteratur einzuschließen vermag. Zugespitzt formuliert: Es gäbe nur wenige Romane, die *keine* Bildungsromane wären. Wenn aber fast alle Romane aller Zeiten *auch* als Bildungsromane zählen, wird eine Gattungseinteilung nicht nur durch Überfüllung sinnlos.

Schränkt man hingegen den zugrunde liegenden Bildungsbegriff auf die Entstehungszeit des Bildungsromans ein, dann erhält man ein präzises Raster zur Einordnung der Romane. Diese Bildung, zwischen

Aufklärung und 19. Jahrhundert anzusetzen, beschrieb dann die Idee einer Identitätsformation auf der Grundlage spezifischer Werte mit einem Bildungsziel, das individualistisch, philosophisch und unpolitisch ausgerichtet ist. Dass dieser Bildungsbegriff ausdrücklich und ausschließlich männlich definiert ist, versteht sich aus seiner historischen Verankerung. Diese Idealvorstellung stimmt für das 18. Jahrhundert über weite Strecken mit der Emanzipationsideologie des Bürgertums gegen die Ständegesellschaft überein, geht aber darin nicht auf. Hinzu tritt die Idee, sich nicht mehr an der christlichen Überlieferung zu orientieren, sondern entweder auf die Erkenntnisse der Antike zurückzugreifen oder dem eigenen Verstand gemäß Kants Definition der Aufklärung zu vertrauen. Das Ästhetische erhält lebenssteuernden Eigenwert bis hin zum Religionsersatz; wer sich dem nicht unterwirft, bekennt sich als Philister und wird damit nicht nur aus der Kunstwelt, sondern auch aus der Bildungsfähigkeit ausgeschlossen. In diesem Erlösungsanspruch der Bildung war auch seine Abwehr alles Politischen angelegt. Schließlich hatten die Klassiker ein nachahmbares Modell vorgelegt, wie den Auswüchsen der Französischen Revolution und jeder revolutionären Veränderung zu begegnen war: Schiller rechtfertigte die sittlich reinigende Wirkung der Ästhetik, Goethe verfocht Entwicklungsvorstellungen, die alles Sprunghafte aus dem Geschichtsprozess ausschlossen, indem sie den Vorgang der allmählichen Veränderung zum Naturgesetz erhoben (vgl. Fiedler). Die Freiheitsbestrebungen solcher Bildungshelden zielten nicht auf die Auflösung der Standesschranken und gar auf politische Autonomie, sondern auf eine abstrakte Gedankenfreiheit, wie sie schon Schillers Marquis Posa im *Don Carlos* von seinem König eingefordert hatte. Am Ende eines erfolgreich durchlaufenen Bildungsprozesses kam dann eine vollendete Persönlichkeit zu stehen, die Zielpunkt und Ideal in einem war.

Auf der Basis dieses engen Bildungsbegriffs lässt sich eine Gattungsgeschichte des Bildungsromans sehr einfach schreiben. Sie beginnt am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts, auf der Grundlage der Ideen der Aufklärung, der Empfindsamkeit und des Pietismus sowie im Vorschein der Französischen Revolutionen mit Wielands *Geschichte des Agathon* (in drei Fassungen 1766/67, 1773 und 1794), Karl Philipp Moritz' *Anton Reiser* (1785/90) und Goethes *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Hier werden zum ersten Mal Bildungsgeschichten erzählt, die nicht nur als Episoden ihrer Romane vorkommen, sondern deren Kern ausmachen. Fast zeitgleich oder mit nur geringer Phasenverschiebung erscheinen Romane, die sich an

derselben Problemstellung unter veränderten Gesichtspunkten abarbeiten wie Friedrich Hölderlins *Hyperion* (1797/99), Jean Pauls *Titan* (1800/03), Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802) und Joseph von Eichendorffs *Ahnung und Gegenwart* (1815), abgeschlossen durch E. T. A. Hoffmanns Bildungsromanparodie *Lebens-Ansichten des Kater Murr* (1819/21). Man hat diese Romane recht passend als Romane in der Nachfolge Wilhelm Meisters bezeichnet (so zuerst Steinecke).

Mit der Krise dieses Bildungsbegriffs, gar mit seiner Verabschiedung als anachronistisch (vgl. Assmann), verlassen auch die Bildungsromane der Zeit die enge Nähe zum Vorbild Goethes, nicht ohne immer wieder auf diese Nähe hinzuweisen wie bei Eduard Mörikes *Maler Nolten* (1832), Ludwig Tiecks *Der junge Tischlermeister* (1836), Karl Immermanns *Die Epigonen* (1836), Gustav Freytags *Soll und Haben* (1855), Gottfried Kellers *Der grüne Heinrich* (1854/56), Adalbert Stifters *Der Nachsommer* (1857) oder Wilhelm Raabes *Der Hungerpastor* (1864). Mit dem Zusammenbruch der alten Ordnungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg gibt es keinen erstzunehmenden Anschluss an den damit verabschiedeten Bildungsbegriff mehr.

Bildungsromane des 20. Jahrhunderts kann es unter der Perspektive eines engen Bildungsbegriffs also nicht mehr geben, auch wenn z. B. Thomas Mann seinen *Felix Krull* (1911) als „Parodie“ und „Zersetzung“ des Bildungsromans anlegt und noch 1921 behauptet, sein *Zauberberg* sei „auf seine parodistische Art ein humanistisch-goethescher Bildungsroman“ (zit. nach Selbmann 1994, 149). Auch Robert Musil arbeitet sich auf seine Weise und letztlich erfolglos mit seinem Monumentalroman *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1930/33) an diesem längst zerfallenen Bildungsbegriff ab. Alle Versuche der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts, Romane so zu schreiben, dass sie in Anspielung und Erneuerung, spielerischer Wiederbelebung und ironischer Distanzierung an den mittlerweile ‚klassisch‘ gewordenen Bildungsroman anknüpfen können, erscheinen entweder halbherzig oder erzwungen. Das gilt auch für Romane wie Günter Grass' *Die Blechtrommel* (1959), Peter Handkes *Der kurze Brief zum langen Abschied* (1972), Botho Strauß' *Der junge Mann* (1984), Thomas Bernhards *Auslöschung* (1986) oder Uwe Tellkamps *Der Turm* (2008), die diesem auslaufenden Strang des Bildungsromangeschichte zuzuordnen sind.

Die gegenwärtige Literaturwissenschaft, wenn sie streng auf sich hält, müsste diesen Vorgaben eigentlich folgen. Zwei Beispiele hierzu: Kann

es nach dieser engen Bildungsdefinition einen weiblichen Bildungsroman, sowohl einen Roman mit einer weiblichen Heldin als auch einen Roman aus der Feder einer Autorin, überhaupt geben? (so schon Paulsen). Im 18. Jahrhundert ist weibliche Bildung nicht vorgesehen. Wenn es gleichsam aus Versehen durch Hauslehrer, durch eine erweiterte Mädchenerziehung oder heimliches Privatstudium, durch freizügige Elternhäuser bzw. Ehepartner dazu kommt, entstehen merkwürdige Romane. Sophie von LaRoche, obwohl als Adlige sozial privilegiert, muss ihren Roman *Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (1771) unter dem Namen des ‚Herausgebers‘ Wieland veröffentlichen. Auch Dorothea Schlegels Roman *Florentin* erscheint 1801 „herausgegeben“ von ihrem Ehemann Friedrich Schlegel. Die Wirkungsgeschichte beider Romane liefert ein Lehrbeispiel, auf welche Weise beide aus dem Reigen der deutschen Bildungsromane ausgeschlossen geblieben sind.

Das zweite Beispiel liefert ein Roman, der schon so heißt, wie ein Bildungsroman heißen muss, nämlich Gustave Flauberts *Éducation sentimentale* von 1869; in der Neuübersetzung von 2020 heißt der Roman sogar *Lehrjahre der Männlichkeit*. Ist die *Éducation* ein Bildungsroman? Bei der Anwendung des engen, des ‚klassischen‘ Bildungsbegriffs, der, wie wir seit 1906 wissen, „ein ganz ausgesprochen nationales Gepräge trägt“ (so Krüger), fällt Flauberts Roman nicht nur wegen des keineswegs glücklichen Endes aus der Reihe heraus.

Es bleibt die Spannung zwischen einem erstrebten, erreichbaren oder eben nicht erreichbaren Bildungsziel und einer potentiell niemals abschließbaren Entwicklung. Wenn man diese Spannung sehr weit fasst, Entwicklungsprozesse gar mit der erzählerischen Darstellung eines solchen kurzschließt, dann werden „development“ und „fiction“ gleichgesetzt.⁴ Dasselbe gilt für die Einpassung in die Gesellschaft, die schon Hegel als Abstoßen der Hörner des Subjekts und als schlussendliche Unterwerfung unter gesellschaftliche Normen ironisiert hatte. Hier gilt es, auf geschärfte Begriffe zu achten, vor allem dann, wenn sie aus dem Englischen in die Terminologie einwandern. Wenn man z. B. Hegels (deutschen) Begriff von Gesellschaft einfach so gegen (außerdeutsche) Nationalstaatsvorstellungen austauscht, entstehen anachronistische Schiefstellungen. Dann lassen sich Romane wie Oscar Wildes *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) und James Joyces *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) als Bildungsromane eingemeinden, es lassen sich „metropolitan bildungsromane“ generieren und sogar Joseph Conrads *Lord Jim* (1900) kann zur „colonial novel of

development“ erhoben werden. Gleichzeitig fällt damit aber der eigentliche Bildungsroman, Goethes *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, der „granddaddy of them all“ (X), durch die Ritzen der Definition. Denn weder zur Zeit von Goethes Roman noch zur Zeit von Hegels Gattungsbeschreibung gab es eine solche Nation, auf die man sich hätte beziehen können. Das modische Globalthema Kolonialismus ist für die deutschen Verhältnisse vor dem Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts und damit für die Gattung des Bildungsromans sowieso abwegig (zu diesem Hintergrund vgl. Selbmann 2018).

Insofern ist das schon zitierte Diktum von Herm. Anders Krüger, der Bildungsroman sei „eine Romanart, die ein ganz ausgesprochen nationales Gepräge trägt, wie sie eigenartiger, individueller kein anderes Volk aufzuweisen hat“, wegen seiner ideologischen Verstiegtheit immer noch vollgültig – man muss es nur mit einem „leider“ versehen. Denn *diesen* Bildungsroman gibt es (oder gab es) nur und ausschließlich in Deutschland. Nur so ist die Anmaßung nachzuvollziehen, dass sich der mittlerweile als Deutsches Reich entstandene Nationalstaat auf den Bildungsroman berufen will, um dadurch sein Wesen zu definieren. Denn seit wann ist es hilfreich, ein historisches Defizit als eine ästhetische Leistung zu feiern?



- 1 Allein das *Handbuch der deutschen Bildungsgeschichte* (Beck: München 1987-2005) umfasst sechs Bände.
- 2 Für die politische Geschichte mag der Begriff des ‚deutschen Sonderwegs‘ mittlerweile obsolet geworden sein (vgl. Bollenbeck), für den Bildungsroman scheint er weiterhin zu gelten.
- 3 Die Themenbereiche dazu hat Joshua Esty zusammengetragen.
- 4 Das suggeriert schon der Titel von Esty, *Unseasonable Youth*.



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Erzählen und Reisen als Bildungskategorien: Felicitas Hoppes *Johanna* und *Hoppe*

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Weder *Johanna* (2006) noch *Hoppe* (2012) sind der Gattung des Bildungsromans in engerem Sinne zuzuschreiben. Weder die Definition eines Romantypus, „in dem der Bildungsgang eines jugendlichen Protagonisten zumeist von der Kindheit bis zur Berufsfindung oder Berufung zum Künstler thematisiert wird“ (Gutjahr 2007, 7), noch der Verweis auf die als Gattungsmuster geltenden *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-96) von Goethe würden sich bei der Interpretation von Hoppes Romanen als geeignet erweisen. Betrachtet man aber „Bildung“ als Recht „auf einen individuellen Lebensentwurf auch *gegenüber* gesellschaftlichen Normenvorgaben“ (Gutjahr 2007, 13) in kritischer Auseinandersetzung mit der historischen Tradition und dem kulturellen Wandel (Mayer 12), also letztendlich als „Anspruch, Ich zu sein“ (Voßkamp 14), das sich textuell durch die „Inszenierung‘ des Selbst“ (ebenda) äußert, so sind *Johanna* und *Hoppe* durchaus Texte, in denen „Bildungsstrukturen, -themen und -motive auftauchen“ (Selbmann 1988, 41) und somit als Bildungsromane im weiteren Sinn, als „Halb- und Grenzformen der Gattung“ (Selbmann 1994, 33) aufzufassen. Oder anders ausgedrückt: Es handelt sich bei *Johanna* und *Hoppe* zwar um Romane, die sich nicht in die literaturwissenschaftliche Ordnungskategorie „Bildungsroman“ einbetten lassen; ausgehend von einer Hybridisierung verschiedener Genres (Reiseroman, Geschichtsroman, weiblicher Bildungsroman, autofiktionale Lebensbeschreibung) setzen sie sich jedoch mit der Entwicklung des Individuums auseinander, reflektieren

die unterschiedlichen Möglichkeiten menschlichen Werdens und zeigen immer wieder Welterkundungen als eine fundamentale Etappe individueller Selbstentfaltung auf, wobei sie die Kunst des Erzählens als Werkzeug für die Bestimmung des eigenen Ichs begreifen.

Neben der persönlichen, durch kulturelle Wandlung geprägten Bildung der Protagonistinnen steht in Hoppes *Johanna* und *Hoppe* auch die wirkungsästhetische Formung der Leser*innen im Vordergrund, so wie es Morgenstern bereits 1819 in seiner Systematik des Bildungsromans gefordert hat¹. Dank der offenkundigen Einbindung des lesenden Publikums in einen kalkulierten Kommunikationsprozess durch offene Texte, die keine konventionellen Erzählmuster aufweisen, sowie mittels einer auf Intertextualität (vgl. Gutjahr 2009, Böhn) und Intermedialität (Pontzen) angelegten Schreibweise, ferner durch äußerst gekonnt initiierte Selbstverweise und dichterische Verwandlungen historischer Episoden sowie durch die Verarbeitung literarischer Quellen hält die Autorin die Lust am Lesen stets wach und sucht beharrlich die kritische Auseinandersetzung mit den Leser*innen, wobei sie durch diese gewählte Strategie den Begriff der Bildung hinterfragt und rekonzeptualisiert.

Ausgehend von dieser Doppelperspektive (Bildung der Figuren und Bildung der Leser*innen) wird Hoppes Beschäftigung mit dem Konzept der Bildung in zweierlei Hinsicht untersucht, und zwar einerseits bezüglich ihrer variantenreichen Thematisierung des Erzählens, der Liebe und des Reisens als Wege zur Persönlichkeitsformung und Identitätsfindung des Individuums und andererseits in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit weiblichen Figuren, insbesondere mit jungen Frauen, und deren Entwicklungsphasen. Dabei fungieren ahistorisch zu verstehende „Gattungskonstituenten des Bildungsromans“ (Selbmann 1994, 27) – also zeitübergreifende Inhaltsmerkmale und konstante Strukturelemente² – als Folie, vor der sich die Spezifik von Hoppes Romanen abhebt.

Johanna (2006) – Tradition, Variation, Innovation

Felicitas Hoppes Roman *Johanna* bietet eine Variation der Geschichte der historischen Johanna von Orléans (um 1412-1431)³. Die namenlose Protagonistin und Ich-Erzählerin ist eine Doktorandin der Geschichte, die ihre Dissertation über Johanna von Orléans verfasst und sich auf die Disputation vorbereitet. Auf die historische Figur wird nur indirekt

eingegangen (ihr wird das erste Kapitel – *Prolog* – gewidmet, und sie ist Gegenstand der Prüfung der Protagonistin, die ein „stark affektives Verhältnis“ – Hilmes 133 – zu ihr entwickelt), wobei zwischen den beiden Figuren Parallelen gezogen werden⁴. In Wirklichkeit geht es jedoch eher um die Initiation der Doktorandin in den akademischen Betrieb, von dem sie letztendlich ausgeschlossen wird (es wird nicht klar, ob die Ich-Erzählerin ihre Prüfung besteht, denn der Professor verlässt frühzeitig den Raum), aber vor allem um die Initiation in das Leben und in die Liebe (die Ich-Erzählerin verliebt sich in den von ihr auf den Spitznamen „Peitsche“ getauften Assistenten ihres Professors für Geschichtswissenschaft).

Der Roman *Johanna* wurde als „weibliche(r) Bildungsroman“ (Ilgner) bezeichnet⁵. ‚Weiblicher Bildungsroman gegen den Strom‘ würde sich jedoch als die geeignetere Definition erweisen. Der Text behandelt nur eine begrenzte Etappe des Bildungswegs seiner weiblichen Protagonistin (die Promotionszeit) und durchleuchtet die von ihr erlebten Phasen dieser Erprobung. Anders als in ‚traditionellen‘ Bildungsromanen findet in *Johanna* keine Erzählung oder Aufarbeitung der Kindheit und Jugend statt; außerdem wird die Entwicklung der Protagonistin mit der einer historischen Figur verbunden, wodurch unterschiedliche Zeitebenen ineinander verschränkt werden. Einerseits verleiht dies der Handlung historische Glaubwürdigkeit; andererseits wird der Vergleich teilweise ad absurdum geführt, so dass die historische Johanna fremd wirkt⁶ und die Protagonistin allein in den Vordergrund rückt. Beide Figuren haben eine wichtige Gemeinsamkeit: Sie weisen weibliche (oder von der Gesellschaft als solche empfundene) Rollenverhaltensweisen zurück – „[...] Johanna sei rückfällig geworden, habe wieder Männerkleider angelegt und alles widerrufen, was sie unterschrieben hatte“ (*Johanna* 9); „Aber Johanna ist keine Dame“ (*Johanna* 14) – und träumen von einer ‚männlichen‘ Welt, einer Welt von Kriegern und Schlachten:

Und du, die zu kleine Schwester, träumst vom aufrechten Federbusch. Von Schwertern und Schlachtwind, von Pomp und Posaune. [...] Warum bist du nicht einfach zu Hause geblieben, um Schafe zu hüten und Kränze zu flechten und unter dem Feenbaum weiter zu träumen. Denn irgendeiner kommt immer vorbei, auch einer, der kurze Beine mag, auf Gesichter pfeift und fast alles auf innere Schönheit setzt. [...] Kein Engel, sondern ein richtiger Mann, mit einer Stimme, die uns von höheren Stimmen erlöst, von Stimmen, die Jungfrauen einreden wollen, dass sie reiten sollten und Könige krönen und Kriege führen und Länder befreien. (*Johanna* 39)

Dieser Wille zur Gleichberechtigung und Unabhängigkeit verweist auf die Emanzipationsbestrebungen weiblicher Bildungsromane um 1800 – wie den 1795 erschienenen Debütroman von Therese Huber *Die Familie Seldorf* und den Erzählerstling *Das Blüthenalter der Empfindung* von Sophie Mereau (1794) –, aber auch auf die Erzählungen *Fenitschka* (1898) und *Eine Ausschweifung* (1898) von Lou Andreas-Salomé, die als Bildungsgeschichten einer promovierten Wissenschaftlerin, Fenitschka, und einer erfolgreichen Künstlerin, Adine, sich mit der Frage auseinandersetzen, mit welchen Integrationschwierigkeiten in die Gesellschaft unabhängige Frauen zu kämpfen haben, wobei sie letztendlich die Erfahrung machen müssen, dass sich die Liebe zur Wissenschaft und zur Kunst mit der Liebe zum anderen Geschlecht als unvereinbar entpuppt.

In Hoppes *Johanna* wird die Auseinandersetzung mit der Geschlechterrolle in Bezug auf die historische Figur explizit thematisiert und in die akademische Welt transponiert. Wohl angeregt von Anna Seghers Hörspiel *Der Prozess der Jeanne d'Arc zu Rouen 1431* (1937), das sich auf die 1840 erschienenen Prozessakten stützt und von Carl Th. Dryers Film *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928) inspiriert wurde (Hilmes 135f.), sowie unter Verweis auf Christine de Pisans Loblied *Ditié de Jeanne d'Arc* (1429)⁷ präsentiert Hoppe eine gegenwärtige Johanna, eine Frau, die sich der akademischen Männerwelt, der Welt der „falsche(n) Priester“ (*Johanna* 14), widersetzt. Sie glaubt an die Macht des Wortes und des Erzählens; sie ist der Überzeugung, dass das, worauf es ankommt, nicht das Erzählen von Geschichte(n) ist, sondern „wie man Geschichten macht, wenn man erzählt“ (*Johanna* 47). Hoppes Protagonistin zweifelt an der Forschung, denn „sie kommt an kein Ende, sie einigt sich nie. Nicht auf Zahlen und Daten und auch nicht auf Namen“ (*Johanna* 81); der Professor erkennt das, behauptet, seine Studentin habe „wenig Sinn für die Wahrheit“ (*Johanna* 76) und versucht, ihre Kompetenz zu unterminieren:

Tatsächlich, Sie sollten Romane schreiben, mir scheint, Sie haben das Zeug dazu, Einbildungs- und Empfindungskraft. Sinn für die Szene, für Pomp und Posaune. Für Reiter und Ross. Das sogenannte Naturtalent, eine schöne und blühende Phantasie. (*Johanna* 123)

Gerade dieses Absprechen der wissenschaftlichen Fähigkeit, das immer wieder ins Spiel gebracht wird, erlaubt Hoppe, ihr ernstes ‚Spiel‘ mit der Literatur – in Bezug auf die Protagonistin, letztendlich aber auch hinsichtlich

ihrer eigenen Tätigkeit als Schriftstellerin – zu problematisieren und ihre Liebe zur Literatur als wertvolle Bildungserfahrung darzustellen. Im Vordergrund steht für Hoppe die Hinterfragung der Rolle der Geschichte für die Literatur und die Betonung der Erkenntniskraft der Phantasie:

Dabei weiß er genau, wie schlecht ich Wahrheit vertrage. [...] Was soll ich in der Vergangenheit? Wo liegt übrigens Frankreich? Ich will nicht hinter Vorhängen hocken, ich will kein Wächter von Schatten sein, die alles vertragen, nur keinen Rauch. (*Johanna* 13)

Damit wir uns nicht missverstehen, Chroniken nacherzählen kann jeder, aber damit macht man keine neue Geschichte. Die Geschichte besteht ja nur aus Geschichten, die man leichtfertig nachbeten darf, nur weil sich ein dankbares Publikum findet. Die Geschichte besteht aus Qual und Bemühung, aus Einsicht und Furcht, aus Versuch und Angst, aus Respekt und Eifer, aus Einwand und Schweiß, aus endlosen langen schlaflosen Nächten. Wenig Feuer, viel Rauch, viel Eitelkeit und wenig Erkenntnis. Und jeden Morgen wieder ein Einwand. Es sei denn, Sie nehmen die Sache leicht und suchen Vergnügen. (*Johanna* 74)

Hoppe spielt in *Johanna* mit der Etymologie des Begriffs ἱστορία (historia). In seiner ursprünglichen Bedeutung ist er sowohl als die „Erforschung“ oder „Untersuchung“ eines Gegenstands oder Sachverhalts als auch als die literarische „Darstellung“ oder „Beschreibung“, durch die etwas erklärt wird, zu verstehen. Innerhalb der terminologischen Tradition wird außerdem die Verwendung des Plurals ἱστορίαι, historische Erzählungen, benutzt, die sowohl im literarischen als auch im populären Gebrauch in Formulierungen wie „Geschichten erzählen“ aufrechterhalten wird.

Es geht bei Hoppe also um eine Bildungserfahrung und um ein Bildungsangebot in doppelter Hinsicht: erstens um die Erfahrung der Protagonistin, die mittels ihrer eigenen Phantasie das Rätsel der Geschichte(n) zu verstehen versucht und die historische Wahrheit in eine erzählerische und poetologische verwandelt. Zweitens dreht es sich um die Erfahrung der Leser*innen, die sich dank der erzählten Geschichten „aktiv auf das Spiel mit der rezeptiven Vieldeutigkeit einlassen“ können, „das der Roman erzeugt“ (Schilling 260), und die den Versuch anstellen können, das Rätselhafte zu entschlüsseln.

In beiden Fällen handelt es sich um individuelle Bildung, die nicht nur auf Wissen fußt, sondern vielmehr auf der Neugestaltung dieses Wissens durch das Individuum, das somit seiner Phantasie freien Lauf

gibt. Bildung, die nur auf Fachwissen basiert, kann zum Hindernis werden. Auch Doktor Peitsche, der perfekte Geisteswissenschaftler, der begabte Redner, der zusammen mit Johanna als Vorbild für die Protagonistin fungiert und in den sie sich verlieben wird, empfindet wahre Freude beim Zuhören der Worte, die sie im Schlaf spricht („Was für ein Text!, rief Peitsche. Viel besser als der Text des Professors, Sie sprechen im Schlaf ja wie abgeschrieben. Ganz wunderbar und ohne zu stottern, direkt in die Feder“, *Johanna* 42), und in der eher unwissenschaftlichen Tätigkeit des Nachbastelns von Papiermützen, „die er abends faltet, nachts beschriftet und morgens im Hörsaal prüfend ins Licht hält“ (*Johanna* 11); es handelt sich dabei um Mützen, die, ähnlich der Papiermütze, die man Johanna aufsetzte, bevor man sie auf den Scheiterhaufen führte (*Johanna* 10), rätselhaft Botschaften vermitteln, welche die Leser*innen nie entziffern werden.

Im weiblichen Bildungsroman gehört die Liebe auch zur Bildungserfahrung (Gutjahr 2007, 46). In *Johanna* schwimmt am Ende des Romans die in den Assistenten Peitsche verliebte Protagonistin zusammen mit ihm in Rouen in der Seine, wohin einst der Gerichtsdiener Massieu das Herz Johannas geworfen hat, während sie sich vorher nicht getraut hat:

Das war Ende Mai. Zwischen neun und halb zehn. Ein kurzer historischer Augenblick, in dem Peitsche mich aus der Seine zog und prüfend meine Waden gegen das Licht hielt. [...] Und weit und breit kein Professor in Sicht. Umso besser. Ein Kuss in die Luft, ein Pfiff durch die Zähne, wir sind wieder da. Peitsche wickelt mich fest in die Decke. Er trocknet mich ab, und ich lache. [...] Und morgen, falls es das Wetter erlaubt, werden wir uns duzen. (*Johanna* 171)

Es erfolgt eine Annäherung zwischen der Protagonistin und Peitsche und zugleich eine Distanzierung der Protagonistin von der historischen Figur, wobei die den Roman durchziehende Metapher des Schwimmens und Tauchens immer wieder aufgegriffen wird. Die Protagonistin und Peitsche gestalten ihre Zukunft aktiv (sie schwimmt in der Seine – *Johanna* 165ff. –, und gemeinsam tauchen sie auf den Grund – *Johanna* 169 –)⁸, während „Johanna [...] passiv den Flammen ausgeliefert“ ist (Schilling 265). Die Protagonistin und Ich-Erzählerin emanzipiert sich von der historischen Vorlage, die somit entmythologisiert wird, und erfüllt mit ihrer Poetisierung der Hauptfigur wichtige inhaltliche Merkmale des Bildungsromans, indem das Individuum „nach verwandten Seelen sucht, Freundschaft und Liebe

begegnet, mit der Realität der Welt in Kampf gerät, unter mannigfachen Erfahrungen heranreift, sich selber findet und seinen Aufgaben in der Welt gewiss wird.“ (Borcherdt 175). Somit zeigen sich „die Fähigkeit, das eigene Gewordensein und damit gerade Erziehung und Entwicklung kritisch zu hinterfragen“ (Gutjahr 2007, 13) und das Potential der „Herausbildung *eigener* Ansichten und Wertvorstellungen“ (ebenda) sowie das Einfordern des „Recht(s) auf einen individuellen Lebensentwurf auch *gegenüber* gesellschaftlichen Normvorgaben“ (ebenda).

Hoppe (2012) – *Überbordende Einbildungskraft und Hyperautorschaft*“

Hoppe, paratextuell als Roman gekennzeichnet, lässt sich als eine fiktionale Meta(auto)biografie und zugleich als Bildungsroman definieren. Der Begriffsbestimmung von fiktionaler Metabiographie von Ansgar Nünning folgend, verlagert sich beim Lesen die Aufmerksamkeit von der Darstellung der Ereignisse aus dem Leben einer Person auf die Metaebene der Reflexion über deren Rekonstruktion und Repräsentation im Medium der Biographie, und es kommt zu einer Relativierung der jeweils erzählten Lebensgeschichte, „die als eine Version von mehreren möglichen erkennbar wird“ (Nünning 134). Die Leseart des Textes als Bildungsroman ist insofern gerechtfertigt, da *Hoppe* ein konstitutives Element dieser Gattung enthält, nämlich die Auseinandersetzung mit individuellen Selbstverwirklichungsprozessen und deren Konstruktion durch ein äußeres Geschehen. Diese Entwicklung erfolgt dank der Begegnung mit anderen Figuren und der Nachahmung von Individualitätsmustern, welche die Hauptfigur vor allem im Leben (insbesondere in ihren durch Reisen gesammelten Erfahrungen) und in der Literatur vorfindet⁹. Die Selbstentfaltung der Figur und deren individueller Anspruch trifft dabei auf ein auffallendes „Copierverhalten“, wobei die Differenz zwischen den eigenen Erwartungen und der Realität stets mitdiskutiert wird (Luhmann 871)¹⁰.

Die Schriftstellerin präsentiert selbstironisch eine dreifache Hoppe, nämlich Felicitas Hoppe, die Autorin des Textes, Felicitas Hoppe, die Erzählerin im Text und Felicitas Hoppe, die Protagonistin des Textes. Somit oszilliert der Text zwischen der Konstruktion eines autobiographischen und eines romanischen Pakts; die autobiographische Realität der Verfasserin mutiert zum literarischen Material des Textes und verbindet sich mit dem Leben anderer (historischer oder erfundener) Figuren.

Von der Autorin Hoppe erfahren wir, dass sie eine deutsche Schriftstellerin ist und am 22. Dezember 1960 geboren wurde – davon erhalten wir Kenntnis dank eines in den Roman eingeführten Wikipedia-Eintrags, den die Schriftstellerin ihrem Text voranstellt und als Kapitel 0 titulierte: „Felicitas Hoppe, *22.12.1960 in Hameln, ist eine deutsche Schriftstellerin. *Wikipedia*“.

Die Erzählerin Felicitas Hoppe hingegen fungiert im Buch als Biographin der Autorin. Sie liefert Hintergrundwissen oder stellt Vermutungen auf und nimmt auf andere Texte der Autorin Hoppe und auf Rezensionen ihrer Werke Bezug. Dabei gibt die Erzählerin ständig Kommentare in Form rhetorischer Fragen zur faktischen Wirklichkeit ab, zur Aufhebung des Unterschieds zwischen Wahrheit und Erfindung sowie zum Leben als permanentem Rollentausch (*Hoppe* 63), die sie mit dem in Klammern gesetzten Kürzel fh kennzeichnet.

Da aber fh auch die Initialen der Protagonistin sowie der Autorin sind, kommt es ständig zu Verwechslungen, wie folgendes Beispiel zeigt:

Und plötzlich tritt jene Stille ein, die Biographen bekanntlich seit jeher beunruhigt, weil sie so schlecht recherchierbar ist. Hier seht ihr mich (hier meint fh offenbar sich selbst / fh), aber wo steckt Felicitas? (*Hoppe* 246)

Hoppe spielt also mit den Identitäten und unterläuft somit das Prinzip der Selbstfindung, welches einer (traditionellen) Autobiographie eigen ist. Statt der Selbstfindung scheint sie vielmehr eine Selbsterfindung zu praktizieren¹¹.

Die dritte Felicitas Hoppe ist die Protagonistin des Textes, die bezeichnenderweise Schriftstellerin und Erfinderin sowie Hockeyspielerin, Konzertpianistin und Dirigentin ist. Dargestellt werden ihre verschiedenen Lebensstationen von der Kindheit bis zum Abschluss des Studiums. Es ist ein abenteuerlicher Werdegang über Kontinente hinweg, ein Leben, das als Performanz zu betrachten ist, gleichzeitig aber Bildungswege aufzeigt, die sich jeder Kanonisierung entziehen. Im Vordergrund steht eine weibliche Figur, die „wie selbstverständlich und ohne sich um konventionelle Vorstellungen von Weiblichkeit, Männlichkeit und Kindheit oder um zugehörige Erziehungs- und Entwicklungsmodelle, Familien- und Gesellschaftsstrukturen, Moral-, Scham- und Sexualstrukturen zu scheren“ (Pailer 171) agiert. Auch die Vorstellung von einer traditionellen Familie wird umgedreht, wobei diese Umkehrung der identitären Verortung

(Holdenried 2012, 17) der Protagonistin dient: Felicitas träumt von einer ihr verwehrt Hamelner Kindheit, wohl „reine Erfindung“ (Hoppe 14); sie erdichtet nach dem Hockeytraining „an Gretzkys Familientisch phantastische Geschichten: Von einer Familie in der deutschen Provinz, von Geschwistern, die aus dem Stegreif vierstimmig singen, achthändig Klavier spielen [...] und denen sie angeblich täglich Briefe schreibt“ (Hoppe 23); die polnische Mutter, Maria Siedlatzek, spielt im Geschehen keine große Rolle; der Vater, der Patentagent Karl Hoppe, siedelt zuerst mit der 13jährigen Tochter von Kanada nach Adelaide in Australien über, um dann zu verschwinden, womit unstete Jahre einer Wanderschaft auf der Suche nach dem fortgegangenen Elternteil beginnen. Die Verarbeitung des Verlusts erfolgt nicht zufällig durch das Schreiben von nie verschickten Briefen und von einer Biographie des Vaters, *Buch K.*, die in dem Moment abbricht, als sie mit dem „Literaturwissenschaftler Haman (einer Art Vaterersatz)“ (Holdenried 2017, 77) zusammenzieht.

Die Lehrjahre der jungen Protagonistin erweisen sich als „incerta esplorazione dello spazio sociale: e sarà poi viaggio e avventura, bohème, vagabondaggio, smarrimento, *parvenir*“ (Moretti 11)¹². Die Unbeständigkeit und Suche nach einer stabileren Identität charakterisieren die Hauptfigur: Gerade dieser Aspekt, der nicht mehr der linearen, langsamen, aber stetig nach vorne weisenden Entwicklung der Protagonisten des Bildungsromans des 19. Jahrhunderts entspricht, sondern eher die Fähigkeit der Hauptpersonen hervorhebt, die teilweise einander widersprechenden Lebensumstände und die Widersprüchlichkeit des Selbst zu akzeptieren, stellt eines der Hauptmerkmale des Romans dar, wie des Bildungsromans des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts per se. Anstelle der reinen Nachahmung von Modellen und der Anpassung an die Gesellschaft rückt nun eine stärkere Selbstbestimmung in den Vordergrund, die eine individuellere Reife mit sich bringt; statt eines „charakterbildenden“ Bildungsgangs wird zunehmend ein „selbstreflexiver“ Bildungsweg maßgeblich (Gutjahr 2007, 60).

Die Widersprüchlichkeit spiegelt sich auch in der Struktur des Romans wider: Die angekündigte Unterteilung in fünf Kapitel (1. Die kanadischen Jahre; 2. Miramare; 3. Durch die Wüste; 4. Kapellmeister; 5. Hochzeit) ist nicht auf die gleichmäßige Entwicklung der Protagonistin auf ein bestimmtes Ziel, auf ein harmonisches Ende hin ausgerichtet, sondern reflektiert die Höhen und Tiefen ihres Alltags und ihre Erforschung geeigneter Wege zu sich selbst. Diese Suche ist verflochten

mit den Erkundungen der Leser*innen und deren Reifung: Für sie werden falsche Spuren gelegt, die dann bei der Lektüre verwischt werden. Es geht letztendlich um das Angebot einer möglichst spannenden Geschichte mit mehr oder weniger enthüllenden Details über eine Figur, in der das lesende Publikum die Autorin zu erkennen glaubt. Diese kalkulierte Gleichsetzung von Wahrheit und Fiktion führt dazu, dass beim Erzählen der Geschichte der Figur Hoppe jede Dichotomie von „real“ und „fiktiv“, von Original und Fälschung, aufgehoben wird. Gleichzeitig wird ständig mit ironischem und lakonischem Gestus die Sprache auf das Motiv von Wahrheit und Erfindung gelenkt; die Autorin hält es für notwendig, die Identität zwischen ihr, der Erzählerin und/oder der Hauptfigur andauernd entweder zu leugnen oder zu bestätigen, um die Frage der Authentizität kontinuierlich zu thematisieren. Der Roman wimmelt nur davon, wie beispielhaft einige Passagen belegen:

Soweit beglaubigt ist, dass Hoppe jene vielzitierte Reise um die Welt auf einem Containerfrachtschiff tatsächlich persönlich unternahm, ist bekannt, dass sie mehrfach die Weltmeere befuhr. [...] Die Hameler Kindheit ist eine reine Erfindung. Das Tagebuch des einzigen Vaters seines einzigen Kindes, akribische Auflistung äußerer Ereignisse unter unterschiedener Weglassung der inneren, gibt Aufschluss über Arbeitsaufenthalte auf höchst unterschiedlichen Kontinenten. (*Hoppe* 13-14)

Hoppes Unterschlagung überprüfbarer Fakten dient einzig der literarischen Ausformung ausufernder Phantasien, wie sie ihr gesamtes Werk prägen. (*Hoppe* 16)

Allein die Tatsache, dass meine vier Geschwister noch schlafen, während ich sie erfinde, dass sie träumen, während ich Briefe schreibe, dass sie aufwachen, während ich mich ins Bett lege, [...] sagt mir, dass etwas nicht stimmt mit der lieben Zeit, dass es eine geographische Ordnung gibt, mit der ich mich niemals anfreunden werde. (*Hoppe* 20)

Der blinde junge Mann (dem sie später in ihrem Debüt *Picknick der Friseure* mit der Geschichte *Das Refektorium* ihre literarische Reverenz erwiesen hat) ist zwar so wenig König oder Matrose wie Felicitas eine Queen, aber, wie die meisten Protagonisten Hoppes, alles andere als erfunden. (*Hoppe* 163)

Es handelt sich dabei um die Variante eines permanenten Spiels mit der Suche nach und der Entdeckung der eigenen Identität, das die Autorin Hoppe mit anderen Schriftsteller*innen ihrer Generation teilt und das

letztlich auf gekonnt unbekümmerte Weise eine wichtige Debatte in der Literatur des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts aufs Neue führt: nämlich die Debatte über die „Unhintergebarkeit von Individualität“ (Frank) und um die bereits im Bildungsroman des 18. Jahrhunderts enthaltene Konzentration auf „Individualität und Selbstfindung im Prozess eines autobiographisch oder biographisch geprägten, selbstreflexiven Schreibens“ (Voßmann 23). Es geht um die Selbstinfragestellung und/oder Selbstfindung, Subjektkonstruktion oder deren Dekonstruktion und vor allem um „die Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten des Subjekts, die zugleich Möglichkeiten der Literatur sind“ (Neuhaus 39), d.h. um die Chance der (Selbst)Findung in der Literatur.

Der Literatur als Selbstfindungsmedium und als Mittel zur Bildung von Figuren und Leser*innen kommt in Hoppes Werk eine entscheidende Funktion zu. Die intertextuelle Einbettung, die Überarbeitung und die Wiederverwertung von Legenden, Märchen und fantastischen Geschichten erweisen sich für Hoppe als strukturprägend¹³. Sie sind symbolhaft und bildungsstiftend, indem sie auf das Recht der Protagonistin pochen, von einem anderen Leben zu träumen, mit der Phantasie Abenteuer zu erleben und dadurch ihre Selbstwerdung zu bestimmen. Gleichzeitig dienen sie der ständigen Aktivierung der Leser*innen, die sich auf eine literarische Spurensuche begeben (können) und fungieren auch als poetologisches Gerüst. Die Wahl der Intertexte steuert die Rezeption: Alle Texte drehen sich um die Motive literarischer Schöpfung und frei bestimmter Selbstentwicklung. Carlo Collodis *Le avventure di Pinocchio* (1883), welche die Autorin selbst „als durchaus heldenhafte Geschichte einer Menschwerdung“ (*Schätze* 193) bezeichnet, führt beide Motive zusammen: Mastro Geppetto, Schreiner und Pinocchios Vater, erschafft die Holzpuppe, und Pinocchio erlebt eine Wandlung von einer Holzfigur zu einem Kind. Astrid Lindgrens *Pippi Långstrump* (1945-1948) ist nicht nur die Geschichte von dem phantasiebegabten, Abenteuer und Freiheit liebenden Mädchen, sondern verkörpert auch eine weibliche Figur, die Stereotypen umkehrt.

Einen besonderen Stellenwert nimmt in *Hoppe* die Sage vom Rattenfänger von Hameln ein, die in vielfacher Variation den Text leitmotivisch prägt und handlungstragend wird. Hoppe, sowohl die Schriftstellerin als auch die Protagonistin, schlüpf dabei in die (männliche) Rolle des Rattenfängers und einer Ratte, träumt sich immer wieder in die Stadt Hameln hinein und tritt sogar im Rattenkostüm auf:

Weltweit, egal welcher Zeitung, hat Hoppe immer dieselbe Geschichte erzählt: wie sie als Ratte mit Schnurrbart und Schwanz versehen, Wurst in der Linken, Brot in der Rechten, den Marktplatz ihrer Heimatstadt Hameln betritt, um sich im Freilichttheater unter der Führung des Rattenfängers vor Touristen aus aller Welt ein Taschengeld zu verdienen. (*Hoppe* 13)

In Hoppes Adaptionen wird der Auszug der Kinder von Hameln hauptsächlich als die Möglichkeit angesehen, die Welt zu erkunden und „das Recht auf die Reise“ zu verwirklichen, „ein Recht darauf, ein Schiff zu besteigen und die Welt mit eigenen Augen zu sehen“ (*Hoppe* 119).

Somit erfolgt in *Hoppe* eine Neuträdierung der Sage, wobei Rollenverwandlungen und Verbergungsstrategien in den Vordergrund gerückt werden; dem puren Akt des Erzählens wird eine sinnstiftende Wirkung beigemessen, und der Geschichte, verstanden als Menschwerdung der Kinder durch die Erkundung der Welt, kommt die Funktion der doppelten Bildung, nämlich der Kinder (somit auch der nach Kanada reisenden Protagonistin) und der Leser*innen, zu. Das Erzählte reflektiert dabei den Prozess künstlerischer Produktivität als Bildungsmöglichkeit; Autoreflexivität wird Teil des dargestellten Bildungsweges und verbindet Protagonistin, Erzählinstanz und Autorin im Sinne einer „poietische(n) Produktivität“ (Schrader 21).

Eine weitere Gestaltungsmöglichkeit des eigenen Selbst vollzieht sich durch das Reisen: In Hoppes Werk werden Reisen eher erzählt, nicht beschrieben, und sie sind stets mit einem Selbstfindungsprozess verbunden. Hoppes spezifische Poetisierung des Reisens folgt einem bestimmten Muster: Als Kompositionsprinzip wird das Erzählen in Episoden zugrunde gelegt, wobei die Aspekte „der Beweglichkeit, der Wandelbarkeit, der Ortsveränderung und des Perspektivenwechsels“ (Homscheid/Nyström 3) sowie der Rückkehr an einen heimischen Ort, wenn auch nur im Traum, in den Vordergrund rücken. Ferner wird auf Reiserouten Bezug genommen, die den einzelnen Stationen im Leben der Protagonistin entsprechen, oder es werden von der Erzählerin fh Kommentare zu mutmaßlichen Reisen der Autorin Hoppe eingeführt, wobei die Grenzen zwischen Fakten und Fiktion nicht deutlich erkennbar sind:

Sowenig beglaubigt ist, dass Hoppe jene vielzitierte Reise um die Welt auf einem Containerfrachtschiff tatsächlich persönlich unternahm, ist bekannt, dass sie bereits als Kind mehrfach die Weltmeere befuhr. (*Hoppe* 13-14)

Die Darstellung der Fahrten der Protagonistin deuten dagegen auf eine individuelle Suche hin, mit der sie sich produktiv, wenn auch teilweise ergebnislos, auseinandersetzt. Unbestimmte Sehnsuchtslandschaften bewohnen dabei ihre Träume:

Der Raps steht leuchtend hoch in unserer Gegend, ein Schock in Gelb, die Hügel, schön und eigensinnig, sind viel zu sanft, um eine bedrohliche Landschaft zu bilden. Keine Berge, kein Meer. Kein Eis, keine Wüste. Weder Schakale noch Araber. Kein schroffes Gericht, kein Urteil. Ich liebe, ich verehere die mittlere Landschaft, den Kompromiss, die Versöhnung, die leise Verabredung, sich unbemerkt ganz nebenbei zu treffen [...] Jeder weiß, dass es diese Landschaft nicht gibt, aber wir alle träumen davon. (*Hoppe* 26-27)

Metaphorisch können das kanadische Eis und die Wüste in Australien als Suche nach der eigenen Identität, nach seiner Rolle in der Gesellschaft interpretiert werden; ständige Begleiter sind der Rucksack, ein Erkennungsmerkmal der Protagonistin sowie der Autorin, aber auch Landkarten, die sich jedoch nicht immer als hilfreich erweisen:

Von Eis und Wüste war die Rede und dass sie sich nicht entscheiden könne. Außerdem habe sie die falsche Karte dabei, was aber völlig egal sei, weil sie die Karte sowieso nicht lesen könne, sie wisse nämlich schon längst nicht mehr, wo sie sei. Außerdem habe sie Schal und Handschuhe verloren, so kann man nicht gehen, das werde sie teuer zu stehen kommen. Offenbar befand sie sich auf einer längeren Wanderung, auf einem langen und quälenden Marsch, auf dem sie von Gefahren umzingelt war [...].

An Rückkehr sei allerdings nicht mehr zu denken, nichts und niemand auf der Welt werde sie dazu bringen, aufzugeben und umzukehren, und wenn sie bis ans Ende der Welt gehen müsse. (*Hoppe* 321)

Die anfänglichen Schwierigkeiten bei der Suche nach Selbstbestimmung scheinen in dem Moment überwunden zu werden, als die Protagonistin Oregon verlässt, sich selbst ans Steuer setzt und den Wagen lenkt:

In dieser Nacht taten wir beide kein Auge zu. Stattdessen blieben wir rauchend am Küchentisch sitzen und tranken im Licht der Adventskranzkerzen [...] weiter, bis es langsam hell wurde und Felicitas sich daran erinnerte, dass sie ein Auto bestellt hatte, das sie um acht Uhr im Verleih abholen sollte. Es war übrigens das erste Mal, das sie, die ewige Beifahrerin, beschlossen hatte, allein zu fahren, (*Hoppe* 323)

Es ist kein Zufall, dass dieser Wendepunkt im Prozess der Selbstfindung, der mit der Emanzipation der Protagonistin einhergeht, mit dem Bild des Kranzes verknüpft wird. Die Frage „Wie krönt man richtig?“ (Hoppe 107), hier wieder aufgegriffen und ironisch mit Bezug auf den Adventskranz ins Spiel gebracht, beschäftigt die Hauptfigur als eine der „persönliche(n) Zentralfragen“ (ebenda) schon auf der Schiffsreise von Kanada nach Australien. Die ‚Krönungsfrage‘, welche die Schriftstellerin bereits in *Johanna* behandelt (Hoppe 106), wird die Protagonistin in *Hoppe* nie loslassen. Eine Antwort darauf wird jedoch die Schriftstellerin Hoppe erst zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt geben, und zwar in dem selbstbewussten Titel ihrer Heidelberger Poetikvorlesungen: *Kröne dich selbst – sonst krönt dich keiner!* (Hoppe 2018).

Der starke Wille der Autorin, sich textuell zu legitimieren, spiegelt sich in Hoppes hohem schriftstellerischem Autonomieanspruch (Frank/Ilgner 16) wider, der ihr gesamtes literarisches Oeuvre auszeichnet. Ihr Streben nach Autonomie manifestiert sich in der Darstellung von Selbstvergewisserungs- und Emanzipationsprozessen ihrer Figuren, in der Wiederverwertung intertextueller Materialien sowie in der ständigen selbstironischen Problematisierung und Hinterfragung ihrer eigenen Texte. Dieses teilweise irritierende Spiel mit Wirklichkeit, Fiktion und selbstreflexiven Kommentaren im Text führt in *Hoppe*, ebenso wie die konstante Demontage und Neukonstruktion von Figuren und Gattungen, zu „selbstironische(n) Selbstermächtigungsphantasien“ (Trilcke/Wolf 78) und zu einer Rekontextualisierung von Autorin und Werk. In dieser Erzählpluralität, gepaart mit einer überbordenden Einbildungskraft, verbinden sich Autobiographie, Autofiktion, Abenteueritae, Familienerzählung, Bildungs-, Künstler- und Schelmenroman im Sinne einer Rekombination des Tradierten und deren Vergegenwärtigung und Neubewertung zu einer prägnanten Gattungshybridität – und damit letztendlich zu einer selbstbestimmten ‚Hyperautorschaft‘.

Ausblick

In der literaturwissenschaftlichen Diskussion über die Gattung des Bildungsromans sind bei aller Vielfalt der Ansätze zwei gegensätzliche Hauptpositionen hervorzuheben: Auf der einen Seite wird der Bildungsroman als literaturwissenschaftliche Ordnungskategorie streng

als jener Romantypus bezeichnet, der in Deutschland im späten 18. Jahrhundert entstanden ist, wobei Goethes *Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre* (1795-96) als Modell fungiert, so dass bei jeder Auseinandersetzung mit dieser Gattung Goethes Werk als Paradigma dient (Gutjahr 2007, 7). Auf der anderen Seite wird der Standpunkt vertreten, dass der Bildungsroman nicht nur eine epochenbezogene Gattung sei, sondern dass er ahistorisch und zeitübergreifende inhaltliche und strukturelle Merkmale aufweise (Selbmann 1994, 27), die es erlauben würden, gattungstypologische Varianten des Bildungsromans zu erkennen bzw. die Zuordnung mehrerer Texte zu dieser Gattung zu bestimmen. Diese letzte Vorgehensweise lehnt enge Gattungsnormierungen ab und eröffnet dadurch die Möglichkeit, sich auch mit Bildungsromanen des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts zu beschäftigen. Sicherlich liegt spätestens um 1900 bei den Bildungsromanen nicht mehr die bürgerliche Vorstellung eines sich im Einklang mit der Welt entfaltenden Individuums zugrunde. Zentral bleibt jedoch die Forderung nach der Selbstformung der Persönlichkeit durch Bildung, die sich in dem Entwurf von neuen Bildungsvorstellungen niederschlägt.

In einer Zeit, wie den letzten Jahrzehnten des 20. Jahrhunderts und den ersten Jahrzehnten des 21. Jahrhunderts, in welcher sich die Schriftsteller*innen in hohem Maße mit der kulturellen Tradition und dem literarischen Kanon befassen, um neue Formen zu entwickeln, und in welcher in der Literatur die Selbstreflexivität einen hohen Stellenwert einnimmt, gewinnt die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Weg der Selbstfindung, den die Protagonist*innen durchlaufen, wieder an Bedeutung, was durchaus als konstituierendes Merkmal der Grundstruktur eines Bildungsromans (Mayer 14) angesehen werden kann.

Die Beispiele von Felicitas Hoppes Romanen *Johanna* und *Hoppe* erweisen sich in diesem Zusammenhang als paradigmatisch: Die selbstreflexive, auto(r)referentielle Schreibweise Hoppes verweigert sich zwar einerseits wegen ihres hohen ästhetischen Autonomieanspruchs (Frank/Ilgner 16) der Zuschreibung zu einer bestimmten Gattung, andererseits ist sie aber ohne die Wiederaufnahme und Verarbeitung von literarischen Traditionen (ebenda 27) und Genres undenkbar, wozu unabdingbar die Hybridisierung und Variation von Gattungen im Sinne einer Rekombination des Tradierten und deren Vergegenwärtigung in innovativer Form gehören. Auch wenn weder *Johanna* (2006) noch *Hoppe* (2012) sich dem Bildungsroman in engerem Sinne zuordnen lassen, so präsentieren sie sich doch als Variationen dieser Gattung. Denn beide hinterfragen das

Konzept von „Bildung“ und fordern es in der Variante eines Rechts „auf einen individuellen Lebensentwurf auch *gegenüber* gesellschaftlichen Normenvorgaben“ (Gutjahr 2007, 13) ein. In beiden Texten wird Bildung letztendlich als Anspruch auf Individualität verstanden, welcher sich textuell in der (sprachlichen) Performanz des Selbst artikuliert. Es geht dabei nicht um eine lineare Entwicklung, sondern um die Gestaltung von Bildungsstufen jenseits der Sozialisationserwartungen, also von Etappen, die zur Identitätsfindung führen können (so in *Johanna*), oder von Selbstvergewisserungsabschnitten, die noch im Werden begriffen sind (so in *Hoppe*). Treue Begleiterin der Entfaltung beider Protagonistinnen in den Phasen suchender Selbsterprobung und „Herausbildung eigener Ansichten und Wertvorstellungen“ (Gutjahr 2007, 13) ist und bleibt, neben den Erkundungen durch Reisen und den Liebeserfahrungen, die Literatur, welche für die Autorin einen „Raum der Erkenntnis“ (Hoppe 2007, 69) darstellt. Durch die Wiederaufnahme literarischer Vorlagen und die gleichzeitige individuelle innovative Modellierung ihrer Erzählwelt setzt Hoppe immer neue Bildungsimpulse, indem sie ihre Leserschaft mit auf die Reise in ihren ‚Hoppe-Kosmos‘ nimmt, um sie immer wieder aufs Neue zu aktivieren und deren eigene Phantasie machtvoll anzuregen. Hoppe bietet ihren Leser*innen dabei einen „Antrag auf Partnerschaft“ (Hoppe 2018, 22) an und fordert sie auf, über die eigene Identität zu reflektieren und individuell den Bildungsauftrag einzulösen, das eigene ‚Ich‘ zu leben.



- 1 „Bildungsroman wird er heißen dürfen, erstens und vorzüglich wegen seines Stoffs, weil er des Helden Bildung in ihrem Anfang und Fortgang bis zu einer gewissen Stufe der Vollendung dargestellt; zweitens aber auch, weil er gerade durch diese Darstellung des Lesers Bildung, in weitem Umfange als jede andere Art des Romans, fördert“ (Morgenstern 1988, 64).
- 2 Als zeitübergreifende Inhaltsmerkmale können die Auseinandersetzung der Protagonistinnen mit der Gesellschaft, die Einwirkung von Mentor*innen und Erziehungsinstitutionen, die Begegnung mit der Kunst, Abenteuern, Liebeserfahrungen und die Selbsterprobung in Schule und Beruf herangezogen werden. Vgl. Jacobs und Krause 37. Unter konstanten Strukturelementen sind eine Erzählweise, die Rückschlüsse auf das Seelenleben der Protagonist*innen zulässt und durch symbolhafte oder paradigmatische Momente verstärkt wird (Gutjahr 2007, 40ff.), die Tendenz zum ausgleichenden Schluss (Jacobs 271) sowie eine Selektion von Lebensphasen, die eine grundlegende Bedeutung für die Ausbildung der Protagonist*innen haben, zu nennen.
- 3 Felicitas Hoppe schreibt dabei aber keinen historischen Roman. Vgl. insbesondere die Beiträge von Schonfield, Hilmes und Ruf.
- 4 Zahlreich sind die Parallelen zwischen Johanna von Orléans und der Protagonistin des Romans: Johannas Todesurteil wird mit dem Scheitern der Protagonistin im akademischen Betrieb verglichen; die von Männern beherrschten Institution Kirche wird der Universität gleichgestellt; Kirche und Universität werden als Machtinstanzen empfunden, die den Kulturkanon prägen. Vgl. Schonfield 53-57.
- 5 Zum weiblichen Bildungsroman vgl. Gutjahr 2007, 62-69. Eine kommentierte Bibliographie der Sekundärliteratur zum Bildungsroman im angelsächsischen Raum (bis 1987) bietet Fuderer an; für den deutschsprachigen Raum fehlt noch eine systematische Studie. Fallbeispiele von Texten, die um 1800 verfasst wurden, behandelt Heuser.
- 6 Hilmes behauptet, Hoppe gelänge es, „uns Johanna fremd zu machen“ (Hilmes 141) und dadurch „hohe Kunst“ (ebenda) zu schaffen.
- 7 Maierhofer stellt die Behauptung auf, Hoppe würde sich gegen „herrschende Adaptionen des Johanna-Mythos“ wenden, wie beispielsweise die Überarbeitungen Schillers und Brechts (Maierhofer 84), wobei Schiller

Johanna nicht nur als Kriegsführerin darstellt, sondern auch ihre Fähigkeit, politische Reden zu halten, in den Vordergrund rückt. So unterstreicht Hoppe ebenfalls wiederholt Johannas rhetorische Kraft: Sie „vertut ihre Zeit nicht mit Lesen, schon gar nicht mit Schreiben. Nur manchmal, falls es sein muss, ein Brief, den sie nicht schreibt, sondern diktiert [...] Weiß der Teufel, woher sie den flüssigen Text nimmt und wer ihr das Briefdiktat beigebracht hat. (Johanna 58).

- 8 Am Anfang kann nur Peitsche schwimmen (seine Armen sind „wie zwei zierliche Flossen“ – *Johanna 52* –, die das Wasser peitschen), die Protagonistin hält sich hingegen vom Wasser fern (*Johanna 53*).
- 9 Zu Recht weist Gutjahr darauf hin: Mit „der Analyse von Bildungsromanen sind wir also immer vor die Aufgabe gestellt, das Erzählte dahingehend zu befragen, wie die Persönlichkeitsentwicklung der Hauptfigur über ein äußeres Geschehen – wie eine Reise, die Begegnung mit anderen Figuren oder die Auseinandersetzung mit Kunst – zur Darstellung gebracht wird“ (Gutjahr 2007, 42).
- 10 *Imitatio* als Bildungsweg ist bereits als ein Strukturprinzip in Wielands *Geschichte des Agathon* zu erkennen und lässt sich grundsätzlich als ein wichtiges Merkmal der Gattung des Bildungsromans bis heute verstehen.
- 11 Zum Begriff der Selbst(er)findung im Roman *Hoppe* vgl. Pailer.
- 12 „unsichere Erkundung des sozialen Raums: und dann Reisen und Abenteuer, Bohème, Vagabundieren, Verwirrung, Ankommen“ (Übersetzung der Verfasserin).
- 13 Zu den unterschiedlichen Adaptionen von Kinderliteratur in Hoppes Werk vgl. Ekelund.



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Mending Fragments of the Self. The Bildungsroman as Kintsugi in *Jack Maggs* and *Mister Pip*

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1. Introduction

In their ‘Foreword’ to Joshua Esty’s *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism and the Fiction of Development* (2012), Mark Wollaeger and Kevin J.H. Dettmar draw attention to one of the key issues addressed in the volume: “what happens to the form of the novel”, the two scholars ask, “when the reciprocal allegories of nation-building and self-making that underwrite the nineteenth-century bildungsroman, or novel of education, no longer seem adequate to the representation of life in an increasingly globalized world?” (ix). The question highlights the core arguments of Esty’s insight into the “breakdown of the allegorical function of the coming-of-age plot” (15) in the twentieth century, with a focus on the geopolitical repercussions implicit in the decline of the normative model for individual development provided by the canonical Bildungsroman. According to Esty: “Modernism exposes and disrupts the inherited conventions of the bildungsroman in order to criticize bourgeois values and to reinvent the biographical novel, but also to explore the contradictions inherent in the mainstream developmental discourses of self, nation, and empire” (3). It is a process that acquires particular relevance within a context in which “the relatively stable temporal frames of national destiny” are supplanted by a growingly “global, and therefore more uncertain frame of reference”, and this is “especially visible in the British novel tradition”, according to the scholar, where “colonial modernity unsettled the progressive and stabilizing

discourse of national culture by breaking up cherished continuities between people and its language, territory and polity” (6).

These observations invite further reflection on whether, and to what extent, the Bildungsroman as a “symbolic form of modernity” (Moretti 5) can still make sense today, at a time when notions of individual, collective, cultural, national, religious, or gender identity have been deeply problematized (Belamghari; Hall). It is above all the Bildungsroman’s relation to “a specific image of modernity: the image conveyed precisely by the youthful attributes of mobility and inner restlessness”, and entailing “a bewitching and risky process full of ‘great expectations’ and ‘lost illusions’” (Moretti 5), that has triggered a new surge of interest in the last few years. In line with the wider theoretical agenda of genre criticism, positing that “literary genres are experimental constructs which are constantly being renegotiated by new works that come into contact with them”, some scholars have rejected the “myopic [...] critical commonplace of the decline of the genre during the modernist period”, highlighting instead how, “in reality, the novel of formation continues to thrive in post-colonial, minority, multicultural, and immigrant literatures worldwide” (Boes 234, 239).

Along with the diverse expressions of the Bildungsroman paradigm in European fiction (Summerfield and Downward), the coming-of-age model has thus been shown to move creatively across a much wider range of cultures and to adjust productively to a variety of contexts. As “one of the most popular and enduring genres in literary history”, characterized by a “remarkable adaptability”, as Sarah Graham has put it, the Bildungsroman has been inventively redesigned in order to lay bare the incessant individual struggle to find a place within an increasingly complex universe. Therefore, whilst “historically associated with realism” and “originally concerned with young, white, privileged, heterosexual men”, the Bildungsroman has come “to give expression to the marginalized and silenced, in writing about the formative experiences of women, LGBTQ people, and postcolonial populations” (Graham 1). In this sense, reconfigurations of the Bildungsroman paradigm range from contemporary American fiction focusing on ethnic female identity (Bolaki) to countless African and Australian novels engaging with issues of race, class, nation, sovereignty and violence in a postcolonial light (Hoagland; Pipic). Likewise, the ‘network novel’ that Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse have identified as an ‘alternative’ genre to the canonical ‘novel of formation’

has been shown to be another “distinct but interrelated aspect of the Bildungsroman” (Falk 107)¹.

Arguing that such a radical reshaping of the traditional Bildungsroman has made its contours difficult to draw, Marc Redfield has gone so far as to identify inherent contradictions in what he defines as a *phantom genre*, a mere construct of aesthetic ideology that “may be expanded to apply to any text that can be figured as a subject producing itself in history, which is to say any text whatsoever” (202). To some extent, this broad inclusiveness of the genre was already largely implicit in Franco Moretti’s view of the “semantic hypertrophy” of the Bildungsroman form, considering that “[e]ven those novels that clearly are *not Bildungsroman* or novels or formation are perceived by us against this conceptual horizon”, thus bearing “witness to the hold of this image on our models of analysis” (15). Nonetheless, bearing in mind that “critical attempts to establish the origins of the Bildungsroman as a significant genre in the history of English-language fiction have [...] become contentious” (Salmon 7), it is precisely this flexibility that is regarded today as the very essence of a genre that “can be detached from its initial context and used productively across different historical periods and cultures” (Bolaki 1). Introducing the proceeding of the 2020 Conference on *The Bildungsroman: Form and Transformations*, John Frow, Melissa Hardie and Vanessa Smith have remarked on the inherent variability of the Bildungsroman paradigm as its most relevant and productive feature:

These variations point to the way in which a supposition of the Bildungsroman’s centrality for the European novel in particular is subject not just to formal dictates but also to *transformations* that come in themselves to *trouble the normativity* of this idealised form and promote instead the *instability* of the key terms and concepts it wishes to centre: masculine gender, youthful malleability, cosmopolitan life as ‘worlding’ and education delivered as an adumbration of possibility, experience, or desire. If the Bildungsroman, then, has long been understood as *forming and deforming* in tandem, even scholarship that sought to set the lineaments of the genre in stone gestured toward such *instability*. (1906 my emphasis)

In the light of the ongoing theoretical debate on the ‘transformative’ power of the genre, and with a view to illustrating how the paradigm has been assimilated, reshaped and creatively adapted to new ‘narratives of self-formation’ in the contemporary novel (Armstrong), this paper focuses

on *Jack Maggs* (1997) by the Australian novelist Peter Carey and *Mister Pip* (2007) by the New Zealand writer Lloyd Jones through the metaphor of the Japanese art of Kintsugi. Insofar as it displays cracks and repairs in the mended ceramic pieces rather than hiding them – thus celebrating ‘imperfection’ and accepting ‘the loss of wholeness’ without disguising the damage – Kintsugi philosophy offers the lens, as I will argue, through which the postmodern ‘narrative of self-formation’ in the two texts is reimagined. Without overlooking the diverse backgrounds they emerge from, and the far-reaching repercussions of the different issues they address, the paper sheds light on the different ways in which both novels engage with, and imaginatively reinterpret Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, a novel that has itself been regarded as one of the most atypical instances of the English Bildungsroman, a “perverse and obstinate counter-model” (Moretti 265), an “unconventional Bildungsroman” (Cao 2017, 26) weaving ‘anti-novel-of-formation’ aspects into an intricate narrative structure.

To some extent, in line with to the last few decades’ fascination with ‘Victorian afterlife’ (Kucich-Sadoff) and cultural ‘appropriations’ of the Victorians, both works may be said to bear traces of Neo-Victorianism, as it has been defined by Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, “*self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*” and testifying to a “sustained need to reinterpret the Victorians and what they mean to us” (4, 9 emphasis in the original). Of course, one should not fail to notice the potential risks of an Anglocentric bias implicit in the term, as the two scholars themselves have pointed out: “replacement – or displacement – of the term ‘neo-Victorianism’ into international and global contexts is not without its own perils, suggesting as it does an overarching narrative that erases the specificities of cultural memory and inculcates a homogenisation of heritage” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2013: 26). The risk lies, more specifically, in what has appeared to be “a consolidation of an imagined, unified, monocentric perspective on the many diverse neo-Victorian figurations produced globally: a perspective that is at its broadest ‘Western’ and at its narrowest ‘Anglophone’” (Primorac-Pietrzak-Franger 4).

From a wider theoretical standpoint, *Jack Maggs* and *Mister Pip* undeniably establish a complex intertextual dialogue with “the cultural event called ‘Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*’, to borrow Mary Hammond’s definition: in different ways, they testify to how, far from being “an immutable work of art to be kept behind glass and admired

from a distance”, it should be more aptly looked at “as an Ali Baba’s cave of treasures which can be – and perhaps more importantly, always has been – plundered at will” (11). Admittedly, many other rewritings of the Victorian masterpiece address the issue of identity and self-formation of the ‘postmodern subject’ from a variety of perspectives exemplified, to mention a few, by Sue Roe’s *Estella: Her Expectations* (1982) or Kathy Acker’s *Great Expectations: A Novel* (1983) that creatively switches across diverse narrative viewpoints, identities and genders in her attempt “to deconstruct and even partially explain the instability of the postmodern self” (Hammond 177)². According to Ankhi Mukherjee, in many of these re-workings of the canonical novel

the constructedness of the literary artefact is seen as analogous to the constructedness of identity categories and cultural formation: the work of rewriting, then, is to look awry at virtual pasts, interrupt collective identities and the habitual coherence of cultural experience, and confront the social discourse informing memorable acts of literature. (54)

Set within the context of various adaptations of Dickens’s text in different genres and media formats that have attracted increasing scholarly attention over the last few years (Cao 2016; Hammond; Marroni), *Jack Maggs* and *Mister Pip* more specifically intertwine the topic of the ‘construction/reconstruction’ of individual identity with crucial postcolonial issues (Butter; Colomba; Hassal; Latham; Taylor; Walker); furthermore, the two novels have been shown to entwine individual and collective experiences of shock and suffering in the light of trauma studies (Ho; Sadoff).

Developing at the intersection between neo-Victorian perspectives and postmodern approaches to the issues of metafictional ‘adaptation’ and ‘appropriation of the past’ (Hutcheon) – in the awareness of the several overlapping areas with postcolonial rewriting (Albertazzi; Gikandi; Ho; Moraru; Said) and “postcolonial neo-Victorianism” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 69) – this paper aims to illustrate how the two texts refashion the Bildungsroman model from distinct, but complementary standpoints. In different ways, *Jack Maggs* and *Mister Pip* mark a shift, I will argue, from the idea of ‘Bildung’ as organic growth to an evocative process of ‘mending fragments’, whose metaphorical and metafictional implications deserve more attention than they have received thus far. In particular, keeping in mind “the astonishing range of interpretative possibilities

inherent in the polysemic notion of Bildung” (Horlacher 128) and its complex etymology implying ideas of ‘developing’, ‘building’, as well as ‘shaping’ and ‘outlining’³, the following pages will illustrate how the Japanese technique of Kintsugi – which ‘exhibits’ the scars between the broken parts of repaired pottery by means of gold lines – provides a powerful metaphorical equivalent for the distinctive model of self-formation/self-narration epitomized by the two novels. In this sense, light will be shed on how both *Jack Maggs* and *Mister Pip* bear witness to new ways in which the Bildungsroman – “at once one of the most successful and one of the most vexed contributions that German letters have made to the international vocabulary of literary studies” (Boes 230) – continues to morph and incorporate itself into the contemporary novel.

2. Carey’s ‘reversed’ Bildung: writing back to Dickens’s model

As most notably exemplified by its early canonical expressions, relying on a “model of progressive maturation, insight, and social adjustment”, the Bildungsroman paradigm has been briefly outlined in the following terms: “a young man from the provinces seeks his *fortune in the city*, and undergoes of process of *education in the ways of the world* such that he eventually becomes *reconciled* with it” (Frow et al. 1905 my emphasis). Seen in this perspective, Carey’s *Jack Maggs* appears as a clear postcolonial attempt at ‘writing back’ (Albertazzi; Ashcroft et al.) to the English literary canon by undermining the narrative archetype embodied by an unconventional Bildungsroman such as *Great Expectations*, imbued with patterns of ‘return’, ‘repetition’ and ‘regression’ (Brooks) along with paradigms of ‘growth’ and ‘development’⁴.

Largely inspired by Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), and responding to its invitation to “read the great canonical texts [...] with an effort to draw, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented in such works” (7), Carey asserts that the point of view from which an Australian should read *Great Expectations* is different from the one assumed by the Victorian novelist:

One day, contemplating the figure of Magwitch, the convict in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, I suddenly thought ‘this man is my ancestor!’ [...] Dickens encourages us to think of him as the ‘other’, but this was my ancestor, he was not

other. I wanted to reinvent him, to possess him, to act as his advocate. I did not want to diminish his 'darkness' or his danger, but I wanted to give him all the love and sympathy that Dickens's first person narrative provides his English hero Pip. That's where I started. ("Interview", online)

Hence, subverting Dickens's narrative perspective and his main focus on Pip's 'progressive maturation', Carey shifts the centre of attention from the orphan to the escaped convict, here rechristened Jack Maggs, who becomes the key character. While set in the heart of Victorian London, Carey's novel is thus largely filtered through the eyes of a character who is literally and metaphorically coming back from the 'periphery' of the Empire, from the 'other side' of the world, and accordingly providing counter-discursive views of the metropolitan 'centre'. Considering the prominent issues of 'standpoint' and 'position' in "the dialectic of place and displacement" underpinning postcolonial literature (Ashcroft et al. *Key Concepts*, 5; Bhabha; Goldie), *Jack Maggs* represents, first of all, an imaginative act of *appropriation*, an attempt to 'invade' and 'repossess' ("Interview" online) the spaces of imperial fiction by re-imagining Dickens's fictional universe from an antipodean standpoint (Jordan; Maack; Thieme).

It is from this 'inverted perspective' that Carey refashions the Bildungsroman paradigm, adapting it to the story of Jack Maggs. Like Dickens's Magwitch, Maggs leaves the Australian penal colony and comes back to London illegally with the aim of meeting Henry Phipps, the orphan he has helped to become a Victorian gentleman, thus asserting his own English identity: "I am a fucking *Englishman*, and I have English things to settle. I am not to live my life with that vermin. I am here in London where I belong" (128). The novel emblematically opens with Maggs's arrival in the metropolis where, after realizing that Phipps has mysteriously left for an unknown destination, he takes a job as a footman in the house next door, in order to wait for his return. Unaware of Phipps's true nature as a snobbish and ungrateful parasite who is intentionally escaping the encounter with his benefactor, Maggs breaks into Phipps's deserted house every night through an unlatched window, sits at his desk and writes letters to his 'adoptive son' in order to offer him a 'faithful' autobiographical account of his adventurous existence. He thus provides his own coming-of-age narrative, beginning with the origin of his name – so reminiscent of Dickens's renowned opening paragraph ("My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both

names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip and came to be called Pip"; 3) – and offering the accurate description of his life, from the time he was abandoned on the Thames mudflats and then rescued and raised as a criminal by London burglars, until he was sent to a penal colony in South New Wales:

You have known for many years that my name is Jack Maggs, although Maggs was not my father's name, but a name given to me by my foster mother who believed I talked too much. What my father's name was I cannot tell, for when I was just three days old I was discovered lying in the mud flats 'neath London Bridge. (75)

Written backwards, from right to left, as a device to protect his dangerous secrets, and with a special ink that gradually fades away ("he watched these fresh lines fade, first to lilac, then to white; until, that is, they became invisible"; 74), Maggs's letters offer the first of a series of references to his use of 'writing' as a precarious attempt to construct/reconstruct his identity by giving 'form' and 'significance' to the broken fragments of his tumultuous existence, an idea that bears increasing resemblance to the philosophy behind Kintsugi. But Maggs's letters mark above all a meaningful shift from Dickens's narrative focus on Pip's 'great expectations' to Peter Carey's emphasis on Maggs's 'High Hopes':

I had hopes you might return tonight [...] but I have waited these hours on the settle, and now at your very handsome walnut desk in vain. It is a most melancholy business to be solitary in the place in which I did invest such High Hopes, but I do trust my disappointment will be brief. I have a messenger who will soon fetch you. If you now read this letter it can only be because you have met up with him, the Thief-taker, and has told you how to make these words visible. (74)

If the use of 'disappearing ink' hints at the 'invisibility' to which Maggs has been condemned by a 'respectable' Victorian society that has tried to get rid of the criminals' disturbing presence by making them literally 'vanish' into the penal colony (Dolce 221), mirror-writing signals a symbolic inversion of the narrative stance embodied by Dickens' canonical text. This is "necessary for the expression of subaltern utterance" (Thieme 116) and, more precisely, of the antipodean standpoint of the "returned convict", a figure that "haunted middle-class English society throughout the early and middle part of the nineteenth century" (Thieme 106).

In line with this 'inverted' narrative perspective, Carey's novel undermines the ideology implicit in the Bildungsroman model, beginning with the tenet that 'fortune' must be sought 'in the city' and that a process of 'education in the ways of the world' and an eventual 'reconciliation' with it are the necessary conditions of individual progress (Frow et al. 1905). Meaningfully, these assumptions are overtly challenged by the events that occur during Maggs's three-week stay in London, unfolded in the present timeline of the novel. Far from finding a welcome, let alone his 'fortune' in the city, Maggs keeps knocking in vain on Phipps' closed door ("He knocked quickly, firmly, but politely. When there was no immediate answer, he knocked again. And then, a minute later Rap-rap-rap", 6) and is then icily rebuffed by Ma Britten, his childhood protector whom he once called 'mother', who leaves him standing alone, in front of another shut door, in the opening pages of the novel:

She hesitated, peering into the night, one hand ready on the door handle. "What are you doing here?" she whispered. "You are a dead man if they find you."

"This is a nice home-coming."

"Don't bring your trouble here" she said. [...]

"I'm going well myself" the stranger said. "You going to ask me in?"

She made not move to offer an invitation [...] "Aren't you worried someone's going to hang you?" Having made this bitter speech, she stepped inside the house and closed the door behind her". (4-5)

Ma Britten, who emblematically makes her living by selling abortion pills, undermines the very notion of 'motherhood' associated to 'Mother Britain', as her name ironically suggests: she epitomizes the image of a 'mother country' that has no qualms about abandoning her own children, an idea that is repeatedly echoed throughout the novel. Thus, after discovering the true wicked nature of his 'English' son who eventually even tries to murder him, Maggs wakes from the dream of his idealized image of England (Maack 239), and 'the city of London' suddenly appears to him as a hellish place to escape from, embodying the darkest sides of the imperial 'metropolitan centre' (Said). Accordingly, only three weeks after his arrival, the convict leaves London with Mercy, the maid he has fallen in love with, and returns to South New Wales, where he peacefully spends the rest of his life with his own 'real' Australian children and where, as the final pages of the novel ironically point out, "he very quickly gave birth to five further members of 'that Race'" (327).

In opposition to the Bildungsroman view of individual maturation in terms of ‘social adjustment’ and ‘education in the ways of the world’, Maggs’s final decision rather suggests a stern attack on ‘that world’, a theme that Carey entwines with his crucial postcolonial concerns, offering his unequivocal response to a typical Australian mind-set (Maack 2005), perfectly represented in Dickens’s novel:

The things that engages me with the book were the degree to which I thought Magwitch was behaving in a really Australian way. He is cast out, he is treated very badly, and all he can think to do, at risk of his own life, it to go and live with his abusers. That became the emotional focus of the book because that was about us [...] When I grew up the convicts were nothing to do with me and the people I must have identified with must have been the soldiers, the jailers, and England was home. My grandfather, who had never been here, called England home. (Carey “Inner Conviction” online)

Furthermore, considering the ‘rhetoric of space’ implicit in the tensions between the ‘metropolitan center’ and the ‘periphery of the Empire’ (Albertazzi; Ashcroft et al. *The Empire*, 45-46; Chrisman; Dolce 217-218; McLeod), the convict’s return to Australia challenges the ideological implications of the ‘imperial narrative model’ that conventionally portrayed colonies as an off-stage peripheral location where characters disappear whenever their narrative function has been accomplished (Said).

At a still deeper level, however, what *Jack Maggs* questions is the very possibility of a narrative of self-formation as an organic and coherent ‘Bildung’, an idea that acquires particular relevance in the light of the metafictional concerns that Carey weaves with postcolonial issues in his complex narrative construction. Indeed, Maggs’s attempt at re-counting the story of his life in his letters to Phipps is contrasted with the project of Tobias Oates, the other central character of the novel, an ambitious but penniless novelist at the beginning of his career who is reminiscent of Dickens himself (Maack 231- 32). Fascinated by a ‘criminal mind’ that he sees as a precious source of literary inspiration – a “Criminal Mind [...] awaiting its first cartographer” (90) – he persuades the convict to become the subject of his mesmeric experiments during which he lays bare the dark secrets of Maggs’s long years in the penal colony. Reworking the convict’s ‘stolen’ memories and adapting them to his literary projects, he thus starts writing his own deceitful, biased and ideologically charged version of

Maggs's story in a novel that is clearly reminiscent of *Great Expectations*: "*The Death of Maggs*, having been abandoned by its grief-stricken author in 1837, was not begun again until 1859 [...] it first appeared in serial, then again when the parts were gathered in a handsome volume, then again when the author amended it in 1861" (328)⁵.

Undoubtedly, the conflict between Oates and Maggs, who refuses to become his fictional character ("I'm not your comic figure, Mr Oates", 228), problematizes the Victorian set of values underpinning the novelist's 'representation' of the character's 'formation', by highlighting its unreliability and arbitrariness (Dolce 222-223). It bears clear trace of the typically postcolonial struggle for the 'control of enunciative power', the very root of imperial supremacy, as Rushdie reminds us in *Satanic Verses*: "They describe us [...] that's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct" (174). In this light, Carey dwells on the increasingly violent reactions of the convict who throws Oates' manuscript into the river – "You will not write my name in your book. You will not write the Phantom's name." "Yes." Jack then hurled the book high out of the Severn. As it flew up into the mist, its pages opened like a pair of wings. (282) – and eventually burns the last bundle of the novelist's handwritten notes in the fireplace:

When the last blaze had died away, the grate was filled with mourning: all those lines of gorgeous copperplate had become sheets of black crêpe which he now stuck at with a poker [...] the wind which one again blew fiercely down the chimney and this time carried the black and broken paper out into the room. The men leapt back, coughing and waving their hands. The burnt papers rose, like black moths as high as the ceiling. (307)

More importantly, the conflict between them above all foregrounds, in broader terms, the difficult process of 'constructing' a coherent narrative of the protagonist's life, which is never offered to the reader as a progressive *Bildung*, a consistent account of "a process of teleological and organic growth, in the manner of a seed that develops into a mature plant according to inherent genetic principles" (Boes 232). Instead, through an intricate web of overlapping storylines and narrative levels, the narrative of Maggs's 'formation' emerges rather as the result of a precarious and shaky attempt to stitch together disconnected fragments, which the reader garners from different voices and incomplete, often incoherent sources:

the convict's memories hastily reported in his letters to Phipps, without following an overall plan ("My previous correspondence [...] was written in a great rush in a Dover Inn, soon after landing. I dare say that my words were not as well chosen as they might have been", 75); Maggs's muddled reminiscences as they arise during the mesmeric sittings, and of which he is thoroughly unaware ("what speeches have I made?" [...] "You have been asleep," Tobias Oates explained, "I asked you questions and you answered them." "Did I answer loudly, then?" "Well, very *clearly*, smiled the young man", 30); the fictitious notes of those sittings that Oates is keeping in order to show Jack Maggs a different version of what he has confessed ("I wrote down what you told me in your sleep, Jack. One day you will read every word of it. Every dream and memory in your head, I'll give them to you, I promise", 265) and, finally, the novelist's real minutes, carefully labelled in alphabetical order:

Here pigeon-holed at 'H' – was the essay on the hands. Beside it, folded in four, were another two pages labelled 'Hair'. This Jack Maggs received incredulously [...] There had been eight magnetic sessions in all, and the record of each one was tied and bundled in good neat order as you see the clerks do at the Inns of Court. (304)

Crucial to the novel is the idea that these fragments seize the true essence of the protagonist's life story not 'despite', but 'by virtue of' their inherently scattered and dispersive nature. Undeniably, the themes of the intrinsic 'fragmentation' of human experience and unreliable knowledge are key in *Great Expectations* where, beginning with the opening page – "my most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening" (1) – Pip soon realizes he has to make his own 'sense of the world' working his way through a multifaceted and labyrinthine universe, an increasingly unstable refraction of his individual search for meaning⁶. Pip's attempt to find a logic and a coherent 'design' in the apparent randomness of his life underlies the narrative structure of *Great Expectations* where, starting from the title, readers are involved in the long series of beliefs and 'false expectations', illusions, mistakes and sudden discoveries that accompany the complex unfolding of Pip's evolution towards final understanding and self-consciousness. This is what Pip himself finally realizes, and Miss Havisham can't deny: "When I fell into the mistake I have so long

remained in, at least you led me on?" said I. "Yes", she returned, again nodding steadily, "I let you go on" (360). Pip's efforts to unveil the *truth*, his attempts to see the overall design of his life by piecing together its apparently disjointed fragments emerge above all in his final dialogue with Jaggers:

I reminded him the false hopes into which I had lapsed, the length of time they had lasted, and the discovery I had made: and I hinted at the danger that weighed upon my spirits. I represented myself as being surely worthy of some confidence from him in return of the confidence I had just now imparted. I said I did not blame him, or suspect him, or mistrust him, but I wanted assurance of the truth from him. (411)

It is this key theme underpinning Dickens's novel that *Jack Maggs* reimagines and recasts within a new context. Far from 'constructing' a consistent project responding to a coherent process of growth towards final understanding of the *truth*, the novel puts together a piecemeal, fragmentary, and therefore more authentic account of Maggs's life: it points to the deepest meaning of the human condition as a never-ending search for meaning that lies in the 'empty spaces' to be filled, as the recurring cartographic metaphor of the blank map⁷ reminds us: "I blame myself for the way I withheld my true history from you. I left a blank map for you and you have doubtless filled it with your worst imaginings" (238). The 'true' story of the protagonist's 'individual development' is thus recounted neither by Oates' *The Death of Jack Maggs* nor entirely by Maggs's letters to Phipps, seemingly only a bundle of 'blank' pages which are now kept, as the novel ironically reminds us, along with seven copies of Oates' work, on the same shelves of "the Mitchell Library in Sidney" (328). The narrative of his 'formation' rather emerges in the 'broken lines' between the disjointed parts that the reader is invited to reassemble, some of which are inevitably lost. It can be read, and largely inferred, in the dotted lines, in the interruptions, in the 'scars' that, like the flogging marks still visible on his skin, reveal so much of the convict's history:

Oates snorted. "Did you not see his back, man? He is a scoundrel. Well, we saw a page of his history" said the little grocer stubbornly. "Whatever his offence, anyone with half a heart can see that he has paid the bill". (88)

Whilst unquestionably drawing attention to “the fracture which is the very condition of post-colonial subjectivity” (Ashcroft 112), this imaginative ‘mending process’ acquires a deeper significance, pointing to the true essence of life as an attempt to make sense of experiences, an endless search for balance between weakness and strength, loss and resilience, never hiding the traces of life’s frailty and imperfection. In this sense, Carey’s reworking of the Bildungsroman model finds a powerful metaphorical equivalent in the Japanese technique of Kintsugi that “takes ceramic destruction and makes a broken object into a new entity” exhibiting its ‘history’, rather than hiding it (Kemske 12). Like Maggs’s unutterable secrets, the precious golden lines between the broken fragments of a repaired pottery lay bare “an intimate metaphoric narrative of loss and recovery, breakage and restoration, tragedy and the ability to overcome it. A Kintsugi repair speaks of individuality and uniqueness, fortitude and resilience, and the beauty to be found in survival” (Kemske 12).

3. Mending hybrid identities: the precariousness of the self in ‘Mister Pip’

Against a background in which the Bildungsroman has shown its great ‘transformative power’, creatively adapting to a variety of contexts, the Kintsugi technique offers an effective metaphor to show how, from a different perspective, Lloyd Jones’s *Mister Pip* (2007) also engages with and radically reinterprets the archetype of the ‘Bildung’ in its imaginative rewriting of *Great Expectations*. The metaphor draws attention, to begin with, to Jones’s reworking of Dickens’s ‘hypotext’ (Genette) by picking, assembling and refashioning fragments of the Victorian masterpiece, and adapting them to his own contemporary ‘narrative of self-formation’; but it is also increasingly associated, from a broader perspective, to the human condition as such, meant as an attempt to survive by stitching together dispersed fragments/narratives of the self in the welter of violence and terror of the 1990 civil war in Papua New Guinea, where the novel is set.

“The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut”, Foucault reminds us, “beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration, and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other sentences: it is a note within a network” (23). Partly in line with the neo-Victorian reinvention of nineteenth-century fictional texts as “an intellectual and cultural mode” (Hailmann-Lewellyn 10), *Mister*

Pip epitomizes the typically postmodernist “phenomena of transposition, transformation and hybridization” through which “contemporary authors continually draw from old stories to revive and update them” (Latham 22-23). While also testifying to “the enduring influence of the Victorian novel on world literature, specifically in its status as a landmark Bildungsroman”⁸, it above all embodies a space of intertextual and intercultural exchange, “an underlining of a continued desire to understand and reinterpret such narratives within more global intellectualized, and also importantly, emotionalized parameters” (Hailmann-Lewellyn 25).

It is in this perspective that Pip’s ‘maturation through suffering’, as it unfolds in Dickens’s masterpiece, is entwined with the different individual and collective experiences of ‘trauma’ of the Bougainville villagers in Lloyd Jones’s fictional universe. Elaborating on the concept of metaleptic transition of literary works into life, *Mister Pip* shows how “characters migrate”, as the epigraph reads, transgress ontological borders, and “live and shape our behavior to such an extent that we choose them” (Eco 10-11). This is the idea underpinning the project of Mr. Watts, or Pop Eye as the villagers call him, the only remaining white man on the isle after the outbreak of the civil war, who decides to reopen the dilapidated local school in order to restore hope in the village children. Having no qualification as a real teacher, he daily reads a chapter of *Great Expectations* to the kids from his own copy of the only book left on the island, thus offering them not merely an ‘escape’ from the atrocities of the conflict, but an entire fictional universe that they can weave into their own life, into their individual struggle for survival and search for meaning in the face of the absurdities of violence. As the thirteen-year-old narrator Matilda recognizes:

Mr Watts had given us another world to spend the night in. We could escape to another place. It didn’t matter that it was Victorian England. We found we could easily go there. [...] By the time Mr Watts reached the end of chapter one I felt like I had been spoken to by this boy Pip. This boy who I couldn’t see to touch but knew by ear. I found a new friend. The surprising thing is where I’d found him – not up a tree or sulking in the shade, or slashing around in one of the ill streams, but in a book. No one had told us kids to look there for a friend. Or that you could slip into the skin of another. (20)

Pip's coming-of-age narrative thus offers Matilda the lens through which she can 'understand' and 'provide a narrative' of her own distinctive "process of *education* in the ways of the world" (Frow et al. 1905), recasting in a radically new context the "bewitching and risky process full of 'great expectations' and 'lost illusions'" (Moretti 5) that underpins any life experience. As the girl admits, "[i]t was always a relief to return to *Great Expectations*. It contained a world that was whole and made sense, unlike ours" (58). While living in entirely different worlds, Pip and Matilda face the hardness of life in a similar way – "Me and Pip had something else in common; I was eleven when my father left, so neither of us really knew our fathers" (21) – and find similar ways to cope with it, as testified by the many references to the Victorian novel, beginning with the opening page of *Great Expectations*, where Pip derives a childish image of his parents from the letters on their tombstones:

The shape of the letters on my father's, gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, "*Also Georgiana Wife of the Above*", I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. (1)

The scene is echoed quite literally in *Mister Pip*:

The shape of the letters on the tombstone gave Pip the idea his father was a 'square, stout, dark man with curly black hair'. Encouraged by Pip's example I tried to build a picture of my own dad. I found some examples of his handwriting. He wrote in small capital letters. What did they say about him? (22)

But besides Matilda's attempts to weave bits of Pip's story into her own individual journey-into-maturity narrative, the metaphor of 'patching fragments' gains increasing prominence in the novel and is explored at different levels. The chapters of *Great Expectations* themselves, which are read 'in daily instalments' by Mr. Watts – a simplified version of the Victorian classic, as Matilda eventually discovers – are reported in 'scattered fragments' every night by the children to their families: "I could pick up any moment in the story [...] I was still discovering my favourite bits" (21). More importantly, once the only copy of the book is thought to be lost, after the rambos' violent raid, Watts invites the kids to reconstruct the 'original' text piecemeal, by assembling their individual memories of single fragments:

Great Expectations had gone up in flames and could not be retrieved from the ashes. Of course Mr Watts has a different approach in mind. "Let's see if we can remember it", he said. [...] Mr Watts instructed us to dream freely. We did not have to remember the story in any order or even as it really happened, but as it came to us." [...] he warned us. It might come to you in the night. If so, you must hang onto that fragment until we meet in class. There, you can share it, and add it to the others. When we have gathered all the fragments we will put together the story. It will be as good as new. (108-109)

Blending with the children's own thoughts and life experiences ("We could fill in the gaps with our own worlds", 113), portions of Dickens's novel thus emerge in their mind at the most unpredictable moments: "Once I began to turn to fragments of *Great Expectations* it was surprising where and when I found them. This was most often at night, when I needed another world to escape to, but it also would occur in unexpected moments" (109). Each fragment is carefully kept and brought to school, where Mr Watts assembles the single pieces of the children's huge puzzle and writes them down in his exercise book, like a patient amanuensis, adding links to fix them together, in a curious blending of oral and written constructions:

"I wonder if I've gotten everything down correctly, he said. Let's find out". He read back the words. Celia blushed. It was clear Mr Watts had added a line or two of his own. He looked up and found Celia. She gave him a quick nod and Mr Watts pretended to look relieved. Now he looked around for another contribution. "Matilda, what have you got for us?" As I retrieved my scene with Pip making his way to Satis House, Mr Watts smiled to himself, and before I had even finished he was bent over, scribbling into his exercise book. (112)

By picking up and sewing together bits of Pip's story, the children create something new, or better 'revitalized', like repaired porcelain in Kintsugi art, where scars exhibit a 'new' life out of the broken fragments of the 'old' pottery. Indeed, being allowed to "fill in the gaps with their own world, [...] they necessarily insert foreign or parasite elements into the original discourse through the gaps opened by the lost book", as Monica Latham argues, "together they create a hybrid product, Dickensian and Bougainvillesque, written and oral, Victorian and native" (28).

A further step of this hybridization process occurs when Watts invites the children's relatives to come to school and share their own 'knowledge of the world': 'shards' of the Victorian novel are thus mixed in the classroom

with other fragments of the islanders' stories, local folklore, mythology, traditions and magical beliefs. The smell of Joe Gargery's forge, the dark atmosphere of Satis house and of Jaggers's greasy office in London merge, in the kids' minds, with the local stories about the origin of dreams, the names of the winds, or superstitions about flying fish; they merge with Dolores' tales about the devil, and the villagers' beliefs about colour blue, as illustrated by Daniel's grandmother: "Blue is the color of the Pacific. It is the air we breathe. Blue is the gap in the air of all things, such as the palms and iron roofs. But for blue we would not see the fruits bats" (51). Meaningfully, the kids' 'encounters' with the Victorian masterpiece alternate with Dolores' readings from the Bible, the only 'real Book' she considers worthy of study and teaching, and which she sees in contrast to the 'fictional', and threateningly 'alien' universe of *Great Expectations*.

This assemblage of fragments from such different traditions is crucial to the novel's concern with the processes of cross-cultural hybridization of which "the island's children become its new custodians" (Kosew 282), an idea epitomized by the curious shrine Matilda builds on the beach, by assembling cowrie shells and heart seeds all around the name of 'Pip' she has traced in the sand: "I had collected a basket of cowrie shells and was adding these to the heart seeds to make PIP even more visible, when Mr Watts looked up from his beachcombing. He saw me and left the water's edge to walk up the sand. 'A shrine', he said, approvingly. 'Pip in the Pacific'" (59). The novel explores the multifaceted implications of 'hybrid identities' in a postcolonial light⁹, in line with the key questions raised by the theoretical debate:

Hybridity research centers on the relationship between identity and context. Empirical studies of hybrid identities center on the dialectical and mutually productive relationship between a multiplicity of hybridized identities in a shifting, globalizing context. How do different groups, confronted with specific and diverse cultural forces, economic forces, and institutional settings, negotiate identity and cultural space within this context? In what ways are the cultural spaces created by the fissures between, and fusing of, divergent cultural elements in fact productive spaces in which identities are constructed and contested? (Leavy 165)

In this sense, the 'spare room' that Mr Watts and his black wife Grace dedicate to their newborn daughter testifies to an analogous attempt to let

their “coffee-coloured child” (153) construct her own identity by collecting and hybridizing disparate elements from her parents’ different cultural universes, as they are emblematically ‘narrated’ on the ‘walls’ of the room:

And why pass up the opportunity of blank wall? Why go in for wallpaper covered with kingfishers and flocks of birds in flight when they could put useful information up on the walls? They agreed to gather their world side by side and leave it to their daughter to pick and choose what she wanted. One night, Grace wrote the names of her family over the wall, a history that went all the way back to a mythical flying fish. (153)

More importantly, however, the novel increasingly associates the metaphor of ‘mending fragments’ to the very essence of the human condition, an intrinsically hybrid and precarious state *as such*, an endless effort to keep dispersed pieces together, struggling to make sense of them. As Stuart Hall notes:

The subject, previously experience as having a unified, stable identity, is becoming fragmented: composed not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities [...] This produced the post-modern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity becomes a ‘moveable feast’: formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented. (Hall 598)

And if it is true that ‘becoming who we are’ always implies the creation of a ‘narrative about ourselves’ (Bamberg; Belamghari; Hall), the attempt to ‘patch disjointed narratives of the self’ is symbolically shown as the only, albeit precarious possibility for survival. This is the way Watts tries to keep Grace’s memory alive, after her death, by gathering the villagers’ scattered memories about her:

Now one of the older men spoke up. “I knew her mother. She was also beautiful...” The man who said this did look up but fastened his eyes on an old memory of female beauty. Others began to speak. They gave their bits of memory to Mr Watts. They filled in a picture of his dead wife. In this way he learned of a girl he had never met. [...] For I moment I had the impression Mr Watts would prefer to join his wife in the ground, but now I saw him happy to remain with us. Especially after hearing all those fragments to do with Grace. (122-123)

This is, more importantly, what Mr Watts himself literally does at the end of the novel, engaging in the only, albeit risky, and inexorably temporary chance to save the villagers' lives and his own, after the rambos have discovered Pip's name traced in the sand and suspect they are hiding a rebel. Thus, appropriating Pip's identity, Watts keeps the rambos enthralled around the campfire:

Mr Watts answered without hesitation, "My name is Pip". "Mister Pip", said the rambo. There were many of us who could have said Mr Wats was lying [...] instead we did nothing and said nothing. We were too shocked to dispute what he said [...] Mr Watts began to recite from *Great Expectations*. "My Christian name is Philip. But my infant tongue could make of it nothing longer or more explicit, so I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip". I could not make up my mind whether this was spectacular daring or complete foolishness. (139)

Like a modern Scheherazade, he cleverly weaves the narrative of his own life with chunks of Dickens's novel, inserting also pieces from the villagers' tales and local folklore as he had heard them at school, reported by the kids' parents ("the donors of these fragments and anecdotes were left to smile to themselves in the shadows", 162), into which he inscribes new meanings:

Those rambos had not heard a storytelling voice for years. The boys sat there, with their mouths and ears open to catch every word, their weapons resting on the ground in front of their bare feet like useless relics. Mr Watts' decision to introduce himself as Pip to the rebels was risky, but it was easy to see why he had made it. Pip would be a convenient role for Mr Watts to drop into. If he wanted he could tell Pip's story as Mr Dickens had written it and claim it was his own, or he could take elements from it and make it into whatever he wished, and weave something new. Mr Watts chose the second option. (141-142)

In Watts's narration, Pip thus curiously grows up "in a brick depot on a copper mine road" (143) like the place where Matilda's father works, and is brought up by "Miss Ryan, and old recluse in a big house with dark rooms covered in cobwebs" (143), plainly reminiscent of Miss Havisham's Satis House. In one of the most memorable moments of Watts/Pip's journey-into-maturity narration, his dreadful conflict with the devil is reported in a way that echoes the exact words used by Dolores in the classroom, when telling the children her stories about the fiend. As Matilda acknowledges: "This wasn't Mr Watt's story we were hearing at all. It wasn't his or Grace.

It was a made-up story to which we'd all contributed. Mr Watts was shining our experience of the world back to us" (163-164).

Predictably, Watts' patchwork narrative, unfolded in instalments over seven nights, fails to save his life. Indeed, his account is abruptly interrupted when the redskins arrive: not only is he shot dead, but his body is cruelly and emblematically 'chopped up' and thrown "in pieces to the pigs" (173), a dreadful ending that he shares with Dolores: "They took my mum to the edge of the jungle, to the same place they'd dragged Mr Watts, and there they chopped her up and threw her to the pigs" (179). Nonetheless, Watts' ultimate, courageous attempt at stitching 'fragmented narratives' survives as his most valuable teaching for Matilda, as a new "symbolic form of modernity" (Moretti 5), an icon, more precisely, of the preciousness and precariousness of existence. It is this teaching that allows her to go through the deep depression she falls into, after leaving the isle and trying to start a new life as a University student: while spending long hours sitting "there, like Mr Watts had once, with his secret exercise book, waiting for fragments" (215), she realizes she has to wait for the 'broken shards' of her life to take shape again, like the pieces of broken pottery that are glued together with gold in Kintsugi. It is this awareness that eventually prompts her to put together her coming-of-age story, once she has recovered, emblematically writing it on the back of the sheets of her PhD thesis on Dickens, still piled up on her desk:

I took the top of the sheet of paper from 'Dickens' Orphans', turned it over and wrote, "Everyone called him Pop Eye. I wrote that sentence six months ago. Everything that follows I wrote over the intervening months. I have tried to describe the events as the happened to me and my mum on the island. I have not tried to embellish. Everyone says the same thing of Dickens. They love his characters. Well, something has changed in me. As I have grown older, I have fallen out of love with his characters. They are too loud. They are grotesque. But strip away their mask and you find what their creator understood about the human soul and all its suffering. (217)

4. Conclusion: reimagining the archetype

What responses can Dickens's Bildungsroman afford us today? To what extent can *Great Expectations* still answer our need for a "symbolic form" in the face of the unprecedented complexity and instability of the world we

live in? It is undeniable that “Victorian literature [...] still matters, greatly, and the reading of Victorian texts, the re-reading of the (neo-)Victorian experience they represent is something that defines our culture as much as it did theirs” (Heilmann and Lewellyn 4). In broader terms, as Azar Nafisi reminds us in *The Republic of Imagination*, all literary texts are crucial to our endless search for ‘form’ and ‘meaning’ in life, which is after all the core of any experience of ‘self-formation’. “Stories are not mere flights of fantasy”, Nafisi points out, “they link us to our past, provide us with critical insights into the present and enable us to envision our lives not just as they are but as they should be or might become” (5). All stories are, to a large extent, the instrument through which we construct our own ‘image’ of ourselves and provide the ‘narrative’ of our inner world and of our relation to the others:

So much of who we are, no matter where we live, depends on how *we imagine ourselves to be*. So much of the home we live in is defined by that other world in our backyard, be it Dorothy’s Oz or Alice’s Wonderland or Scheherazade’s room, to which we have to travel in order to see ourselves and others more clearly. (35, my emphasis)

Engaging with one of most influential stories of self-formation in the literary tradition, *Jack Maggs* and *Mister Pip* offer, each from its unique perspective, an imaginative rethinking of the Bildungsroman archetype. Both novels address the issue of whether, and to what extent, it is still possible to provide a ‘narrative of the self’ against the background of an increasingly multifaceted universe in which “the fully unified, completed, secure, and coherent identity is a fantasy”, as Stuart Hall has put it, a world in which “we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily” (598).

Yet, far from denying the possibility of ‘development’ – in keeping with the “antidevelopmental narratives” (Esty) of modernist fiction or the postmodernist stress on ‘impossible evolution’ and ‘unachievable closure’ – both novels point to the true nature of the Bildungsroman which is instead inseparable, as Bakhtin puts it, from “the image of *man in the process of becoming*” (19) within a world which is itself in a constant condition of change, “no longer *within* an epoch, but on the border *between* two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other” (23). Weaving the typically neo-Victorian engagement with the nineteenth-century textual and cultural

heritage with postcolonial issues on the one hand, and individual and collective experiences of suffering and generational traumas on the other, the two novels examined in this paper represent the protagonists' "process of becoming" as an endless search for form and meaning out of the broken fragments of their existence in a world that falls apart. If "scholars of the *Bildungsroman* have tended to focus on the formation of the protagonist's 'self', and the way this is 'reconciled' with society", *Jack Maggs* and *Mister Pip* respond rather to what has more recently emerged as a shift in attention towards "the protagonists' role in actually *forming* the society they occupy" (Falk 110 my emphasis) and, above all, *reimagining* their own 'provisional', unstable place in it.

In this sense, reinterpreting the complex polysemy implicit in the notion of 'Bildung' as 'construction', 'form', 'frame', and 'image', the metaphorical process of 'mending shards' exemplified by the Kintsugi technique (Kitty) foregrounds the "contradictions and fragmentations in the *formation* of identity" (Belamghari 2) in both texts. Attention is thus drawn to the precariousness of the 'self' – and, accordingly, of any 'narrative' of it – as most notably epitomized by the vanishing ink of Jack Maggs's letters or Pip's name traced by Matilda in the sand. Embracing the Japanese philosophy of *wabi-sabi*, which is centered on the acceptance of transience and recognizes beauty in imperfection (Santini 2019), Kintsugi points to the preciousness of life not 'in spite' but 'because of' the weaknesses, mistakes and uncertainties we have to face in an increasingly complicated and unpredictable world:

Global pandemics, recessions, disruption, artificial intelligence and how they all interact is a complex web impossible to navigate flawlessly. Therefore, in a turbulent society, previously held knowledge is no longer enough; we need new mindsets. Kintsugi thinking is a crucial philosophy [...] the higher the tolerance for mistakes, the more we will learn. (McCullen 14)

Both Jack and Matilda realize that faults and failures enclose the deepest meaning of their life, and that a true 'narrative of formation' should not hide, but rather celebrate vulnerability. After all, it is our wounds that make our story unique: they are the cracks through which life reveals its hidden beauty: "In the practice of kintsugi, the flaws themselves are necessary to for the enhancement of beauty [...] The suffering and impermanence serves as a pathway towards more profound reflection on the beauty in the object" (Yoder 66-67).

And it is this perspective that ultimately points to the core of *Great Expectations* shedding new light on Dickens's famously multifaceted engagement with the Bildungsroman archetype.¹⁰ The preciousness of mistakes, faults and suffering is, after all, the crucial teaching of what Robert Stange defined as Pip's "moral fable from the moment of his first awareness to his mature acceptance of the human condition" (9). This is what Pip realizes when faced with his 'broken expectations' and 'lost illusions', with the apparent meaninglessness of his life experiences in which no reassuring logic is capable of holding everything together, according to an overall design: "Miss Havisham's intentions towards me, all a mere dream; Estella not designed for me; I only suffered in Satis House as a convenience, as sting for the greedy relations, a model with a mechanical heart to practice on when no other practice was at hand" (323). This is what he learns about the 'darkness' he has to acknowledge as part of his ascent in Victorian society during the trial against Magwitch ("holding the hand that he stretched forth to me", 456), in the awareness that he "owns his respectability to his involvement with a criminal outcast" (Gilmour 117). This is, finally, the key teaching about the value of suffering that Pip learns after his last meeting with Estella, in the original conclusion of the novel: "in her face and in her voice, and in her touch, she gave me the assurance that suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham's teaching, and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be" (509)¹¹.



- 1 The genre's capacity to be endlessly reshaped has been recently epitomized, among others, by the *Geschäftsroman*, "a new type of bildungsroman that discusses the growth of business, instead of a human" (AlAmmouri-Salman 227), in line with a society overwhelmed by commodification processes.
- 2 In Acker's 'heteroglossic' novel "the temporal unification of past and future with one's present – an unmistakable symptom of (Acker's purchase of) the postmodern condition – leads to a breakdown of personal identity" (Mukherjee 57). Other remarkable examples of re-workings of *Great Expectations* addressing the issue of identity from different perspectives include Michael Noonan's *Magwitch* (1982), Alanna Knight's *Estella* (1986) and Tony Lester's trilogy (2010-2011) mentioned in the bibliography. On these aspects regarding the 'cultural translations' of Dickens's masterpiece, see Hammond 174-182.
- 3 Famously 'untranslatable' in other languages (Horlacher), the German term *Bildung* (derived from the verb *bilden*) embraces many meanings along with the idea of 'education' and 'formation', including notions of 'model', 'frame' and 'image' (implicit in the German words *Bild* and *Abbild*), and also embracing the ideas of 'shaping', 'forming', 'fashioning', 'framing', 'outlining', and 'imitating' (Kluge 110).
- 4 As Peter Brooks has pointed out, "[w]hereas the model of the *Bildungsroman* seems to imply progress, a leading forth and developmental change, Pip's story – and this may be true of other nineteenth-century plots as well – becomes more and more, as it nears its end, the working through of past history, an attempted return to the origin as the motivation of all the rest, the clue to what must else appear, as Pip puts it to Miss Havisham, a 'blind and thankless' life" (134).
- 5 Carey's attempt to "claim *Great Expectations* as an Australian narrative" has been read as a way of "inverting, if not dissolving the notion of original text and sequel that is central to the writing-back paradigm" (Schmidt-Haberkamp 258).
- 6 I have elsewhere explored the 'fragmentary' quality of Dickens's narrative universe with a focus on the epistemological implications of a labyrinthine city in which the boundaries between truth and falsehood, reality and illusion

- become increasingly blurred. See Squeo 2003 and 2004 mentioned in the bibliography.
- 7 The metaphor of cartography is extensively explored in the novel. For the far-reaching implications of cartographic representation in imperial policy, see Simon Ryan's study quoted in the bibliography.
 - 8 Strictly speaking, as the two scholars point out, "*Mister Pip* is neither a Victorian nor neo-Victorian text but lies in a different sphere as both critique and appropriation" (26).
 - 9 *Mister Pip* has been read as a "clarifying attack on the neo-imperialist corruption of governments and transnational capital" (Lawn 150) involved in the little known Pacific war of the early 1990s.
 - 10 Whilst describing the progress of a young man from the country to the city and his ascent in social hierarchy in terms of 'education in the ways of the world', the novel undermines Victorian values and reshapes the Bildungsroman paradigm: it criticizes "the fastidious, ostentation and complacent nature of bourgeois respectability" (Brown 139) that produces the protagonist's alienation from himself and meaningfully implies a 'return to the origin' and a "gradual retrieval of the past" (Brooks 129). Recent revisionist readings of *Great Expectations* have seen it as a picture of "the crisis of self-fashioning" and of the Bildungsroman genre at large, testifying to the 'failure' of "European modernity" (Stević 2020).
 - 11 The original ending, written in June 1861, is included in the *Appendix* of the Penguin edition quoted in the bibliography.



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Come resistere alla narrazione e deformare il romanzo di formazione: *The Hard Life* di Flann O'Brien

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Chi era Flann O'Brien? Un uomo del Nord d'Irlanda di nome Brian O'Nolan (1911-1966) che diventò uno dei dublinesi più noti della sua generazione. Quando morì, era già una sorta di figura culto, resa celebre dalla sua rubrica sull'*Irish Times*, *Cruiskeen Lawn* e accresciuta ancor di più dall'ultimo suo romanzo, pubblicato postumo, *The Third Policeman*, anch'esso, come il più celebre *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), un brillante esempio di esperimento letterario, di *anti-novel*.

Scrittore poliedrico, che si cimentò nei tre tradizionali generi – poesia, prosa, teatro – produsse cinque romanzi, tradusse poesie dal gaelico e fu autore di *plays*, tre dei quali furono rappresentati nel 1943. Fu anche un impiegato statale, grande bevitore, che riprese a scrivere prosa dopo la seconda edizione di *At Swim-Two-Birds*, nel 1960, pubblicando nell'arco di qualche anno ben due romanzi, *The Hard Life* (1961) e *The Dalkey Archive* (1964) che, oltre ad avere dei motivi letterari in comune, rendono difficile ogni individuazione di elementi del canone letterario irlandese e contribuiscono a definire con decisione il carattere postmodernista della sua ultima produzione narrativa.

Indubbiamente, la presenza di molteplici identità rappresentate dai vari pseudonimi¹ utilizzati ha contribuito a rendere più oscuro il quadro complessivo di valutazione della sua opera e di definizione del suo sé come uomo e autore in un mondo in cui regnano l'immaginazione e la creatività e ogni convenzione letteraria sembra venir meno. Basti pensare alla sua

originalissima teoria dell'esto-autogamia – quella di *At Swim-Two-Birds* – secondo cui i personaggi nascono già adulti, istruiti e pronti ad essere assunti nel servizio civile. O, si pensi alle difficoltà che i critici hanno avuto negli anni ad individuare momenti importanti della sua vita: ha davvero sposato una ragazza tedesca che però è morta dopo un mese, è mai stato in America? Sappiamo, però, con certezza che visse sempre in Irlanda e che i sobborghi di Dublino sono i luoghi dei suoi romanzi, quelli in cui tutto ciò che è straordinario si mescola a quanto joycianamente è ordinario, quotidiano; la comicità si unisce ad una certa tristezza, o pietà; mostri e cowboys dall'accento dublinese convivono con fate, stregoni, pseudo scienziati o semplicemente scrittori. Non stupisce dunque la definizione della sua opera come un “fluent drama of paradox [...] a world of outrageous élan, despair resolutely cut with comedy, mortality suspended in the enchantment of a comic vision so rich we can hardly bear to leave the page and remind ourselves of time.” (Shea: x)

Apparso a venti anni di distanza da *At Swim, The Hard Life*, sul quale ci si soffermerà come esempio adattato, stravolto di *Bildungsroman*, fu completato nell'arco di soli due mesi e subito accettato dall'editore Timothy O'Keeffe, che lo descrisse come un libro divertente (P. Costello, P. Van De Kamp: 122) e che, tuttavia, attese qualche mese prima di pubblicarlo. Scritto con l'intento di offrire una satira della società irlandese e soprattutto della Chiesa Cattolica, il romanzo voleva anche essere una provocazione al Censorship Board che avrebbe potuto vietarne la pubblicazione. O'Brien era pronto a fare causa ma, per fortuna, il romanzo venne pubblicato senza difficoltà e nell'arco di ventiquattr'ore andò a ruba a Dublino.

L'adattabilità del genere, tradizionalmente associato ad un contesto realistico, permette ad O'Brien di rimanere ancorato ad un'ambientazione prettamente irlandese, o meglio dublinese, per rappresentarne la sua staticità, a differenza di altri romanzi di formazione che, secondo Moretti, registrano i cambiamenti sociali in atto in Europa durante quegli anni². Basti pensare al romanzo di James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in cui una narrativa di sopravvivenza si fa espressione conclusiva di una forma di dissenso del sistema sociale, mantenendo le strutture formali di un genere le cui fondamenta e interessi tematici sono tuttavia soggetti a critiche e revisioni.

The Hard Life narra della formazione, della crescita e istruzione di due orfani, Manus e Finbarr, dieci anni il primo e cinque il secondo, che vanno a vivere con il fratellastro della madre, Mr Collopy, il quale

provvederà alla loro educazione presso le scuole dei Christian Brothers, con l'aiuto della sua seconda moglie, Mrs Crotty. La loro storia è la storia di due individui che nascono, crescono, sono, come dice Bachtin "in the process of becoming" e maturano (T. Jeffers: 2) in un quadro sociale statico, dove l'azione sterile non solo si adegua alle restrizioni sociali ma esclude qualsiasi tipo di esperienza estetica, raggiungimento di traguardi personali e professionali e non porta con sé cambiamenti. La loro picaresca avventura familiare e scolastica ha la durata di undici anni, il loro percorso di crescita avviene in un ambiente tetro e cupo eppure esilarante. Così recita l'incipit, che ha ben poco di sentimentale:

It is not that I half knew my mother. I knew half of her: the lower half – her lap, legs, feet, her hands and wrists as she bent forward. Very dimly I seem to remember her voice. At the time, of course, I was very young. Then one day she did not seem to be there any more [...] A while afterwards I asked my brother, five years my senior, where the mammy was (O'Brien: 6)

La storia si sviluppa principalmente nella casa dello zio: tutto ruota attorno alla cucina – luogo ideale di tante scene di teatro irlandese – in cui quello che sembra un vecchio uomo ama soffermarsi, bevendo il miglior whisky della distilleria Kilbeggan, da solo e in compagnia di Father Fahrt, un gesuita tedesco irlandesizzato:

He was sitting there at the range in a crooked, collapsed sort of cane armchair, small reddish eyes looking up at us over the rims of steel spectacles, the head bent forward for closer scrutiny. On an ample crown, long grey hair was plastered in a tattered way. The whole mouth region was concealed by a great untidy dark brush of a moustache, discoloured into a white celluloid collar with no tie. Nondescript clothes contained a meagre frame of low stature and the feet wore large boots with the laces undone. (O'Brien: 11)

Quest'iniziale immagine di un nuovo contesto familiare rappresentato da una donna, il cui pallore sconcertante lascia già presagire l'esperienza della morte e da un uomo, pigro, sporco, che non fa che passare le sue giornate dietro una fiaschetta di whisky e un'ambizione assurda, è tutt'altro che rincuorante. I due fratelli, che condividono la stanza, commentano di tanto in tanto ciò che osservano ma non sembrano trovare il conforto di una vera e propria famiglia. Se Mrs Crotty provvede ai loro pasti, non manifesta tuttavia alcun affetto. La famiglia è alquanto strana e la loro

vita è assai dura, soprattutto per il piccolo Finbarr che vede il fratello crescere e rendersi autonomo più velocemente, anche se è lui a sembrare il più onesto, oltre che più maturo. Manus, invece, è ambizioso e crede nel valore dell'istruzione nella misura in cui i suoi benefici consentano di svincolarsi dal contesto in cui essa viene offerta. Ingegnoso, interviene in una conversazione tra Collopy e Father Fahrt per fornire le date precise della morte di Lutero e dell'Inquisizione. Presto parte per l'Inghilterra dove intende fare fortuna fondando una scuola a distanza, con manuali per nulla scientifici che vengono inviati per corrispondenza dietro laute somme di denaro a lettori creduloni. Le sue osservazioni e decisioni sono sempre di ordine pratico e nascondono intenzioni losche che sortiscono conseguenze disastrose nel mondo reale. Nel suo mondo, come in quello dei bambini, non esiste differenza tra la fantasia e la realtà. Ecco perché le sue sono avventure pericolose come quelle di *Don Quixote*, non a caso proposto in riedizione a lettori lontani, a prezzi "convenientissimi" o come quelle di Charles Blondin (1824-1897), un funambulo e acrobata francese che nel 1859 attraversò in diciotto minuti le cascate del Niagara sopra un cavo metallico. Definendo Manus il Blondin dublinese, O'Brien non ne tesse certamente i complimenti.

Manus riesce a convincere Mr Collopy che può andare a fare visita al Papa a Roma e organizza con il suo denaro la trasferta per lui e Father Fahrt. A Roma chiederanno l'indulgenza, riceveranno la benedizione papale per un'impresa sulla quale Collopy sta lavorando in Irlanda e che tiene in un certo senso il lettore in sospenso: la costruzione in città di bagni pubblici per donne. È a Roma che Collopy muore, sprofondando da un palco in un teatro dove era andato per un concerto di violino: in sovrappeso a causa di una bevanda apparentemente benefica preparata da Manus, che porta ad un aumento eccessivo del peso. Il romanzo si conclude con i due fratelli curiosi di sapere quanto hanno ereditato dallo zio, più che dispiaciuti per la sua morte. Esempio di realismo comico, il romanzo ci conduce dunque, anche drammaticamente, come recita il sottotitolo, ad una vera e propria esegesi dello squallore, sia fisica che mentale.

The Hard Life piacque in generale a molti e da molti fu accostato a *A Portrait of the Artist as a young Man* di James Joyce, non solo per il linguaggio ma per il genere in cui ad una prima lettura può inserirsi: il romanzo di formazione.

A differenza di Joyce, Flann O'Brien anticipa e ci fa comprendere immediatamente quanto sia profonda la sua idea di squallore non solo dal

titolo ma anche dall'epigrafe, una citazione di Pascal, che ci ricorda come spesso i problemi nascono dall'essere, dal trovarsi in determinati contesti sociali. Egli lo fa senza riserve, condannando o meglio presentando e accentuando dettagli realistici della sua storia: i suoi personaggi "are real and none is fictitious even in part" (O'Brien: 1) e come nella vita reale sembrano essere sopraffatti dagli eventi senza alcuno spiraglio di opportunità. Le loro vicende vengono raccontate da un narratore cresciuto, schietto e inaffidabile:

There is something misleading but not dishonest in this portrait of Mr Collopy. It cannot be truly my impression of him when I first saw him but rather a synthesis of all the thoughts and experiences I had of him over the years, a long look backwards. (O'Brien: 11)

Finbarr è dunque un narratore consapevole che narra la sua storia, descrivendola, giudicandola e criticandola con un certo distacco disinvolto. Tale ricerca della parola giusta che commenti, dia conto dell'esperienza compiuta e lontana, è ciò che costituisce il *trait d'union* del romanzo, l'esegesi dello squallore, privo di qualsiasi coinvolgimento emotivo che possa in qualche modo renderne difficile la comprensione o sminuirne la portata. Il protagonista descrive i dettagli della propria vita e di quella del fratello a partire dalla morte della madre e del loro trasferimento nella casa di Mr Collopy. Il luogo che abitano prima di trasferirsi a Warrington Place è una casa squallida e sporca con poca acqua, dove i pasti vengono consumati per sopravvivere e la dieta non varia mai.

Anche la casa di Mrs Crotty e di Mr Collopy, sebbene più grande, viene presentata in maniera analoga: dalla cucina, priva di luce e odorante di whisky, alle camere da letto ovunque sembrano regnare i cattivi odori e gli oggetti rotti. La casa si trova lungo il canale e ciò è già – per quanto a sud del fiume Liffey – un segno di squallore. La camera di Mr Collopy puzza a causa di calzini sporchi che raccoglierà sistematicamente la figlia avuta dal primo matrimonio, Annie – "a horrible, limp, lank streeel of a creature" (O'Brien: 81) – mentre la camera di Mrs Crotty odora di urina a causa del materasso che di notte veniva da lei bagnato. L'atmosfera è quella di "The Dead", seppure sorridiamo alle brevi visite di Padre Fahrt e nutriamo curiosità per le imprese losche del fratello. Via via che si va avanti nella storia, tale senso di tetro squallore trova il suo *climax* nella morte di Mrs Crotty, la cui lontana e debole voce chiamava dai meandri della sua

stanza per tutto il lungo periodo della malattia. “Squallore” è il termine utilizzato per descrivere il funerale che sembra non commuovere nessuno, accrescendo così la scena di un senso incolmabile di miseria umana: il fratello si è portato dietro una bottiglietta di whisky e si è ubriacato, finendo per litigare con Mr Collopy quella sera stessa.

L'altro luogo classico del romanzo di formazione è l'istituzione scolastica, qui rappresentata dall'Istituto dei Christian Brothers a Synge Street. Quando il primo giorno di scuola, Finbarr viene accompagnato dallo zio, la porta viene aperta da un uomo vestito di nero che li conduce in una stanza spoglia, definita come una prigione, dove un uomo triste, dagli strani tic, che ride senza motivo, gli pone delle domande. Il luogo è sinistro, lugubre e non lascia spazio a sentimenti positivi:

That is how I entered the sinister portals of Synge Street school. Soon I was to get to know the instrument known as 'the leather'. It is not, as one would imagine, a strap of the kind used on bags. It is a number of such straps sewn together to form a thing of great thickness that is nearly as rigid as a club but just sufficiently flexible to prevent the breaking of the bones of the hand. Blows of it, particularly if directed (as often they deliberately were) to the top of the thumb or wrist, conferred immediate paralysis followed by agony as the blood tried to get back to the afflicted part. Later I was to learn from the brother a certain routine of prophylaxis he had devised but it worked only partly. (O'Brien: 20)

La Dublino in cui i due bambini crescono è la città della giovinezza di Joyce, segnata da edifici decadenti, strade sporche, pub affollati, ma anche quella della maturità, cercata e temuta: nel quartiere rosso, che ricorda l'episodio di Circe dall'*Ulisse* di Joyce, una sera, tornando a casa, Finbarr scorge, con grande sorpresa, la cugina che chiacchiera insieme ad altre persone. La vista di Annie in quel quartiere poco rispettabile lo turba ancora di più quando legge, in risposta ad un suo resoconto, la lettera in cui il fratello ipotizza che la ragazza possa avere contratto varie malattie, sessualmente trasmissibili, dai nomi stranissimi, quali *spirochaeta pallida* o *treponema pallidum*:

The greatest likelihood is that Annie, if infected, labours under the sway of H.M. Gonococcus. In women the symptoms are so mild at the beginning as to be unnoticed but it is a serious and painful invasion. There is usually fever following infection of the pelvic organs. Complications to guard against include endocarditis, meningitis and skin decay. Gonococcal endocarditis can be fatal. (O'Brien: 105)

Tale elenco non sorprende il lettore che ha già avuto occasione di conoscere il personaggio del fratello e ritenerlo del tutto inaffidabile. Con lui, O'Brien introduce l'idea di squallore intellettuale, presentandoci in maniera distorta ciò che potrebbe sembrare un manifesto educativo che prevede l'acquisizione di discipline disparate capaci di cambiare il futuro, rendendo la gente sofisticata e colta, oltre che onesta. Sappiamo che non è così e che la nostra idea di una società ideale non corrisponde a ciò che ha in mente Manus.

Con la lente distorta di un narratore che cerca di ricordare – anche se le sensazioni sembrano essere vivide e il quadro generale sembra essere chiaro – viene descritto un altro personaggio, del quale Flann O'Brien si disse fiero, Padre Fahrt, dall'inglese “fart” ovvero “scorreggia”, il cui nome ridicolizza ogni rispettabile visione della Chiesa, rappresentata qui da Gesuiti. Al pari di Mr Collopy, l'altro adulto, che potrebbe costituire un punto di riferimento, dimostra di non essere colto né informato su ciò che accade nella sua città e nel mondo, ma soprattutto di non sapere granché della sua materia, la Teologia. Le sue brevi battute su argomenti che dovrebbero essere disquisizioni su questioni teologiche costituiscono i momenti di interazione con Mr Collopy, facendo di lui l'interlocutore ideale del progetto segreto che riguarda l'istituzione di bagni pubblici per donne a Dublino che lo stesso Mr Collopy concepisce quasi come una missione religiosa, tema trattato in un buon numero di pagine e che verrà rivelato soltanto alla fine del romanzo:

After all that has been done. Mr Sproule went on, we have to set up the Collopy Trust....The Trust will erect and maintain three establishments which the testator calls restrooms. There will be a rest room at Irishtown, Sandymount, at Harold's Cross and at Phippsborough...(O'Brien: 142)

Padre Farht accompagnerà Mr Collopy a Roma chiedendo la benedizione del progetto al Papa che, disgustato per tale assurda richiesta, li manda via senza alcuna esitazione.

Sarà il fratello a descrivere com'è deceduto lo zio e come si è svolto il funerale nonché a fornire dettagli sulla sepoltura che reca, facendoci ancora sorridere per la grottesca e terrificante sorte, un'iscrizione ironica, che richiama per contrasto la sorte tragica di Keats: “Here lies one whose name is writ on water.” (O'Brien: 140) I due fratelli si ricongiungeranno

in Irlanda, dove, secondo la volontà di Mr Collopy, ad Annie spetterà una rendita, oltre che un'abitazione a Warrington Place, e a loro andrà una piccola quota. Manus consiglia a Finbarr di sposare Annie e vivere con la sua rendita mentre lui tornerà a Londra. L'idea, agli occhi di Finbar, è semplicemente disgustosa – il disgusto è la sensazione predominante nella vita del protagonista – e al pari di Manus, anche lui, una volta cresciuto, trova una consolazione altrettanto disastrosa negli alcolici:

In a daze I lifted my own glass and without knowing what I was doing did exactly what the brother did, drained the glass in one vast swallow. Then I walked quickly but did not run to the lavatory. There, everything inside me came up in a tidal surge of vomit. (O'Brien: 147)

È con tali parole che si conclude un romanzo che non ha nulla di narrativamente costruttivo se non il piacevole interludio rappresentato dalla vista e dai brevi incontri con Penelope, la sorella di Jack Mulloy, un amico di Finbarr, di cui lui si è invaghito. Pur tuttavia, gli incontri con la ragazza si soffermano su aspetti che non sono, come ci si aspetterebbe, relativi al suo aspetto fisico o ai sentimenti che prova, bensì legati all'idea della consumazione di un pasto: Finbarr immagina come bere del tè insieme a lei sarebbe ben diverso. Ciononostante – e come si potrebbe immaginare – nulla accade tra i due e il “fallimento” di questo tentativo sottolinea l'inevitabile divario tra il mondo degli uomini e quello delle donne, *leit-motif* di tutta la narrazione.

I personaggi stereotipati di O'Brien vivono un'esistenza disperata, sofferente e priva di sbocchi positivi. Il resoconto dei primi momenti educativi del fratello, che, più grande, va a scuola per primo, porta con sé il dubbio che un'istruzione completa possa mai avere luogo:

That night the brother said in bed, not without glee, that somehow he thought I would soon be master of Latin and Shakespeare and that Brother Cruppy would shower heavenly bread on me in his class on Christian Doctrine and give me some idea of what the early Christians went through in the arena by thrashing the life out of me.” (O'Brien: 34)

In generale, quando accade un evento, esso porta con sé un cambiamento in peggio. In un'Irlanda povera e affamata, la vita, come recita il titolo, è davvero dura, e crescere non implica un processo di apprendimento

e arricchimento, bensì di mera consapevolezza che non si può far nulla per essere migliori, moralmente e mentalmente. La Chiesa non offre consolazione ma solo una serie di assunti incomprensibili ed *excursus* storici sulla potenza conquistata dai Gesuiti nei secoli che non giustificano né danno conto di ciò che accade nella vita del giovane narratore. Per tale motivo, seppure la presa di coscienza di un sé abbia avuto luogo e pertanto il romanzo di formazione abbia acquisito la sua *raison d'être*, non ci consoliamo immaginando un futuro migliore per il giovane Finbarr.

The Hard Life si presenta immediatamente al lettore colto come una satira del romanzo di formazione, e in particolare di uno specifico romanzo di formazione, da cui tuttavia, sembra che O'Brien tragga ispirazione, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In un clima di distacco dalla funzione ideologica e di rifiuto di un'autorità legittimante, il romanzo di Joyce si presenta come l'esempio moderno di un genere i cui interessi tematici e le cui fondamenta concettuali vengono sottoposte a critica e revisione. Spunto di riflessione per tentare di stabilire dei nuovi modi di rappresentare le relazioni tra un soggetto in formazione e le istituzioni sociali e familiari, esso si fa portavoce di un'esperienza ricca di difficoltà e criticità.

Sebbene i due romanzi descrivano gli effetti ideologici disastrosi della Teologia e della Pedagogia e si presentino come critiche delle convenzioni sociali, con personaggi che resistono al sistema sociale e che raccontano una problematica avventura educativa, il genere del *Bindungsroman* viene utilizzato da O'Brien come un pretesto per attaccare possibili letture in chiave 'mitica' della vita irlandese presentate da Joyce e offrire un ritratto non già di una formazione, bensì di isolamento sociale e di un "arrested development" (Esty), individuale e collettivo, e di una soffocante deformazione.

Ecco dunque che l'esperienza formativa del sé conduce inevitabilmente, oltre che ad una narrazione della negazione – ben diversa dal celebre *non serviam* pronunciato da Stephen, intesa come annullamento – ad un'esperienza di fallimento lontana dalla conclusiva asserzione del valore dell'esilio dell'artista joyciano.

Il romanzo di formazione di O'Brien non ha un eroe come protagonista, un individuo che riesce a liberarsi dai legami e dal peso della Chiesa Cattolica per realizzare i propri sogni artistici, né giunge, come afferma Hardin, ad "a better understanding of self and to a generally affirmative view of the world" (Hardin 1991: xiii). I suoi personaggi sono lontani dall'essere dei modelli letterari, non esplicitano né mettono in atto

i propri ideali, rimanendo bloccati in un contesto familiare, il primo, e sociale ma circoscritto, il secondo, entrambi privi di rapporti che possano dare benefici intellettuali: nulla viene detto di cosa farà Finbarr né di come possa cambiare in meglio il personaggio del fratello. Potremmo in un certo qual modo rimproverare all'autore di avere creato una storia poco convincente su un ragazzo che non sembra avere obiettivi nella vita e continua a criticare l'ambiente in cui si trova. Il testo sembra dunque ben rappresentare ciò che Albert Memmi ha definito "an internal catastrophe", ovvero una forma di sviluppo "arrestato", tipico della situazione coloniale: "The revolt of the adolescent colonized, far from resolving into mobility and social progress, can only sink into the morass of colonized society – unless there is a total revolution." (Memmi 1965: 99).

Alla stregua di quanto argomentato da Moretti, i cambiamenti sociali e politici della fine del diciannovesimo secolo conducono alla degenerazione di una forma letteraria che aveva sino a quel momento fornito al giovane eroe borghese una guida per il mondo. Il *Bildungsroman* si rivela dunque un inadeguato modello di formazione della propria identità e dei modi convenzionali di sviluppo e caratterizzazione narrativa. Il genere si rinnova radicalmente in un mondo in cui si fondono lo spirito della tradizione e quello del progresso. La *Bildung* finisce per essere un modo per opporsi all'ordine sociale, alle convenzioni relative alla formazione da autodidatti e a idee pedagogiche che impongono dei modelli restrittivi e punitivi.

Al limite di ciò che è normativo, socialmente e genericamente, il desiderio del sé si interiorizza e diventa illecito, qualcosa di distruttivo, che si fonda su un'idea di "self-culture" (R. Salmon 2019: 64) e di "self-help" (R. Salmon 2019: 65). Gli ideali che definiscono il dominio culturale non danno ragione, non rappresentano la socialità che il protagonista del romanzo di O'Brien desidererebbe – sempre che tale desiderio sia esplicitamente riconosciuto – possedere. La sua istruzione da autodidatta prosegue senza controlli o regole e con conseguenze disastrose o, ancora, come precisa Patricia Alden, secondo il "caos dei principi", proprio di un eroe moderno (Alden 1986: 66). Il risultato è un brillante esempio di "Counter-Bildung", ovvero una non-proposta formativa che finisce per contraddire i cliché, raccontare la contraddittorietà dell'esperienza sociale nonché legittimare l'ideologia del protagonista 'moderno' e straniato, che ha visto il fallimento di sogni ben poco riconoscibili e che non ci lascia immaginare un futuro migliore.



- 1 Da quello più noto di Flann O'Brien all'autore di articoli umoristici in inglese e in gaelico sull'Irish Times di Myles na Gopaleen a quello di George Knowall come autore di articoli su The Nationalist e sul Leinster Times.
- 2 Moretti asserisce che alla fine del secolo il Bildungroman attraversa una fase di trasformazione e negoziazione di problemi complessi legati alla definizione del sé, all'idea di nazionalità e di istruzione, al ruolo dell'artista e ai rapporti sociali e personali. Si veda Moretti, Franco, *The Way of the World. The Bildungroman in European Culture*, Verso, 1987.



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A Vulnerable Heroine?: Trauma and Self-Begetting in William Trevor's *The Story of Lucy Gault*

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“That Spanish woman, who lived three hundred years ago, was certainly not the last of her kind. Many Therasas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action; perhaps only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity; perhaps a tragic failure which found no sacred poet and sank unwept into oblivion.”
(George Eliot, *Middlemarch*)

Introduction: the “contradictory pulls” of William Trevor’s narrative style

Readers of William Trevor’s fiction agree that his novels and short stories delve deep into the mystery of human mind, bringing to light the fragility of life and the lingering echoes of the past. Thus, while Hermione Lee describes Trevor’s macrotext as “a story of the past, of memory, and of how time works” (n.p.), Paul Delaney and Michael Parker see Trevor’s fiction as concerned with the “interrogation of patterns of inheritance and ideological heritage, and the impact of the past on the choices a person makes” (5). While illustrating his own aesthetic choices in a conversation with Costanza del Río Álvaro, Trevor himself acknowledges that the ineffability of ordinary life is at the core of his narratives: “I’m interested in people, I’m very curious about people and I write out of this sense of

straight, ordinary curiosity. I want to find out myself” (del Río Álvaro, “Talking with William Trevor” 121). As these comments make clear, understanding the complexity of human life is the driving force that shapes Trevor’s narrative style. Its concern with the vulnerability of human existence and the connections between ordinary events and larger historical questions, such as the turbulent history of the Anglo-Irish relations, are the main themes in Trevor’s works.

In a writing career spanning over fifty years, the mystery of human life has always sparked intellectual curiosity in the Irish writer. This explains why the typical characters that populate Trevor’s fictional world are women, children and bachelors, as they represent an unfamiliar world to explore. Moreover, Trevor’s narratives generally present psychologically wounded characters in the throes of individual and collective grief experiences. The struggle with the mystery of human life is also intertwined with the haunting legacy of the Irish Troubles. Accordingly, silences, ellipses and violent incidents pervade Trevor’s fiction, thereby favouring a critical reading of his works through the lens of trauma studies (see del Río Álvaro “Talking with William Trevor;” Monaco “Postcolonial Trauma”). This is specifically evident in the three Big House novels, *Fools of Fortune* (1983), *The Silence in the Garden* (1988) and *The Story of Lucy Gault* (2002), where violent history adversely impacts on the lives of ordinary people. Set against the backdrop of the War of Independence (1919-21) and of the Civil War (1922-23), these novels showcase the long legacy of British colonialism in Ireland and employ the motif of the Big House as a colonial metaphor for power and conflict. In 2021, Ireland commemorates the hundredth anniversary of the Anglo-Irish Treaty that put an end to the Troubles and gave way to the birth of the Free Irish State in 1922. However, the emotional and psychological wounds of such a historical turmoil have continued to impact on the ways writers have depicted this watershed, thereby laying emphasis on the “contradictory pulls in the contemporary Irish novel towards veiling and unveiling the memory of the past” (del Río Álvaro, “Trauma Studies” 9).

Starting from these claims, my article proposes to read the third and last novel of Trevor’s Big House trilogy, *The Story of Lucy Gault*, as an exemplary case study on how the contradictory forces of Irish history impinge on a coming-of-age story. *The Story of Lucy Gault* portrays, in contemporary *Bildungsroman* fashion, the life and quest for self-identity of the eponymous heroine. In this novel, spanning nearly a century, from

the Irish Troubles in the early 1920s to the violence of World War II and to Ireland's economic miracle at the dawn of the third millennium, readers follow Trevor's heroine from her childhood years to her old age. The whole plot is set in the Gaults' mansion of Lahardane, along the coast of County Cork. The Gaults, Protestant estate owners in South Ireland, are the symbol of a decaying gentry family whose origins date back to the eighteenth century, though the "style of the past was no longer possible" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 6) in Lahardane. The narrative opens with an attempted arson by three young Catholics from the local village of Enniseala. As Captain Everard Gault, Lucy's father, mistakenly shoots and wounds one of the three arsonists, Everard and his wife Heloise decide to leave Lahardane, causing unhappiness to their only child. Lucy secretly escapes from Lahardane and when a sandal belonging to the child is found by the sea, she is assumed to be drowned. Left bereft of their only child, Everard and Heloise leave Ireland, while Lucy is eventually found alive in the woods with a swollen ankle by Henry, the Gaults' retainer. The child is brought up by Henry and his wife Bridget, waiting for the return of her parents. These long years of waiting represent the bulk of the narrative as Lucy retreats to a lonely existence, in a sort of exile from the world. Living on the family estate of Lahardane, Lucy will get old, becoming an almost mythical figure in a highly transformed country.

As made clear in this summary, the novel charts the life of an ordinary character whose quest for identity is dominated by historical clashes and a lingering feeling of individual guilt. A latent manifestation of pain percolates through the silences, gaps and recollections that punctuate Lucy's quest narrative, as the child becomes an adult and the world goes through violent events and social transformations. Lahardane becomes a healing and contemplative place, tangential to major watersheds. As if time has stopped, Lucy grows up and espouses her wounds, devoting her time to reading Victorian novels, keeping bees and gardening. The victim of familial and historical forces she is unable to control, Lucy, like a martyr, embraces loss as a position of strength rather than weakness. Her quest for self-definition is predicated upon psychological and physical wounds produced by traumatic historical forces. However, these moments of exposure to loss turn out to be "paradoxically productive" (Butler 468). While addressing the creative power of loss, Judith Butler reminds us that loss emerges from a condition of spatial and temporal dislocation. The "animated afterlife" (468) of traumatic loss haunts the present, carrying a

sense of belatedness. And yet, what is produced from grief can be “oddly fecund” (468), thereby becoming the condition for relationality.

In this respect, *The Story of Lucy Gault* bears the traces of this animated afterlife of trauma. By bearing witness to their traumatic experiences, Lucy and the main characters of the story shed some light on the creative power of loss. As the omniscient narrator wonders, was such a sense of belonging to a place so deep to cause “this terrible commotion, and grief like you wouldn’t witness in a lifetime?” (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 43). To answer this question, my paper will look at Lucy’s *Bildungsroman* as both trauma and self-begetting fiction. Following the recent critical debate on the nature of the *Bildungsroman*, I will first argue that Trevor exploits the conventions of the genre to illuminate the mystery of human mind, juxtaposing historical realism with other genres such as the elegiac and the Gothic. Then, I will discuss the influence that trauma exercises on the growth of the protagonist. Lucy’s self-quest is conveyed through silences, doublings, secrets and analepses, narrative conventions that can be said to question the unspeakable nature of trauma. Finally, I will examine how the wounded heroine’s exile from the world can be seen in terms of dispossession (Butler and Athanasiou 2013). In its affirmative terms, dispossession entails an ethical openness to the self and the other, thus providing the basis for self-definition. As in a self-begetting novel (Kellman 1976; 1980), Lucy’s story begets both a self and itself. Lucy’s quest for self-identity becomes the condition for the narration of the story itself, turning the heroine into subject and object at the same time.

The Bildungsroman and historical realism

In *The Story of Lucy Gault*, Trevor offers a telling example of a coming-of-age story where the correlation between traumatic experiences and sense of guilt are remarkably direct. As already stated, Trevor exploits the conventions of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, combining historical events and other less realist elements. For its reliance on a model of progressive maturation and development, from childhood to old age, *The Story of Lucy Gault* thematises the struggle between inner self and socio-historical changes or, to borrow Franco Moretti’s words, it places emphasis on “the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of *socialization*” (15; emphasis in the original). The interface between these

forces is what makes the *Bildungsroman* “intrinsicly contradictory” (6; emphasis in the original) in that it tends to intertwine idiosyncrasies with socio-cultural processes. Self-definition is predicated upon a struggle with the world around, a dialectical opposition that György Lukács sees as a “problematic reconciliation” (*The Theory of the Novel* 132). From a female perspective, it has been argued that this struggle generates a fractured self. The quest for self-identity is a painful compromise for female characters as it entails “a distinctive values system and unorthodox development goals, defined in terms of community and empathy rather than achievement and autonomy” (Abel, Hirsch, Langland 10). As Maroula Joannou contends, “[d]isillusionment, disappointment, diminution in stature and the dashing of idealistic aspiration, if not disaster and death, are all too common for the heroine” (204), thus recording the problematic nature of a female quest for self-definition. These contradictions are well illustrated, for instance, in Dorothea Brooke’s story of maturation in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871-72). Here, the heroine’s lofty vocation is juxtaposed with what Eliot calls “the web,” a central metaphor for “the hampering threadlike pressure of small social conditions, and their frustrating complexity” (169). The “life of mistakes” (7) of women like Dorothea, as quoted in the epigraph of my essay, stands for this contrast between one’s vocation and the forces that rule societies. In this respect, Trevor’s heroine can be said to remind readers of Dorothea’s “life of mistakes” as Lucy’s story is similarly undermined by guilt, mistakes and limitations. And yet, unlike the Victorian heroine who finds some redemption in a second marriage, Lucy’s abnegation eventually achieves a regenerative effect, turning Trevor’s heroine into a dispossessed human being. As Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou argue, dispossession can allow for “relationality and binding for others” (92). In other words, Lucy’s portrait is that of a victim of conflicts where a permanent state of attentiveness and care translate into a potential for relationality and self-definition.

In Trevor’s novel, realistic coming-of-age conventions, namely clear temporal markers, are intermingled with less realistic elements, such as lyrical and elegiac interludes and gothic and sensational forms. This combination of different formal mechanisms can be read as an effort to remould the genre of the *Bildungsroman* as to accommodate the quest for self-definition of an ordinary female character. The need to reanimate the genre was already a concern in Victorian female authors like Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot herself. “[B]y questioning the preoccupation

of the classical Bildungsroman with male perfectibility as well as its restrictive proscription of femininity” (204), Joannou argues, these novels provide ample evidence of the limitations of the classical *Bildungsroman* to represent female perspectives. The tale of trapped provincial women, as Jed Esty explains, characterises both the Victorian and Modernist generation where readers can find “female protagonists tied fatefully to some kind of modernizing landscape in which they can neither thrive nor survive” (223, note 43). This sort of arrested self-development also marks Lucy’s *Bildung* as readers can infer from the very initial pages of the novel when upheavals and transformations wreak havoc on the growth of the child.

When the novel begins, Lucy is “almost nine” (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 8) and she is devoted to child to her parents Everard and Heloise. Divided in six parts, *The Story of Lucy Gault* opens with the scene of Everard shooting and wounding Horahan, one of the three young Catholic boys who were trying to set Lahardane on fire. It is the twenty-first of January 1921 and, as readers can learn, this failed arson was the last of other intimidations while the country was “in a state of arrest, one that amounted to war” (3). An invalid survivor of World War I, Everard Gault carries “fragments of shrapnel” (4) in his body. Despite his physical wounds, the man lives a happy life with his English wife Heloise and their only child Lucy. The child is totally immersed in the present: she plays with the dog of the O’Reillys, the Gaults’ neighbours, and enjoys her secret swims at the near beach with the animal. Her sense of belonging to Lahardane, to the glen, the woods and the seashore is rooted in the ‘here and now.’ Like the Lucy celebrated in William Wordsworth’s famous poems, Trevor’s Lucy belongs to her birthplace until she comes to realise that history has entered her life in violent ways. She eavesdrops on her parents’ conversations, understanding that they are willing to leave Ireland and that “[n]othing could be left behind” (10). Historical events and religious conflicts force the boundaries of Lucy’s childhood, thereby disrupting her peaceful life.

Therefore, history collides heavily with Lucy’s life and the Gaults’ vicissitudes. This begins even before Lucy’s birth as readers can infer from the very first pages of the novel. The origins of the Gaults date back to an uncertain past. By the eighteenth century, they moved from Norfolk to County Cork when the land at Lahardane was purchased and the house was built. The Gaults represent the typical Anglo-Irish gentry that had played a dominant role in the socio-political life of Ireland since the late seventeenth century. In consequence of its colonial legacy, the Protestant Ascendancy

knew a gradual decline and became the target of Irish nationalists in the first two decades of the twentieth century, as the attacks at Lahardane demonstrate. “History touched the place” (5), the omniscient extradiegetic narrator observes while alluding to the prominent historical figures who had visited Lahardane, such as the viceroy of Ireland George Townshend in 1769 and Daniel O’Connell, the leader of the Irish nationalist movement, in 1809. The two contrasting figures illustrate the faltering attitude of the Gaults towards Irish nationalism. Moreover, history invades the Gaults’ house with its disruptive force. This is suggested by the fields that the family lost because of card-playing and, more importantly, by a diphtheria outbreak that killed the whole family, except for Everard and his brother, at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this respect, the stories of Lucy’s ancestors, that the child hardly knows about, form the very background of her existence, thus conditioning in some ways her personal development.

As is clear from what we have seen so far, Trevor uses historical events and real figures to allow readers to gain a foothold. However, these events cast some light on the contrast between history and personal development, revealing the psychological and emotional complexity of human mind. By presenting the pure and paradisiacal gaze of a child, Trevor tries to infuse a sense of innocence to the idea of history as progress or, as Lukács’s calls it, to the “unbroken upward evolution of mankind” (*Studies in European Realism* 3). In *The Story of Lucy Gault*, development does not entail organic progress. It instead occurs as a violent upheaval. History, specifically the traumatic events of Irish history, percolate through Lucy’s coming-of-age journey, “producing jagged effects on the politics and poetics of subject formation” (Esty 2). These disruptive elements, that Jed Esty associates with imperialism and colonialism, can be found in the ways Trevor combines historical realism and non-realist strategies to portray such a problematic self-development, namely the elegiac and the Gothic.

Elegy and romance

As the title itself suggests, *The Story of Lucy Gault* centres on the life of the eponymous heroine, specifically on the days and months following her unfortunate incident in the woods. While Lucy grows up, she isolates from the rest of the world, gradually plunging into a state of permanent

melancholia. Political upheavals disrupt the country and yet time is blocked from Lucy's perspective. "Past and present had somehow become one" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 146) in Lucy's world. As the heroine becomes an adult, she struggles to keep alive the memories of the past and the recollection of the lost ones in spite of the major changes and transformations in her native land. Her individual progress looks like a vigil which never closes or refuses to do so. This recurrent interest with the representation of loss and absence is, I think, characteristic of a certain elegiac fashion. The marine setting, the dialogue with the departed, the use of repetitions and returns, the theme of the vigil and the lamentation are the main features of elegiac writing that, as David Kennedy explains, is a "form without frontiers" (1), thus transcending the border between fiction and poetry. From this point of view, Lucy's story disrupts the linear passage of time and, at the same time, it shows how the past remains paradoxically present in a country that has eventually gained independence.

As a form of narrative elegy, *The Story of Lucy Gault* recalls contemporary elegies that "take human fragility as their main theme and build up an urn of language characterised by vulnerable form" (Ganteau 95). What Jean-Michel Ganteau sees as a "vulnerable text" (150) is one characterised by hauntings, uncertainty, openness, doubt and dialogism (150), which stretch narrative representation to the limits while privileging presentation rather than representation (170). In *The Story of Lucy Gault*, this is specifically suggested in the manipulation of focalisation and in the temporal disorientation in spite of the presence of clear time markers. Although focused on a central character, *The Story of Lucy Gault* is not a first-person narrative. By contrast, Trevor resorts to the omniscient eye of an extradiegetic narrator to orchestrate a multifocal perspective with shifting focalisation. When Lucy is found alive in the woods, the narrative alternates long chapters chronicling the heroine's life at Lahardane, waiting for the return of her parents, with Everard and Heloise's exile as they travel first to Switzerland and then to Italy. Unwilling to settle in Sussex, as they had initially decided, Lucy's parents move far from Ireland and England, looking forward to a fresh start. This explains why Henry's telegram announcing Lucy's finding never reaches Everard and Heloise who have eventually set up home in the fictional town of Montemarmoreo in central Italy, a place which adumbrates the typical Tuscan and Umbrian towns Trevor himself had inhabited. Moreover, the Gaults' circumstances and vicissitudes of life are intercut with parallel short chapters on Horahan's

hallucinations. The man is haunted by the past, specifically by the image of a house destroyed by blazing fire and by the recollections of a drowned child. The figments of Horahan's imagination shed light on his own sense of guilt, refashioning the passage of time in a disarticulated way. For Horahan "it became a struggle [...] to establish reality (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 77). Past and present, presence and absence are inextricably intertwined: while lamenting on loss, trauma and exile, the characters' voices echo each other, offering different and distant perspectives on their common sense of alienation. Silences, repetitions, amnesia, hallucinations and recollections pervade the narrative, making trauma permanent and omnipresent. These formal traits push the realist project to the limit or, as Anne Whitehead suggests, "traumatic realism" is a contradiction in terms since "traumatic knowledge cannot be fully communicated or retrieved without distortion" (84).

Seen in this light, *The Story of Lucy Gault* uses elegy to poetically perform the effects of loss, thus distorting the realist and chronological linearity of the narrative. As Lucy herself states, "[m]emories can be everything if we choose to make so" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 119). Here, Lucy is talking to Ralph, a young man coming from County Wexford to tutor the O'Reillys' children during summer break. Lucy and Ralph first meet by chance, while the young man was trying to reach the O'Reillys', and later, persuaded by the local clergyman Canon Crosbie, Ralph regularly visits Lucy, keeping her company until he falls in love with her. Lucy invites Ralph to visit her at Lahardane once a week, asking him to extend his sojourn in County Cork. And yet, she refuses his love, pretending not to listen to his feelings, replying with silence to his tender and gentle words. Notably, readers are given no access to Lucy's thoughts. In a way, though she is the heroine, she is absent from the story: her mute suffering and her stoic renunciation make her a spectral and enigmatic character. During the conversations between Lucy and Ralph in the summer of 1936, readers never learn Lucy's intentions as the girl is usually silent or describes her house and the garden. Likewise, Ralph, who has been told about the Gaults' story by the O'Reillys, seems to be unable to access the girl's mind:

In the silence that had gathered as they stood by the car, Ralph wanted to say that he knew about the snares of the childhood, and knew as well that his experience was puny compared with what still continued for the girl he believed he loved. His sympathy was part of love, as tender as his fondness. (100)

What seems to be recorded here is Ralph's awareness of the hazards of life, a fact that elicits empathic connections. Throughout their summer infatuation, Lucy never replies to Ralph's words of affection. By contrast, a numbing sensation seems to affect Lucy who talks of the 4072 books in the library of Lahardane or urges Ralph to describe his home and his childhood. Some form of shock is thus brought to light through silences and ellipses. The elliptic treatment of Lucy's traumatic experience is typical of a traumatic realism which presents a sense of haunting belatedness and generates an emotional and cognitive crisis. As Ganteau argues, elegiac narratives "perform the effects of disrupted time" (96) by evoking the belated time of trauma and its disruptive effects.

As these comments illustrate, it seems as if Lucy were the victim of a grief rooted in a crypt or, as Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok would argue, her trauma rests "on some 'gaping wound' opened long ago within the ego" (142). The crypt is a symbol for secrets that are almost unspeakable as Lucy's silence illustrates. Prey to frequent bouts of melancholia, Lucy's coming-of-age narrative is conveyed through a poetics of limitations and faithfulness to her wounds. The scars and the echoes of the past return to torment the heroine. As Lucy and Ralph hear "the sound of keening" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 118) coming from a cottage where people are mourning one of the two fisherman caught by a storm at sea, Lucy surprisingly wonders: "'How could I have run away from them?' [...]' 'I made them suffer as those women are suffering now. I long for their forgiveness. That will just not go away'" (118). Here, as Ralph reaffirms his love to the girl, Lucy admits that she was "possessed" and she will continue to live with her memories. The marine setting and the wailing pain of the women corroborate the idea of Lucy's story as an elegiac narrative where sudden epiphanic confessions occur. Interestingly, neither the omniscient narrator nor the characters will allude to this lucid explanation never again. Therefore, readers realise that Lucy's silent self-begetting is encrypted in her psyche or, as Abraham and Torok contend, "entombed in a fast and secure place, awaiting resurrection" (141). Memories become less distinct or, as the narrator explains, "time turned memories into figments anyway" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 110). In this sense, the elegiac form contributes to a poetics of relationality in which the grieving subject exposes himself/herself to the others. By using a poetics of vulnerability based on lamentation, silences and unrequited love, Trevor mobilises the powers of elegy to alternate the visible with what is left invisible and unsaid.

Gothic and doubles

Lucy's crypt contains a loss where shadows and voices of the past congregate, providing a potent image of vulnerability. In addition to temporal disorientation, *The Story of Lucy Gault* evokes also Gothic conventions: the isolated and decaying home, a female heroine left alone, the ghosts of the past and the socio-political transformations reflect a certain gothic mode. As already alluded to, Lahardane, with the remnants of the pasture land and the avenue on which chestnut trees had been planted centuries ago (4-5), represents the typical Ascendancy Houses, but it also recalls gothic castles since the characters themselves see the place as an "old gaunt house" (165). A mirror-image of the Anglo-Irish families that moved to Ireland by the eighteenth century, Lahardane, like other Big Houses, becomes the symbol of colonial power during the turbulent years of Irish history. In this respect, Trevor resorts to the theme of the decaying Big House already captured in many Irish novels, such as in *Castle Rackrent* (1800) by Maria Edgeworth and, in the twentieth century, in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* (1929) and in *Birchwood* (1973) by John Banville, among others. A sense of anxiety is at the core of the Big House literary tradition, a feeling of uneasiness also shared by Gothic fiction. In *The Story of Lucy Gault*, as in Trevor's other two Big House novels, this sense of gradual decline is further problematised by the tragedies of the two World Wars and the Anglo-Irish conflicts that threaten the future of the Ascendancy. During these years, big houses were burned or bombed and eventually abandoned, an adverse fate that also affects Lahardane. As already observed before, Lahardane had been visited by historical characters and had been invaded by historical incidents. The house then discloses some fragmentary memories of the past that still haunt the present. This ties in with Vera Kreilkamp's contention that the Big House "constitutes a nostalgic or reactionary form, rooted in elegiac longings" (Kreilkamp, "The Novel of the Big House" 61).

Due to the sense of decay and insecurity, Big House novels retain some gothic elements. According to Kreilkamp, the Big House shares with the Gothic some features, such as the motif of the decaying mansion; problems related to lineage and succession; an exiled major character, usually, the landlord; and inherited guilts and family secrets (Kreilkamp, *The Anglo-Irish Novel* 23-4). Trevor uses these elements to create narrative distortions, thus laying emphasis on the condition of alienation of a young Protestant woman living in a solitary place where the signs of the past are

visible and have an impact on the present. The house, close to a seashore where waves roared up “like wild white horses, spectral forms exploding into foam” (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 116), is decayed and dusty and “the dark clung to it” (115). In this gothic atmosphere Lucy already appears as a ghost, imagining the day when Ralph will go away and leave her alone. Like Lahardane seems to be “petrified, arrested in the drama there had been” (139), so Lucy is “stilled too, a detail as in one of her own embroidered compositions” (139). Both the heroine and the place are subject to narrative stasis, despite the political forces which govern the passing of time outside Lahardane.

This image of temporal suspension recalls Miss Havisham’s sideration in her dilapidated mansion, Satis House, in Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*. Notably, heroines of Victorian *Bildungsromane* populate Lucy’s imagination. In her solitary house, Lucy devours many of the books collected in the library. By reading these novels, Lucy is “drawn into a world of novelty, into other centuries and other places, into romance and complicated relationships” (78). For instance, Trevor’s heroine seems to be particularly attracted to Rosa Dartle’s vulnerability. A minor character in Dickens’ *David Copperfield*, Rosa is a spinster like Lucy and displays a scar on her lip. The scar is a tangible reminder of the emotional pain Rosa suffered from in her childhood, like Lucy’s permanent limp stands for her abnegation when she ran away to the woods above Lahardane. And yet, Lucy is not vindicative like Dickens’ character. Interestingly, she feels closer to Mrs. Rochester, “[w]hom nobody had sympathy for” (118). The reference to Mrs. Rochester, alias Bertha Mason, reminds readers of a traditional gothic female figure. A ghost-like character that haunts Thornfield Hall in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Bertha represents the inherent darkness of human mind, a classic theme of the Gothic. Her madness elicits empathy in Lucy as she possibly sees in the creole woman the same anxieties and uncertainties about identity and the repression of desires. To some extent, these Victorian doubles reflect Lucy’s attributes and create a duality of the self.

The *doppelgänger*, a common figure in Gothic literature, has a significant impact on the lives of the hero or heroine. As Eran Dorfman argues, the double often takes “the form of a more or less exact copy of the self” (3) in Gothic literature. Through a mechanism of projection and introjection, doubles reveal that “the boundaries between I and world, I and Other, I and me, are far from being clear” (3). Beyond the connections between Lucy and these female Victorian characters, Lucy also incorporates her parents’ attitudes.

As she grows up, she tends to wear her mother's white dresses and takes up petit-point embroidery as Heloise used to do. Moreover, Lucy starts up the hives again, showing a strong interest in bee-keeping, thus maintaining her father's production of honey. On the one hand, by wearing Heloise's dresses and by keeping bees as Everard would once do, Lucy introjects what she finds pleasurable inside. On the other hand, she tends to project her sense of alienation outside, sharing it with the heroines of the Victorian novels she eagerly reads. According to Dorfman, primary narcissism lies at the core of the double, involving "a continuous and laborious process of introjection and projection" (23). When one is confronted with the inevitable struggle between inside and outside, and understands that many desired things are to be found outside, there emerges "a difficulty in fully acknowledging the separate existence of others and one's dependency on them, resulting in a withdrawal into one's own sphere" (22). In Lucy Gault, however, this withdrawal into the self bears the marks of the interface between fiction and reality. As Lucy remarks, "[i]n novels people run away. And novels were a reflection of reality, of all the world's desperation and of its happiness, as much of one as of the other" (*The Story of Lucy Gault* 174-75). The direct and indirect evocation of other literary characters is a metafictional strategy which directs the reader's attention towards the fact that Lucy is not alone in her excruciating experience. In addition, it underscores the self-begetting nature of the novel since Lucy seems to be self-aware of her own condition. The devotion to the past, a characteristic element of the elegy and the Gothic, prevails in Lucy's self-quest and this saturation with the past becomes a source of redemption, paradoxically healing. While it is true that Lucy Gault shares various elements with doubles, like Wordsworth's Lucy, Miss Havisham, Rosa Dartle, Bertha Mason, and Dorothea Brooke, her quest for identity does not end with death, destruction or marriage. Lucy, penitent and vigilant, dissolves with Lahardane into absence within the text. As we will see in the following pages, her personality displays saint-like qualities, conjuring up the image of such martyrs as Saint Cecilia and Saint Lucia.

Trauma, dispossession, relationality

It is undeniable that the spectral evocations of the past, the temporal disruptions, silences, ellipses and repetitions are all elements that can be ascribed to literary trauma theory. For classical theorists such as

Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, among others, traumatic events are unspeakable because they result in mental wounds that disrupt the mechanisms of memory and consciousness. As Roger Luckhurst argues, drawing from Caruth, trauma is “a crisis of representation, of history and truth, and of narrative time” (5). Other scholars have instead addressed the question of trauma and vulnerability in more creative ways. Unspeakable does not always mean unrepresentable and, as Michelle Balaev contends, silences should be understood “less as an epistemological conundrum or neurobiological fact, but more as an outcome of cultural values and ideologies” (19). Balaev sees silence as a rhetorical device which enables readers to imagine the traumatic experience. This view fits with Barry Stampfl’s contention that “the unspeakable is always already (paradoxically) part of a universe of discourse, a form of signification” (25). What these observations showcase is that when we engage with the question of representing trauma, plural potentialities may arise if one remembers, as Balaev explains, that “the meaning of trauma is found between the poles of the individual and society” (17). The practice of sharing trauma and the experience of caring can then challenge its inherent unspeakability, alerting readers to a plurality of situations in which singular traumas are addressed and evoked. Vulnerability, Brené Brown suggests, “begets vulnerability” (50), its contagious power eliciting solidarity and relationality as Trevor’s *Bildungsroman* demonstrates.

This orientation to share trauma and care for the other seems to echo Butler and Athanasiou’s understanding of dispossession as a twofold complex concept. On the one hand, dispossession arises from violent practices by which people are “disowned and abjected by normative and normalizing powers” (1), as in the histories of colonial conflict. On the other, it describes “the constituted, preemptive losses that condition one’s being dispossessed (or letting oneself becoming dispossessed) by another” (1). *The Story of Lucy Gault* can be said to address this dichotomy. The acts of violence against the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy may be read as an act of resistance against the threats to lose land and rights. Likewise, as Everard himself realises before the ruins of World War II, the English and the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy had ignored the needs of Irish people, prompting them to turn violent. The novel then blends both perspectives, problematising the legitimacy of the frames of violence and victimhood. In short, all the characters are victims of their own choices and this multiple exposure to loss provides the basis for a certain relationality and interdependence.

As suggested above, ruins and grief are important components of *The Story of Lucy Gault*. They can be found everywhere in the novel. Ruins stand for the passage of time and imply the persistence of the past into the present. Like Lahardane bears the marks of historical events, so “*Ireland of the ruins [...] more ruins and always more*” (*The Story of Lucy Gault* 145; emphasis in the original) is what Everard imagines to find in the wake of the disaster of World War II. In the aftermath of Heloise’s death, Everard travels around Europe. The conflict has wreaked enormous damage across the continent. In Vienna, for instance, Everard finds “a broken city, its great buildings looming like spectres among the ruins” (146). The debris of the war materialises through the uncanny form of spectres and ruins coming from the past and connecting to the present. Here, Captain Gault reflects on how grief and greed have wiped out the heart of Europe. In the same way, Anglo-Irish families, like the Gaults themselves, have drained Ireland of its energy, ignoring the aspirations of the dispossessed (146). This is what Everard envisages before going back home where he will discover the truth about his daughter and a country in the throes of great changes.

However, the individual-collective dichotomy governs the narrative organisation of the novel, connecting grief and pain on a personal and national level. Interestingly, one could also read Lucy’s quest for self-definition alongside the theme of a nation attempting to establish itself. The daughter of a member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and of an English woman, Lucy stands amid contradictory forces like Trevor himself who was born to Anglo-Irish parents and spent most of his life in England. The rise of Irish nationalism, exemplified by the attacks at Lahardane, World War II and the economic boom of the “Celtic Tiger” are the visible signs of a world in a state of flux, moving forth towards the future of technological progress. The contrast between past and future running throughout the novel is evident when Everard Gault returns to Lahardane. In the wake of Heloise’s death, Captain Gault finds a “different Ireland everywhere” (158). We are in the late 1940s and the country is undergoing radical transformations: while in Enniseala mackintosh coats are being manufactured (158), electricity reaches Lahardane and Everard buys a car (165), hoping to save his daughter’s life from silence and isolation.

Whereas unspeakability affects all the characters, Trevor highlights the feeling of relationality by means of a multi-layered plot in which connections are yet possible. Revelations, visions, hallucinations, and annunciations are the ways through which the novel connects the various

characters, despite their isolated lives, thus performing some kind of narrative solidarity. Albeit her central role, Lucy is not the only wounded character featured in the novel. As already alluded to, Everard displays physical and mental wounds. However, a certain “fissuring of the subject” (Butler and Athanasiou ix) also affects Heloise and Horahan whose tormented existences contribute to a choral image of interdependence. When the Gaults settle down in Montemarmoreo, Heloise experiences a miscarriage, an incident that definitely extinguishes her hopes to have a new child. To some extent, both Heloise and Everard sublimate their grief devoting themselves to religious art and visiting Italian churches with their frescoes and mosaics. Heloise, for instance, is especially fascinated by the figure of Saint Cecilia in the local church of Montemarmoreo, “the saint whose courage in her tribulations had for centuries given heart to this town: all that was peace as much as there could be” (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 67). According to a legend, the young Cecilia, who was born to a rich Roman family, vowed her virginity to God. She then got married to the pagan Valerian who later accepted her vow and was baptised. However, both Valerian and Cecilia were arrested and eventually executed. Saint Cecilia, who is venerated by the Christian, Anglican and Orthodox Churches, is considered the patron of music and musicians because she heard heavenly music during her wedding ceremony. The image of the martyr, with her story of resilience and abnegation, haunts Heloise. When the Fascist regime seizes control of Italy, the Gaults move to the Swiss town of Bellinzona, close to the Italian border, where Heloise dies of a pandemic flu. Here, in her bed, Heloise wonders whether the church in Montemarmoreo has survived the bombs of World War II and if the image of the saint has been “lost in rubble, violently destroyed, as the saint herself had been” (133). Other iconographic images obsess Heloise’s mind, such as the recollections of *The Resurrection* (1463-65) by Piero della Francesca in Sansepolcro (Arezzo) or Frà Angelico’s annunciations which adorn the Convent of San Marco in Florence, the Basilica of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Sangiovanni Valdarno (Arezzo) and the Church of San Domenico in Cortona (Arezzo).

In a similar vein, Raphael’s *The Ecstasy of Saint Cecilia* (1514-17) may come to the reader’s mind. Though this altarpiece is not mentioned in Trevor’s novel, it is evocative of the vivid impressions conveyed by Renaissance religious art. In the Renaissance, painters used lights to express emotions, to shed light on the vibrations of the body. The

chiaroscuro technique allowed Renaissance painters to juxtapose light with shade to achieve a contrasting effect. As Percy Bysshe Shelley famously commented on Raphael's *Ecstasy*, Saint Cecilia seems rapt in her inspiration, "her deep, dark, eloquent eyes lifted up [...] her countenance, as it were, calmed by the depth of its passion and rapture, and penetrated throughout with the warm and radiant light of life" (Saintsbury 170). Maybe, Trevor was thinking of the Romantic poet's words when he evoked Saint Cecilia's luminous image, particularly when Lucy herself visits the Italian church. Once her father dies in the mid-1950s, Lucy sets out on a journey to Italy and Switzerland in search of her parents' traces and of herself. In Montemarmoreo, she walks the streets her mother had belonged, feeling "a shadow and the distant echo of a voice remembered" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 204). Lucy is told the story of the saint who "had heard all the world's music that was yet to come" (204), whose body first resisted the terrifying heat of the flames and then lived for three days after the decapitation. In the church, Lucy is mesmerised by the altarpiece image of the saint whose pale-blue eyes evoke a sense of relief. There is, then, a somehow redemptive quality in the eternal power of religious art that metaphorically enables characters to connect with each other, thus putting them on an equal footing.

Likewise, Trevor uses the *chiaroscuro* metaphor to shed light on Horahan's problematic condition. Obsessed by visions and hallucinations, Horahan undergoes his traumatic development and must deal with its aftermath. His restlessness leads him to change jobs: first, he works as a porter at Enniseala station, then he joins the army in the hope of finding in military discipline a refuge from his confusion. Throughout his life, "he bore his torment with fortitude" (123), the narrator observes, finding solace in prayers. In the camp where he serves as a soldier, he regularly visits the local chapel. Here, in the dark, Horahan "knelt before the Virgin he could not see, begging for the gift of a sign, a whisper of assurance that he was not abandoned" (124). In spite of the physical and mental dark that surrounds him, Horahan feels a luminous halo emanating from the Virgin, a radiance of light and consolation that all the characters in Trevor's novel aspire to achieve.

By focussing on the miraculous eyes of Saint Cecilia's iconography and on the Virgin's merciful and compassionate face, Trevor may be said to capture the reader's attention to what is hidden or invisible, opening to the material proximity of the other. It is through this ethics of care that

we can acknowledge our common sense of precarity and vulnerability. This is what Emmanuel Levinas reminds us when he addresses the ethical implications of his philosophy of alterity on which Butler's investigation is partly based on. The face, Levinas argues, "is a living presence. [...] The face speaks" (66). In other words, the encounter with the face of the other makes us aware of our own vulnerability and it illuminates its potential to relationality because "the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation" (189). In the novel, the face-to-face encounter materialises when Horahan unexpectedly visits Lahardane and meets Lucy, the drowned child of his delirious illusions. The man mutters during an unsettling conversation with Everard while Lucy, looking at the features of the man, "saw there only madness. No meaning dignified his return; no order patterned, as perhaps it might have, past and present; no sense was made of anything" (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 191). This episode seems to adhere to Levinas' epiphanic moments of gnosis since the face is a form of signification, the face "opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation" (201).

This scene represents the turning point of Lucy's quest. In the wake of his father's death, Lucy's story becomes a tale of bright existence, a mythical account where light and darkness blend. Lucy accepts her past and begins her journey towards redemption, culminating in her decision to visit Horahan at the mental asylum where he has eventually been interned. For seventeen years, in spite of Henry and Bridget's disagreement and the local gossip in Enniseala, Lucy regularly visits the man who had tried to set Lahardane on fire, until his death. They play "snaked and ladders," a board game that allegorically stands as a metaphor for the fortunes and misfortunes of human condition, the ladders that take us up rapidly and the snakes that pull us down. Thus, Trevor portrays with poignancy the ups and downs of life, turning Lucy's story into myth that transgress the barriers of time and guilt.

The allegoric imagery of Renaissance art and hagiography is crucial to *The Story of Lucy Gault* and, more broadly, to Trevor's narrative style (see McAlindon "William Trevor and the Saints;" Monaco "Between Hagiography and Insanity"). By resorting to narrative strategies that disarray the apparent realism of the novel, Trevor's narratives open to new meanings and promotes relationality. Rather than representing the unspeakability of trauma, Trevor presents the paradoxical productive effects of traumatic experiences, using allegoric images to illuminate the

dark side of human mind. Lucy Gault stands amid these manifestations of grief, becoming the symbolic point where pain and trauma converge. As Tom Herron observes, it is no accident “that Lucy, whose name comes down to us, via the Latin *lucere* (to shine) and *lux* (light) and *lucidus* (clear) from the Greek feminine form of *leukos* (bright, shining, white), is so named” (163). To keep with hagiographic references, her name brings to mind Lucia of Syracuse, the Christian martyr protector of the sight. Thus, in *The Story of Lucy Gault*, the name itself is a poignant remainder of illuminating grace despite the darkness that surrounds the story of the heroine and of the other characters. In this respect, the name reveals the struggle to achieve empathy and solidarity. In order for connections to happen, we must allow ourselves to be seen, we must let the light in the cracks of our minds. As Brown argues, vulnerability is the most daring action in one’s life and it is about showing and to be seen. Vulnerability, Brown writes, “isn’t good or bad: It’s not what we call a dark emotion, not is it always a light, positive experience. Vulnerability is the core of all emotions and feelings. To feel is to be vulnerable” (34). By sharing their inner selves and exposing their wounds, Lucy and the other characters strive for visibility. Thus, Lucy, as her name suggests, epitomises the luminous gifts of imperfection and fragility that can awaken her and the other characters to connections.

Coda: A story of self-begetting

We have seen that, unlike the physical journey undertaken by the male protagonists of the classical *Bildungsroman*, Lucy’s psychological quest is predicated upon suffering and contemplation. Her relational ties with the other are established in the recognition of a common vulnerability. In *The Story of Lucy Gault*, exposure to vulnerability may be then seen in terms of dispossession, understood as a means to reject invisibility. As Jean-Michel Ganteau and Susana Onega state in *The Wounded Hero in Contemporary Fiction*, “the figures of the wound and the quest thematise such ethical issues as openness or exposure to the other” (13). The Lucy readers find by the end of the novel is a miracle, an uncanny and mythical figure in a country where mobile phones, the Euro, mass tourism and the Internet have appeared and global economy is thriving. In the local cafés where Lucy regularly has tea and a piece of cake, she is referred to as “the Protestant woman” (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 209) or, as Lucy herself muses,

“a relic, left over, respected for what she was” (209). In a country that has gone through major historical watersheds, the story of Lucy Gault “came to find a place among the stories of the Troubles that were told on the neighbourhoods” (70). Conversations in cafés and travellers’ tales contribute to turn, with their telling and retelling, Lucy into a legend. As the wayward child grows up and becomes aware of her condition, new stories about the solitary Protestant woman are narrated in the area, these more recent versions less critical than the stories of the previous generation. Lucy herself, the narrator observes, “was aware that this opinion was as temporary as the one that anger and distaste had once created: the story noy yet passed into myth, and would be not cast in permanence until her life was over, until it was reflected in time’s cold light” (138).

As Lee has emphasised, commenting on the title itself of Trevor’s *Bildungsroman*, “‘the story of’ is a telling phrase for the title of this gravely beautiful, subtle and haunting Irish novel. It means not only what happens to Lucy Gault, but that what happened to her has become a story, first a local tale, told and retold, and then a legend” (n.p.). There seems to be a redemptive quality in Lucy’s story which reflects its self-begetting nature. This self-reflexive orientation is evocative of Steven Kellman’s “self-begetting novel,” by which he means a work that appears to have been written by a character within that work. “Like an infinite recession of Chinese boxes,” Kellman explains, “the self-begetting novel begins again where it ends” (Kellman, “The Fiction” 1245). Though he generally refers to first-person accounts, his model can however suit those narratives that double back on themselves, making the whole story a repeated narration of its protagonist. Here, as Kellman adds, a certain fusion of form and content emerges since we are confronted with both “process and product, quest and goal” (1246). Thus, a central concern in the fiction of self-begetting is the question of identity as the typical protagonist of a self-begetting novel is a solitary heroine or hero who ultimately tries to beget her/his own self and his/her own story. The issue of names as markers of identity are crucial in the self-begetting novel and this question is also thematised in *The Story of Lucy Gault* as suggested before. Whereas Trevor’s heroine has a name and a surname, the manipulation of her identity is achieved by means of alter egos that allegorically surround Lucy, thereby underscoring the transformative and multi-faceted nature of Lucy’s quest for an identity of her own. The tales embedded in the life story of Lucy Gault encapsulate different facets of Lucy’s personality: the guilty child, the suffering abandoned heroine,

the Protestant martyr, the stoic and determined woman, the compassionate old woman. The novel becomes a mirror text where we find duplications of the central character, thus metamorphosing self into myth.

“Only the myths would linger, the stories that were told” (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 195). With this burden of cultural myth and the various *doppelgängers*, like the heroines of Lucy’s favourite Victorian novels and the female martyrs, Lucy’s identity is a palimpsest where various stories of abnegation and redemption converge. In the final moments of the novel, we find an old Lucy thinking about her childhood, her parents, Horahan, Bridget and Henry. They have all died and Lahardane, once a gothic house, will probably become a hotel when Lucy herself will die. And yet, in spite of the wounds, the permanent limping and the traumatic experiences, light is what readers can find by the end of the novel. Lucy’s luminous radiation, a “flicker in the dark” (227), reminds us of the bright colours of Piero della Francesca’s frescoes, a light out of darkness that impresses greatly:

Her tranquillity is their astonishment. For that they come, to be amazed again that such peace is there: all they have heard, and still hear now, does not record it. Calamity shaped a life when, long ago, chance was so cruel. Calamity shapes the story that is told, and is the reason for its being: is what they know, besides, the gentle fruit of such misfortune’s harvest? They like to think so: she has sensed it that they do. Their wonderment is in their gestures and in their presents, and gazing from their eyes. They did not witness for themselves, but others did, the journey made to bring redemption; they only wonder why it was made, so faithfully and for so long. Why was the past belittled? Where did mercy come from when there should have been none left? (224)

Peace and bewilderment are the notes on which Lucy’s *Bildungsroman* ends. The two Catholic nuns that visit Lucy are stunned by the old woman’s recollections, almost hostages to Lucy’s tale of plights and pain. They wonder how calamity might have yielded such tranquillity. However, what the above-quoted passage also illustrates, is the self-begetting power of Lucy’s excruciating experience. Calamity gave life and still continues to cast light on Lucy’s story, being the reason of her journey towards redemption. Interestingly, the shift of the verbal tense from the past simple to the present simple (“shaped”/“shapes”) is a narrative device that stretches the perpetual presence of the past. In the final chapter, Trevor employs the present simple, creating the uncanny effect of a disjointed temporality that makes Lucy’s search for self-definition even more visible. This dialogue

between past and present entails the blurred distinctions between fiction and self, what Kellman sees as “an urge toward immortality” (Kellman, “The Fiction” 1255). In this way, Trevor engages with the power of narrative art to play with time, plot and characterisation. The story precedes Lucy, her life told and retold over the years to people she does not know.

If the temporal markers that abound in the novel provide readers with a historical background and a timeline of the events, the elegiac language of loss, the gothic atmosphere, the allegory and the self-reflexive stance contribute to the complexity of Lucy’s coming-of-age story. Sitting in her chair and glancing at the dusk that illuminates the sky, Lucy observes the fading day and “smiles all the way” (Trevor, *The Story of Lucy Gault* 227). Unlike the ending in Bowen’s *The Last September* where the family estate is burned and destructed, Lucy’s smile is a poignant reminder of life. In Trevor’s world, care and mercy become the condition for the creation of a wounded subject who is yet aware of the compensative power of human connections and of the illuminating force of storytelling.



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“Sharing the Same Soil:” Sally Rooney’s *Normal People* and the Coming-of-Age Romance

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“All these years they’ve been like two little plants sharing the same plot of soil, growing around one another, contorting to make room, taking certain unlikely positions. But in the end she has done something for him, she’s made a new life possible, and she can always feel good about that.”
(Normal People 265)

“Here, Marianne. You’re not cold, you know. You’re not like that, not at all.”
(Normal People 106)

1. Introduction

In recent years, several edited volumes have been released on literary fiction and genre, and on the centrality of generic narrative forms to past and present developments in the field of Anglophone literary studies (Frow 2005; Dowd and Rulyova 2015; Cooke 2020). A debate has emerged on the subject of the ‘genre turn’ in literary fiction: authors today dare to adopt genres that until recently had fallen into oblivion – horror (McCarthy 2006), science fiction/fantasy (Ishiguro 2005), the historical novel and autopathography (Mantel 2003, 2009, 2012, 20013, 2020). Although this move towards genre has been amply recognized and elaborated upon by

literary critics (Dorson 2017; Lanzendörfer 2016; Rothman 2014), the romance genre has been almost entirely neglected by the recent increase in scholarship on generic forms of literature.

Meanwhile, the field of popular romance studies has been steadily expanding over the course of the last two decades, with important contributions being made to scholarship in the different subgenres – historical, gothic, paranormal, young adult, erotic, etc. – and themes – class, wealth, gender, sexuality, religion, race and ethnicity. However, the scholarship in this field has remained largely unknown to literary critics, while popular romance scholars have also remained at a distance from the field of literary fiction.

Against such stark division of labour, David Schmid argues that “[w]e need a more nuanced understanding of the relation between literary and genre fiction, one that avoids maintaining each half of this binary in isolation, and instead imagines the possibility of hybrid mixture.” (Schmid quoted in Dorson, *McCarthy* 4) While this call has been heeded in the genres of horror, science fiction, or the historical novel, as noted above, much remains to be done when it comes to the romance genre, which is not usually admitted to converse, on equal footing, with the domain of literary fiction.

A rare exception to this trend is *Rethinking the Romance Genre*, a volume edited in 2013 by Emily S. Davis. This inquiry aims at analysing political postcolonial texts that too hastily, to Davis’ mind, have been categorized as ‘sell-outs’ for their mixing of political concerns with generic and popular artistic forms and modes of representation. Davis particularly focuses on genres – the romance, the gothic, and the melodrama – that have been, for a long time, associated with a domain more private than public. Against dichotomous views of the private and the public, Davis contends that “the task of cultural analysis is not to pit the ‘merely personal’ against the ‘profoundly structural,’” (*Rethinking* 225) but to attend to the ways intimacy, sexuality, and the personal sphere contribute to create the current existential episteme.

Following this insight, the present essay seeks to make the two fields (literary fiction – in one of its most distinguished subgenres: the bildungsroman/coming-of-age form – and romance fiction – one of the least respected literary genres comprising the modern/contemporary spectrum of literature) dialogue with one another by analysing the construction of love and romantic relationships in a current and composite narrative which

incorporates elements borrowed from both genres. Marianne and Connell's development into adulthood takes place because of their encounter, and through one another. Therefore, the balance *Normal People* strikes between the two literary forms is so precise that one could not easily tell if the love story is inscribed within the coming-of-age narrative or vice versa.

For this reason, this essay is divided into two parts of comparable relevance. In the first part, *Normal People* will be analysed in light of Pamela Regis' eight essential narrative elements of the romance, at the same time as it will explore the ways in which the text adheres and/or departs from the tropes of the romance genre.

The second part will discuss *Normal People*'s adherence to the narrative and discursive conventions of the bildungsroman. It will be argued that although the novel significantly departs from several of its fundamental canonical tenets – the individual at the centre of the narrative and the accomplished parable of achieved (or failed) personal development – it continues the genre's tradition in the attempt to harmonise the complementary spheres of “mobility” and “interiority” (*The Way* 4), arguably a reworking of the dichotomous terms of the ‘structural’ and the ‘private’, while also directing the psychological development of its characters towards a final socialization that exemplifies, in a contemporary fashion, the acquisition of maturity and adult understanding. In other words, in *Normal People*, “self-development and integration are complementary and convergent trajectories.” (*The Way* 18-19)

As a romance novel, *Normal People* shows Connell and Marianne's construction of their relationship with one another. As a coming-of-age story, the novel places such relationship centre-stage, outlining the dynamic course of it as if it were a ‘dual hero,’ so to speak, an anti-egocentric protagonist endorsing a logic of material and emotional co-dependence and reciprocal support, ultimately directed towards finding a place in the world.

In the third and concluding part of this article, it will be observed that the particular declension *Normal People* makes of the essential elements of the romance novel constitutes a concrete instance, within the context of Anglophone literary studies, of the major social and cultural transition reflected by numerous literary texts, from staging ‘static’ parables of success/failure to recounting dynamic modulations, mirroring (and confirming) Gilles Deleuze's insights on human subjectivities undergoing, in the current era, a momentous shift, from grounded to fluctuating ‘modulations,’ form deep-rooted to nomadic and rhizomic.

2. Normal People as a Romance Novel

Pamela Regis's *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003) has played a fundamental role in re-routing scholarly approaches to romance from ideological and psychologising to straight-forwardly academic. As Eric Selinger explains: "by doubling back to pre-feminist, non-Freudian approaches to the romance novel, Regis essentially hit the reset button on the whole enterprise of popular romance studies." (*Rebooting* 3)¹ Her work does not only put together a modern canon of the romance novel, sketching its history and pre-modern literary affiliations, it also individuates eight essential narrative elements to be employed as analytical categories for understanding the romance, several 'events' in the storyline which must occur for a romance novel to be defined as such.

By applying her eight essential elements to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Regis illustrates the movement "from a state of unfreedom to one of freedom" (*Natural History* 30) which, she maintains, constitutes the trajectory of every romantic plot:

Eight narrative events take a heroine in a romance novel from encumbered to free.² In one or more scenes, romance novels always depict the following: the initial state of society in which heroine and hero must court, the meeting between heroine and hero, the barrier to the union of heroine and hero, the attraction between heroine and hero, the declaration of love between heroine and hero, the point of ritual death, the recognition by heroine and hero of the means to overcome the barrier, and the betrothal. These elements are essential. (*Natural History* 30)³

This grid allows for a virtually endless number of variations: the meeting between heroine and hero, for instance, can be recounted in flashbacks, the 'betrothal,' especially in LGBTQ+ romances, is often figurative. As Selinger points out "wary of marriage, some contemporary romance novels deflect the 'betrothal,' or deflate it through humour." (*Rebooting* 2) The barriers, especially in contemporary novels – seldom featuring dragons or evil kings – can be thoroughly internal, that is constituted by the "attitudes, temperament, values, and beliefs held by heroine and hero that prevent the union." (*Natural History* 32) In modern and contemporary romance novels, barriers are usually related to a certain "inability or unwillingness to declare for each other, and the declaration scene marks the end of this barrier." (*Natural History* 34) Similarly, in its current declension, the moment of

recognition does not primarily indicate the recognition of the means to overcome concrete barriers, but the recognition of one's true needs beyond prejudices and insecurities, external pressures and expectations.

2.1 *Society Defined/The Meeting*

Regis explains 'society defined' as follows: "Near the beginning of the novel, the society that the heroine and hero will confront in their courtship is defined for the reader. This society is in some way flawed; it may be incomplete, superannuated, or corrupt. It always oppresses the heroine and hero." (*Natural History* 31) As Marianne and Connell go to school together, the reader knows they have already met. The first encounter for the reader, however, takes place at Marianne's mansion, where Connell goes from time to time to pick up Lorraine, his mother, who works there as a housekeeper. Connell and Marianne, therefore, are already very much impacted (and indeed oppressed) by the social context in which they meet and become close to one another.

In the novel, 'society defined' and 'the meeting' happen at the same time, in the same opening sequence. The narrative makes the 'macro' and the 'micro,' the 'structural' and the 'private,' proceed hand in hand from the very beginning, suggesting the importance of social status and environment to personal histories and sentimental experiences. In this regard, the novel is a contemporary representative of a time-honoured tradition of romantic stories and its authors – from Samuel Richardson to Jane Austen – that have always discussed – transversally, but in a recurrent and sustained manner – the economic institutions at the centre of British society (marriage, servitude, financial autonomy, and patrimonial laws), and their impact on private lives.

As Connell and Marianne are very young, however, they do not necessarily recognize or possess the vocabulary necessary to articulate the 'larger issues' at play. A little later in the story, shortly before kissing for the first time, they tease one another:

He told her she should try reading *The Communist Manifesto*, he thought she would like it, and he offered to write down the title for her so she wouldn't forget. I know what *The Communist Manifesto* is called, she said. He shrugged, okay. After a moment he added, smiling: You are trying to act superior, but like, you haven't

read it. She had to laugh then, and he laughed because she did. They couldn't look at each other when they were laughing, they had to look into corners of the room, or at their feet. (*Normal People* 13 – 'NP' hereafter)

The scene endearingly weaves together the mood of awkwardness and attraction between the protagonists with a telling textual reference, adumbrating the larger issues that will play a role in the development of their relationship. Aside from establishing their unequal social statuses, the initial sequence tells us that Connell and Marianne are bright students, that Connell is popular among teachers and peers, and that Marianne, on the contrary, "has no friends, and spends her lunchtimes alone reading novels." (*NP* 2) Society, therefore, is defined as unequal and 'political' from the beginning.⁴

2.2 *The Barrier(s)*

Normal People presents a combination of external, 'structural' barriers, and 'private,' internal ones. According to Regis:

External barriers include elements of the setting, especially the society in power at the beginning of the work, as well as the heroine and hero's family, the economic situation of either or both halves of the couple, and coincidence. [...] Elements of internal barriers include the attitudes, temperament, and values held by heroine and hero that prevent the union. (*Natural History* 32)

At the beginning of their relationship, as already noted, Connell and Marianne seem to be especially oblivious to the 'macro' barriers that define the context in which they act. The possibility, for instance, that Marianne's mother might not be thrilled at the idea of Connell seeing her daughter has to be suggested to him by Lorraine and comes as a shock. In his world, the scholastic microcosm, Connell is the successful, well-adjusted person; Marianne is an 'odd' character with no apparent prospects or advantages.

For Connell, therefore, the main barrier is the possibility of being judged by his friends, the prospect of having to explain to them his attachment to Marianne. Acceptance from peers is very important to him and later barriers, for Connell, will always be related to one form or another of social anxiety and self-acceptance in relation to perceived expectations.

Marianne, in turn, does not perceive herself as someone worthy of love because of an abusive familial environment we learn about little by little. Men, in her family – her father in the past, and then her brother – have always been aggressive towards Marianne, and her mother does not protect her from their behaviour. Marianne, therefore, lives her life haunted by the thought of not being a person easy to love: “Well, I don’t feel lovable. I think I have an unlovable sort of...I have a coldness about me, I am difficult to like.” (*NP* 101)

All the subsequent barriers on Marianne’s part, such as the string of sadistic boyfriends she will engage with, are a consequence of this primary, inner impediment.

Marianne’s feelings of inadequacy will be confirmed when Connell, after declaring his love for her in private, asks a popular girl at school to the graduation party. This episode, which will determine their first break up, will occasionally return as a truly painful memory in Marianne’s life, as well as in Connell and Marianne’s shared history, one that Marianne will interpret, for a long time, as ‘evidence’ of her supposedly unlovable nature and personality.

2.3 The Attraction

If Marianne’s ironic, defiant, and seemingly autonomous personality makes of her an outcast in high school, it works in her favour in college. When Marianne and Connell meet again at Trinity College in Dublin, everything has changed: Marianne is at the centre of a rather privileged and posturing circle of friends, and working-class, unpretentious Connell struggles to feel at ease in the new environment.

Their attraction to one another, however, has not changed and will soon lead them to resume their relationship. From this moment onwards, while the connection between Connell and Marianne deepens, their space of private, intense communication will constantly be threatened by their respective financial circumstances, their families, and their friends. All these actors will take turns in disrupting and intruding, in making their presence felt. Sometimes, Connell and Marianne will manage to preserve their privacy, other times these interferences will be stronger than their capacity to understand and communicate effectively with one another.

The sexual attraction between the two protagonists is a narrative element romance novels usually dose, playing with the reader’s

expectations. Sexual relations can happen early in the story – before the protagonists fall in love with one another – or at the end of it, but their occurrence usually signifies a turning point in the relationship. Connell and Marianne engage in sexual relations almost immediately and without investing this event of any particular significance with regards to their relationship. The ‘naturalness’ of their bond is apparent throughout, from the opening scene, over the course of which a strong and ‘exclusive’ path of communication seems to establish itself:

When he [Connell] speaks to Marianne he has a sense of total privacy between them. He could tell her anything about himself, even weird things, and she would never repeat them, he knows that. Being alone with her is like opening a door away from normal life and then closing it behind him. He’s not frightened of her, actually she’s a pretty relaxed person, but he fears being around her, because of the confusing way he finds himself behaving, the things he says that he would never ordinarily say. (NP 6-7)

The attraction between the protagonists never ceases to exist, it is an overriding force that will always pull them close. Initially, it is surprising and destabilizing: “He found himself fantasizing about her in class that afternoon, at the back of Maths, or when they were supposed to be playing rounders. He would think of her small wet mouth and suddenly run out of breath, and have to struggle to fill his lungs.” (NP 23) Later, it will establish itself as a familiar presence in their lives, as Marianne and Connell will always be better at communicating their love for one another physically rather than verbally, finding comfort, acceptance, and reassurance in one another’s presence.

2.4 *The Declaration*

In *Normal People*, a first, tentative ‘declaration’ takes place, once again, in the opening scene, where Rooney places two lines of a circumspect reciprocal pronouncement – Connell: “I never said I hated you.” (NP 6) Marianne: “Well, I like you.” (NP 7) However, the ‘proper’ declaration takes place later in the narrative:

Connell is silent again. He leans down and kisses her on the forehead. I would never hurt you, okay? He says. Never. She nods and says nothing. You make me really happy, he says. His hand moves over her hair and he adds: I love you. I’m not just

saying that, I really do. Her eyes fill up with tears again and she closes them. Even in memory she will find this moment unbearably intense, and she is aware of this now, while it's happening. She has never believed herself fit to be loved by any person. But now she has a new life, of which this is the first moment, and even after many years have passed she will still think: Yes, that was it, the beginning of my life. (NP 44)

In romance novels, the declaration is often associated to the resolution of conflict; in *Normal People*, to the contrary, marks the beginning of a 'modulation' over the course of which Marianne and Connell will split and return to one another multiple times.

It seems a characteristic of Rooney's narration to insert, early and simultaneously in the story, several important elements (society defined, the meeting, the attraction, the declaration...), perhaps to establish a difficult and chaotic 'field' (a 'shared soil') Marianne and Connell will learn to navigate with one another's help.

This seeming randomness suggests a point of view on existence as a space resembling, perhaps, a house, more than a road: a space for chaotically coexisting events rather than a linear segment of ordered experiences. Canadian author Alice Munro famously stated that "a story is not like a road to follow...is more like a house. You go inside and stay there for a while, wandering back and forth and settling where you like and discovering how the room and corridors relate to each other, how the world outside is altered by being viewed from these windows..." (*Selected Stories XVI- XVII*)

From a discursive point of view, Rooney seems to suggest that events in life occur simultaneously, self-development is connected to encounters, and such occurrences are often first dealt with and later elaborated upon and better understood. *Normal People* progresses linearly in time, but with continuous analepses and prolepses. The reader, therefore, often tries to process new information that will be better 'ordered' at a later stage, when the narration will fill the blanks.⁵

From a figurative perspective, Connell and Marianne may be seen as a structure, private but open, which they will gradually learn to inhabit and protect from unwanted intrusions. Throughout the narrative, the couple resembles a building exposed to good and bad weather, just like the one they visit at the beginning of their relationship, when, as teenagers, vaguely intuit that all things have 'something to do with capitalism.' (NP 34)

2.5 Point(s) of Ritual Death

In his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Northrop Frye coins the phrase ‘point of ritual death’ to indicate the moment when comic narratives reach “a potentially tragic crisis near the end.” (Quoted in Regis, *Natural History* 35) Regis clarifies that this point “marks the moment in the narrative when the union between heroine and hero, the hoped-for resolution, seems absolutely impossible, when it seems that the barrier will remain, more substantial than ever.” (*Natural History* 35)

Once Connell and Marianne are caught up in a modulation of high and lows, a point of ritual death occurs every time they split. If their first separation in school occurs because of the graduation-party episode, their first separation in college occurs when Connell is too embarrassed to ask Marianne if he can stay at her house for some time while he figures a way to pay rent. Marianne takes Connell’s unease and nervousness as signs of wanting to end the relationship. They separate and start seeing other partners.

Jamie, Marianne’s new boyfriend, is an enabler for Marianne’s self-harming behaviour and thoughts. At Marianne’s own request, he is violent to her during sex and disregards her in front of her friends. Marianne, in turn, does not love nor respect Jamie, but stays in the relationship because she thinks she deserves to be mistreated. Helen, Connell’s new girlfriend, makes of Connell a socially accepted ‘good guy,’ a prospect that, calming his anxiety, appears as particularly desirable to him.

In other words, Jamie and Helen give Marianne and Connell what they think they need, thereby confirming their respective negative opinions of themselves: Marianne is unlovable, and Connell needs to be kept grounded into healthy sociality, otherwise he might be left with the terrifying prospect of having to face aspects of himself that are not immediately legible to him.

After splitting up with Jamie, Marianne leaves for Sweden for a school term. There, she meets Lukas, a photographer with whom she engages in games of sexual submission. Lukas is even colder than Jamie, a sadistic artist who, in Marianne’s description of him, “has managed to nurture a fine artistic sensitivity without developing any real sense of right and wrong.” (*NP* 190)

2.6 The Recognition

Over the course of a photographic session at Lukas' studio, Marianne goes through a series of self-realizations. She understands that what she sometimes desires and what she wants are not necessarily the same thing. For instance, she uses her encounters with Lukas to experience "a depression so deep it is tranquillising" (NP 190) and detach herself so thoroughly from her body as to perceive it as "if it were a piece of litter." (NP 191) Marianne observes that men's desire for domination "can look so much like attraction, even love." (NP 192) Moreover, she grasps that, not unlike her boyfriends, her friends have not been nice to her, making of friendship a vacuous competition for self-affirmation. Marianne put up with them because she had never experienced social acceptance before.

Lastly, she realises Connell's sincere and enduring feelings for her, a wave of warmth and admiration she feels each time she reads one of his long and articulate e-mails to her.

At the end of this long sequence, Marianne finds the courage to run away from Lukas, respecting the romance novel convention according to which "the heroine must escape her 'death'" (*Natural History* 35) to re-unite with the hero. Quoting once again from Frye and in reference to the myth of Persephone, Regis argues that the rescue of the heroine from the underworld, which Marianne quite significantly self-performs, is sometimes "vestigial, not an element of the plot but a mere change of tone." (Frye quoted in Regis *Natural History* 35) In other words: "the heroine does not die. She is freed from [death's] presence, and this freedom is the mythic counterpart that results from the lifting of the barrier. The reader's response, again, is joy. The reader rejoices in this escape, however symbolic, however merely hinted at." (*Natural History* 35)

As Regis explains, in a narrative characterised by internal barriers, the recognition consists of the heroine "understanding her own psyche better." (*Natural History* 37) Regis clarifies that "both what is recognized and when it is recognized vary enormously. In an upbeat, rapidly paced book, the recognition scene may be in the last few pages and lead directly to the ending. In a bitter-sweet, slower-paced book the recognition scene may be quite early, and the barrier, which eventually falls, does not do so quickly." (*Natural History* 37) In this narrative, the point of ritual death and the recognition partially blend. Far away from one another, both Connell and Marianne make a series of discoveries concerning themselves, one another, as well as their surroundings.

At approximately the same time as Marianne's session at Lukas', Connell has a first meeting with a therapist. This is a parallel sequence over the course of which Connell lets the reader 'see' his pain for the first time. The recent suicide of Rob, a friend from school, triggers for Connell a series of unresolved issues, making him despair of ever feeling at ease in the world. During this long and excruciating admission of pain, Connell indicates to the therapist, as the only positive aspects in his life, his love for literature and his closeness to Marianne.

At Rob's funeral, Connell meets Marianne who returns home from Sweden to attend it. When they see each other, indeed they 'recognize' one another, immediately re-establishing that private space of communication that always encircles them, leaving everyone else out:

Marianne, he said.

He said this aloud without thinking about it. She looked up and saw him then. Her face was like a small white flower. She put her arms around his neck, and he held her tightly. He could smell the inside of her house on her clothes. The last time he'd seen her, everything had been normal [...] Marianne touched the back of Connell's head with her hand. Everyone stood there watching them, he felt that. When they knew it couldn't go on any longer, they let go of one another. (NP 209-10)

Helen's concerned reaction to this moment of mutual understanding will lead to her break-up from Connell. Marianne and Connell return to their friendship, rediscovering soon their attraction for one another.

2.7 *The Betrothal*

As Marianne and Connell 'touch' a point of ritual death every time they split, they experience a 'recognition' every time they return to one another. When they do, this often goes together with Connell's 'public' acknowledgment of his attachment to Marianne, which signifies, in turn, increased self-acceptance.

Connell rarely touches Marianne in front of their friends. The first time he does so is during a pool-party in college: "he put his arm around her waist. He had never, ever touched her in front of anyone else before. Their friends had never seen them together like this, no one had." (NP 115) Then

it happens again at Rob's funeral, when Connell, at a party organized by their friends from high school, appears not only finally at ease, but proud of displaying his connection to Marianne:

At midnight when they all cheered Happy New Year, Connell took Marianne into his arms and kissed her. She could feel, like a physical pressure on her skin, that the others were watching them. Maybe people hadn't really believed it until then, or else a morbid fascination still lingered over something that had once been scandalous. Maybe they were just curious to observe the chemistry between two people who, over the course of several years, apparently could not leave one another alone. Marianne had to admit that she, also, probably would have glanced. (*NP* 261-2)

This sequence, followed by a last declaration of love from Connell to Marianne, would be more than sufficient to characterize a 'betrothal' according to current standards of romantic storytelling. At this point, the narrative presents the reader with a 'better' society: Connell rescues Marianne from her abusive brother, they both fully understand the importance of one another's presence for their respective mental health and well-being. Moreover, Connell understands more fully his power over Marianne, the fact that he can hurt her, and Marianne acknowledges she has been occasionally insensitive towards Connell's financial difficulties.⁶ They smooth over the rough edges of their familial relations (Connell), or accept that they will never be resolved (Marianne), they move their first steps into 'the real world' by finding employment (Marianne) and timidly begin to publish their work (Connell).

However, the modulation will continue. Once they understand how important they are and have been for one another, they can even afford to (momentarily?) separate, act like the adults they have become by letting one another have their chance at accomplishing their dreams. In the very last sequence of the novel, Connell gets offered a place for postgraduate studies in New York. He does not want to leave Marianne behind, but she sees that they must let go of their present happiness to make space for the future:

He probably won't come back, she thinks. Or he will, differently. What they have now they can never have back again. But for her the pain of loneliness will be nothing to the pain that she used to feel, of being unworthy. He brought her goodness like a gift and now it belongs to her. Meanwhile his life opens up before him in all directions at once. They've done a lot of good for each other. Really, she thinks, really. People can really change one another. (*NP* 265-266)

Since high school, Marianne and Connell have learnt love, self-acceptance, and selflessness, encountering loneliness, grief, and abuse along the way. Their development into adulthood makes them better partners to one another. Even the title of the novel is an oblique celebration of a newly acquired maturity. At the end of the story, we see Marianne walking around campus, and we are told that she is “neither admired nor reviled anymore. People have forgotten about her. She’s a normal person now. She walks by and no one looks up.” (NP 254) ‘Normal’ means that “the conflict between individuality and socialization, autonomy and normality...” (The Way 16) has been reduced. Marianne has finally adjusted; she has found her own space in the world to occupy.

3. *Normal People* as Bildungsroman

As *Normal People* features a striking synthesis of romantic narrative motives with tropes of bildungsroman, this critical essay aims at bringing both domains to the fore. Franco Moretti famously connects the two genres in his seminal discussion of the canonical phase of the Bildungsroman, analysing *Wilhelm Meister* alongside *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) – and *Jane Eyre* (1847) as an instance of the later development of the genre. In this segment of the article, we will see that *Normal People*, just as its illustrious predecessors, conforms to the narrative structure of the romance novel at the same time as it embodies an essentially contemporary outlook on personal growth and self-development, in this instance conceiving of such processes as open-ended, unstructured, and non-normative.⁷

In other words, in the previous section this essay followed the construction of the sentimental relationship between the two protagonists. In the second part, it will be seen how the text, by assigning the role of protagonist to such relationship, its development through time and adjustment to the world, and by denying a definitive ending to it, reveals a deep and interactive engagement with narrative and discursive motives of the Bildungsroman from a characteristically contemporary perspective.

In *The Bildungsroman: Form and Transformations* (2020), John Frow, Melissa Hardie, and Vanessa Smith, list the traditional defining elements of the genre, significantly putting in mutual relation the literary form of the bildungsroman with the romance:

a young man from the provinces seeks his fortune in the city, and undergoes a process of education in the ways of the world such that he eventually becomes reconciled with it. Yet even in this reductive formulation key variants exist: a young woman undergoes a process of worldly or sentimental education and becomes reconciled to her destiny, sometimes in the form of marriage; or a young man or woman undergoes a process of aesthetic or worldly or sentimental education (sometimes all three together) and achieves success as a writer or an artist [...]. There is also a tragic variant, in which the novel ends with the hero's failure or death. These variations point to the way in which a supposition of the Bildungsroman's centrality for the European novel in particular is subject not just to formal dictates but also to transformations that come in themselves to trouble the normativity of this idealised form and promote instead the instability of the key terms and concepts it wishes to centre: masculine gender, youthful malleability, cosmopolitan life as 'worlding' and education delivered as an adumbration of possibility, experience, or desire. (*The Bildungsroman* 3)⁸

As discussed in the previous section, Marianne and Connell get increasingly adjusted to the world and society. Connell, with the help of Marianne, learns to navigate the passage from 'the province' to 'the city' as the acceptance of a new identity.⁹ He finds this sort of emancipation particularly difficult, and his sense of estrangement is reinforced when he takes part in cultural events that instead of celebrating writing as a personal but inclusive experience, appropriate it as a practice of social distinction.

Therefore, *Normal People* still responds to or elaborates upon some of the traditional tropes characterizing the genre – the protagonist from the provinces, education as personal salvation, the worldly power of the city. Of course, the text revisits these tropes from a contemporary perspective, not only by showing how unstable and deceitful these institutions have become in the current era, but also by effectively portraying the "longing for a place of security and stability that can insulate characters from, if not fix, their alienation" (Sudjic, *Darkly Funny* n.p.) which is characteristic of contemporary novels.¹⁰

The historical form of the Bildungsroman set some specific ground rules, as it were, for future narrative of personal development and upbringing that contemporary authors are currently trying to subvert and question, or 'de-centre,' as Frow et al. put it above.¹¹ From this perspective, one may see *Normal People* as still engaged in dialogue with the historical form of the Bildungsroman, or better said, with some of the discursive

tenets which have been isolated and articulated by its authors and are still active in the current episteme.

Differently put, the historic Bildungsroman articulates a worldview that, nowadays, may be rarely actively promoted, but that has permeated the current arrangement of ideas and values, reflecting itself in works of fiction. I wish to contend that *Normal People* aims at destabilizing two such tropes particularly: the centrality and solitude of the individual against a background of ‘secondary’ characters and events, and the positive (or negative) accomplishment of existence as purposeful, teleological parable. The rest of this section discusses the strategies *Normal People* puts in place to subvert these very notions.

3.1 Self-sufficient/Co-dependent Development

In “Variants of the Romantic ‘Bildungsroman,’ (2008) Manfred Engel outlines a concise but accurate history of the genre, its genesis and main phases. The Bildungsroman, Engel explains, originates in Germany at the end of the 18th century, it has in the *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship Years*, 1795/96) its archetypal text, and it is given its definition a century later by German historian Wilhelm Dilthey. Its development is usually organized, by historians of the genre, in three main phases: the end of the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Realism.¹²

Engel further explains that all narratives of *bildung* written over the course of the 19th century ‘respond’, one way or another, to *Wilhelm Meister*, and that their common trait is an elaboration of the conflict between individual ideals and a society perceived as prosaic and commercialised. Such narratives envision the notion of *bildung* as “a process of organic, or quasi-organic development” (Engel 2008: 264) which is often “modelled on the triadic scheme of paradise / fall / redemption, or — in the terminology of German idealist natural philosophy — of unity / division / unity regained at a higher level.” (*Variants* 277)¹³

Moreover, Engel observes that, as the specific origin and historical phases of the genre are largely overlooked by scholars, the term ‘*bildung*’ has lost much of its analytical precision, becoming an all-encompassing definitional term for diverse narratives of upbringing and personal development. In other words, the term, from designating specific narratives, has become the name of a “theoretical topos.” (Hershinow, *Born Yesterday* 16)

To argue the point of the specificity of the genre beyond its current, 'relaxed' uses, Engel lists a series of fundamental characteristics of the historic form, such as its focus on adolescence, for instance, on the formation of an individual character ("The 'Bildungroman' is a novel of character, i.e. as a rule it has one, and only one, central figure" *Variants* 265), on social structures as potentially threatening the harmonious development of the individual – the latter trait embodying a particularly historically located perspective.¹⁴ Moreover, the genre stages an "interaction, *a dialectic interplay between character and environment, individualisation and socialisation,*" (*Variants* 266 – Italics in the original) and its protagonists ideally achieve integration into society.

Normal People is committed to find alternatives to the triadic schema mentioned above as well as existence perceived as individual pursuit. By placing two characters as protagonists of its narrative development, the novel makes a distinctive move against the latter notion. Even more so, because instead of making of the hero a heroine, Rooney places the development of a relationship (not of a person) at the core of her narrative, therefore adhering to John Cawelti's characterization of the romance's defining characteristic, which is "not that it stars a female but that its organizing action is the development of a love relationship, usually between a man and a woman." (*Adventure* 41)

By showing the interconnectedness of human lives from the choice of its protagonist – a couple – *Normal People* clearly challenges the trope of the centrality, autonomy, and fundamental self-sufficiency of a fictional figure reaching maturity on his/her own; the individual as the sole protagonist of an existence, coming to terms with the world with the help (and/or despite the hostility) of 'secondary' characters revolving around him/her.¹⁵ In her previous published novel, *Conversations with Friends* (2017), Rooney attempts at making a similar point, which she then illustrates over the course of an interview for literary magazine *The Tangerine*:

[*Conversations with Friends*] isn't so much about individual people as it is about relationships, and the interplay of Frances' [the protagonist] dynamics with each of the other three people in the foursome, rather than Frances as a psychological entity. What might disappoint readers about the book is that they might want a conventional hero's journey where Frances undergoes certain experiences, learns something, then comes out a different person. That's not really what the book is

trying to do, I don't think. It's more about developing meaningful inter-relationships within a group, or within a community, or a family, or a friendship. (Rooney quoted in Nolan, *Interview* n.p.)

The effort of not making of Frances a heroine 'of the triadic schema,' someone who becomes, through others, a better person, as Rooney puts it, or someone who incorporates fortunate (or less fortunate) encounters with others as to become a better version (synthesis) of herself, is apparent throughout the narrative. See, for instance, the following sequence, in which Frances goes through a moment of deep realization in which she sees herself as almost 'generated' by other people. Feeling a strong physical pain, Frances enters a church in search of momentary relief, and, minutes before fainting, she reflects:

Instead of thinking gigantic thoughts, I tried to focus on something small, the smallest thing I could think of. Someone once made this pew I'm sitting on, I thought. Someone sanded the wood and varnished it. Someone carried it into the church. Someone laid the tiles on the floor, someone fitted the windows. Each brick was placed by human hands, each hinge fitted on each door, every road surface outside, every bulb in every streetlight. And even things built by machines were really built by human beings, who built the machines initially. And human beings themselves, made by other humans, struggling to create happy children and families. Me, all the clothing I wear, all the language I know. Who put me here in this church, thinking these thoughts? Other people, some I know very well and others I have never met. (*Conversations* 294)

Normal People takes a step forward in this direction, as it explains less, but 'shows' much more people's impact on and importance to other people's development through Marianne and Connell, who constantly enact (and never discuss) their reciprocal determination and co-dependency. In a sense, the narrative objectifies the principle, pivotal to the entire tradition of romance novels, according to which self-realization can only occur through the encounter with an Other, in which "I incorporate [...] other-mindedness as part of myself." (Lear, *Love and its Place* 194)

This 'incorporation' however, is not (only) self-serving or instrumental, not exclusively aimed at a better synthesis of the self. It is an open-ended practice that leads to a partial loosening of one's boundaries and the possibility of reciprocal support.¹⁶

3.2 The Deleuzian Modulation

In the canonical bildungsroman, happiness is “the opposite of freedom,” intended as “the end of becoming.” (*The Way* 23) This is a notion, indeed relevant to these pages, that the Bildungsroman and romance narratives share, and often conventionally express in a final marriage between hero and heroine (the betrothal). Such an act, Moretti maintains, symbolizes an act of consent, a figurative harmonious ‘blending’ of the protagonist’s values and aspirations with the larger social order in place: “the happiness of the classical bildungsroman is the subjective symptom of an objectively completed socialization.” (*The Way* 24)

Moretti goes on to say that this “definitive stabilization” (*The Way* 27) is only possible in a pre-capitalist world, a world that values borders, the naturalness and beauty of belonging to one place, the importance of the journey as a circumscribed experience with otherness enabling the achievement of a higher existential synthesis.

Through his discussion of the canonical stage and later development of the European Bildungsroman, Moretti shows the disintegration of this social and cultural context over the course of the nineteenth century. Later studies of the genre have focused on Modernism and Postmodernism to bring to the fore the impossibility of a definitive merging of individual aspirations with an environment often perceived as hostile, contradictory, and precarious.

Normal People’s ending, therefore, will not be conclusive, and if there is a final ‘betrothal,’ this has to take place within the continuous becoming of a wider existential modulation that renders all human interaction, in typically contemporary fashion, provisional and fragile.

In “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” (1990) Gilles Deleuze sketches the contours of current and future existences as having to cope with multiplied options and possibilities. He observes that the beginning of the twentieth century sees the maximum development of the societies of disciplines, and the forms of social control that these embody. In the disciplinary societies, extensively and influentially studied by Michel Foucault in works such as *Madness and Civilization* (1961) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975), individuals, throughout their lifetimes, experience a series of regulated institutions (the family, the school, the factory, the hospital, the prison...) in which their subjectivities are shaped according to standards and norms which are ubiquitous and functional to society.

In other words, disciplinary societies act on individual bodies to exert a form of power that is at once very subtle and extremely pervasive. We might perceive ourselves as 'free' individuals, but our self-perception has been shaped by and within environments that function according to rules we have interiorized to the point that we do not perceive any longer their coercing and authoritarian drive.

In his short text, Deleuze detects an important transition in power dynamics he sees occurring at the end of the last century. If the institutions that make us who we are, and the forms of power they implement, used to be static moulds, now they are becoming dynamic modulations, and our subjectivities are shifting in the process. The institutions of enclosure of the society of disciplines are making space for much more fluid organizations that Deleuze names 'institutions of control:' "enclosure are molds, distinct castings, but controls are a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point." (*Postscript 4*)

Naturally, this change has consequences for love relationships as well: if in the past individuals were expected, by marrying another, to make a lifetime commitment, today individuals see their possibilities significantly multiplied as they 'navigate' romantic relationships.

Within the last forty years, and since the 21st century especially, there have been works of fiction, in Anglophone literature, at the forefront of elaborating this crucial transition from a modern but 'older' social order to a more fluid and current one, in which subjectivity and love are construed and narrated as rhizomic and always in flux.

If A.S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990), for instance, 'multiplies' the existential possibilities of its protagonists by making them live in the past as well as in the present, Kazuo Ishiguro's main character(s) in *Never Let Me Go* (2009) are human clones regularly made to sacrifice a part of themselves, embodying the impossibility to commit to long-term existential projects. Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn* (2009) elaborates on the impossibility of being 'here' and 'there' at the same time, David Nicholls' *One Day* (2009) reminds us of the irremediable loss that may come from perceiving our existential possibilities as endless.

Lastly, Sally Rooney's *Normal People*, as this essay has illustrated, offers a moving depiction of the specific burden that comes with having one's possibilities for love (and disappointment) multiplied in the current era. In *Normal People*, self-knowledge and love are not 'achievements'

to be conquered once and for all, that can be ‘stored away’ and be relied upon throughout a lifetime; they will be lost and discovered time and again, for as soon as Marianne and Connell find happiness with and through one another, the modulation catches up with them, and Connell’s life “opens up before him in all directions at once.” (NP 266)

4. Concluding Remarks

Although some of the most critically acclaimed Anglophone works of fiction of the current century feature romantic storylines that reflect major collective and individual changes in the way we perceive our subjectivity, these have never been isolated and analysed as such. If we explore them deploying the analytical tools developed by romance scholarship, we will see numerous and important textual instances of that interplay between the ‘structural’ and the ‘personal’ previously discussed in the introduction of this essay.

By analysing *Normal People* with the help of romance scholarship, this essay has shown the text as a hybrid and multi-layered creation which uniquely encapsulates elements of the romance and the coming-of-age story. Making a case for the interconnectedness between self-knowledge and individual adjustment to society on the one hand, and the capacity to love another on the other, the novel blends two literary forms whose past and current affiliations should be further explored.

Vis-à-vis the bildungsroman, to which the present publication is dedicated, *Normal People* makes an argument in favour of emotional co-dependence and the human necessity to love and be loved against claims for intellectual as well as emotional self-sufficiency, thereby overcoming the triadic conception upon which the genre was historically built.

As a ‘disruptive inheritor’ of such a distinguished literary form, the novel does not make its protagonists proceed along a road punctuated with important encounters. Following the necessity to find ways of conceiving of and narrating otherness that do not reduce it to a stepping-stone towards self-realization, the novel places its protagonists inside a house exposed at all sides to external interferences (two plants sharing the same soil), making visible the contemporaneous and inescapable nature of the connection of their lives with those of everyone else, as well as with a virtually endless series of other events, ‘private’ as well as ‘structural.’



- 1 Selinger further explains that Regis “not only set aside the vexed, unhelpful metaphor of ‘addiction’ to romance; she gave herself license to shrug off the hierarchy that segregates high-art and popular versions of the courtship-and-betrothal narrative,” (*Rebooting* 2) thoroughly refreshing the standard academic approach to the genre.
- 2 The heroine’s freedom to choose one partner’s freely from social and familial constraints: “this freedom is limited – ‘pragmatic as [Northrop] Frye would have it. For a heroine, especially, it is not absolute. It is freedom, nonetheless.” (*Natural History* 30)
- 3 “The ‘point of ritual death’ is that moment in a romance novel when the union between heroine and hero seems completely impossible. It is marked by death or its simulacrum (for example fainting or illness); by the risk of death; or by any number of images or events that suggest death, however metaphorically (for example, darkness, sadness, despair, or winter).” (*Natural History* 14)
- 4 The latter adjective is given a rather loose sense; it is ‘political’ any context saturated with power relations, and high school certainly constitutes one of such contexts.
- 5 This is a notion present in the author’s literary imagination. After all, Rooney’s previous novel, *Conversations with Friends*, ends with the following consideration: “You live through certain things before you understand them. You can’t always take the analytical position.” (*Conversations* 321) As I will argue in the following segment of this essay, *Normal People* makes a concrete effort at illustrating life as unmediated experience – events one must cope with before understanding them – rather than a sequence of occurrences one can control through analytical approach.
- 6 This happens over the course of a trip to Trieste, Italy. Marianne and Connell discuss, for the first time, their feelings towards their unequal statuses and financial situations.
- 7 Always following Moretti’s categorizations, the previous part of the essay, with its structural analysis, is mainly concerned with the aspects of the text that pertain to the *fabula*, “essential, logic, wholly self-contained,” a “less visible, but far more solid” (*The Way* 17) element of the text. This second

part focuses on the *szuzhet*, the “values and experiences that gratify our sense of individuality” (*The Way* 17) and that traditionally pertain to the bildungsroman.

- 8 This essay will not enter philological debates concerning the past or present affiliations of the genre. It will only be briefly observed, however, in relation to the passage quoted, that is historically inaccurate to make of the marriage plot/romance novel a ‘variant’ of the Bildungsroman. If we take the foundational texts of their respective traditions as indicative of a minimum measure of historical accuracy, we see that Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela; or, of Virtue Rewarded* (1740) is half a century older than *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship Years, 1795/96).
- 9 While still in high-school, Marianne ‘makes’ Connell realize his love for literature. Consequently, Connell chooses to study English in college, but he will remain conflicted about this for a long time. Connell needs time to conciliate his deeper passions and desires within him, which include his attachment to Marianne.
- 10 Author Olivia Sudjic discusses the ‘millennial novel’. The passage continues as follows: “It is one thing to hate the world and want to change it, as many books that ‘defined’ previous generations did, but if you hate yourself, nowhere feels like home for very long; relief is found in certain physical places, memories, a person, a routine or mind-numbing substance. The need for these in millennial novels is always, at least in part, a response to the death throes of a ruthless economic system that makes us feel like outsiders to ourselves, a system propped up by ecocide, racism, sexism, the class system and heteronormativity. The longing is alleviated only by revulsion.” (*Darkly Funny* n.p.)
- 11 Recently, there have been numerous attempts at bringing to the fore ‘alternative narratives of bildung,’ stories that undermine the Euro-centric nature of the constructs listed by Frow et al. See, for instances, Stella Bolaki’s *Unsettling the Bildungsroman* (2011), and Michael Perfect’s “The Multicultural Bildungsroman: Stereotypes in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*.” (2008)
- 12 See Engel’s competent illustration of the different historical phases of the genre articulated around the successive versions of Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s novel, from the *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* (Wilhelm Meister’s Theatrical Calling), to the *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*.
- 13 This theoretical matrix, Engel explains, characterizes not only the most representative German novels of the genre, but also some of the most illustrious instances of their Anglophone Romantic ‘equivalents’, verses penned by authors such as William Wordsworth, John Keats, Percy B. Shelley, Samuel T. Coleridge, and William Blake. Engel glosses by

observing that “most of these verse narrations create [...] a new myth for the triadic pattern of unity, fall, unity regained.” (*Variants* 278) This influential pattern – philosophical and discursive, as well as artistic – travels beyond the Germanic and Anglophone contexts with texts such as *Aurélia ou le Rêve et la Vie* (1855) by Gérard de Nerval, and *Sartor Resartus* (1833/34) by Thomas Carlyle, a narrative that assumed much importance among the American Transcendentalists.

- 14 Novels of development do not exist before the end of the 18th century. Before that time, Engel argues, fictional characters’ changes are “abrupt and have no psychological motivation.” (*Variants* 265)
- 15 Rooney’s narratives discuss existences as reciprocally determined, materially as well as affectively. In a recent interview, she elucidated this point: “I definitely do have a strong reaction against the predominant discourse of independence. [...] The way that I started thinking about gender politics was organized around female independence, so the idea that women should be independent from men, but also from one another and from social structures, and that empowerment was about personal agency and decision-making. And I guess I just increasingly became critical of that attitude. I now feel like there is absolutely nothing independent about the way that we live our lives [...]. I’m not interested in pursuing the idea that we should have, or could have, independence from other people, either in our intimate lives or in a situation within a network of economic exchange.” (Cullingham, *Not So Interested* 10)
- 16 See the article “The Small Rebellions of Sally Rooney’s *Normal People*” (2019) by Annalisa Quinn, in which Marianne and Connell’s ‘system’ or reciprocal support is read as form of rebellion against a capitalistic society that extends its promotion of individualistic values and selfishness to the context of interpersonal relationships.



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Abstracts

Rolf Selbman, *Der Bildungsroman ist tot – es lebe der Bildungsroman? Überlegungen zur Begriffsbestimmung einer bedrohten Gattung*

As foregrounded by the title, the article traces back the definitions of German *Bildungsroman*, pleading for a narrower concept while writing a “history of youth.” The article also takes into consideration issues like “female *Bildungsroman*,” “international *Bildungsroman*,” “Colonial” and “Postcolonial *Bildungsroman*,” but it rejects them. The “German *Bildungsroman*” is a genuine German narrative genre with roots in the history of the 18th century. Unfortunately, the *Bildungsroman* cannot be transposed and applied on a one-to-one relationship to other national literatures.

Moira Paleari, *Erzählen und Reisen als Bildungskategorien: Felicitas Hoppe's Johanna und Hoppe*

Hoppe's literary work is based on themes such as travelling and storytelling. The characters of her fiction represent a struggle between attitudes of self-development and refusal of traditional patterns of behaviour, constantly questioning the concept of *Bildung* as a process of self-fulfilment.

Both *Johanna* (2006), a novel about the French national heroine Joan of Arc, and *Hoppe* (2012) are not *Bildungsromane* in the traditional sense of the genre, but rather narrative texts that, focusing on a hybridization of genres (travel novel, historical novel, female *Bildungsroman*, autofiction),

deal with the theme of individual development, reflect on the possibilities of human becoming and repeatedly consider storytelling as an opportunity for one's own determination.

Hoppe's dealing with the concept of *Bildung* and with the genre of *Bildungsroman* comes through mainly in three ways: 1) in the thematization of the journey as a path to education and identity; 2) in the attempt to activate the reader again and again and also to reconceptualize the notion of education through an intertextual dialogical structure and an episodic composition; 3) in the examination of female characters, especially young women, and their phases of development.

This paper aims, on the one hand, at considering the different modalities of the representation of *Bildung* based on the protagonists of both novels and, on the other hand, at exploring the (im)possibilities of ascribing Hoppe's works to the genre "Bildungsroman".

Alessandra Squeo, *Mending Fragments of the Self. The Bildungsroman as Kintsugi in Jack Maggs and Mister Pip*

With a view to illustrating how the *Bildungsroman* paradigm has been assimilated, reshaped and creatively adapted to new 'narratives of self-formation' in the contemporary novel (Armstrong 2020), this paper focuses on *Jack Maggs* (1997) by the Australian novelist Peter Carey and *Mister Pip* (2007) by the New Zealand writer Lloyd Jones. In different ways, both novels imaginatively engage with what has been regarded as one of the most canonical instances of the English *Bildungsroman*: Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Bearing witness to the last few decades' fascination with neo-Victorianism and cultural "appropriations of the Victorians", both works have been extensively explored from a postcolonial perspective (Hassal 1997; Jordan 2000; Thieme 2001; Maak 2005; Taylor 2009; Latham 2011, Walker 2011; Butter 2014; Colomba 2017) and they have been shown to embody different approaches to individual and collective experiences of shock and suffering in the light of trauma studies (Ho 2003; Sadoff 2010).

Without disregarding the multiple themes and issues woven into the two novels' intricate narrative textures, this paper aims to illustrate how they specifically address the *Bildungsroman* model in Dickens' masterpiece from their own distinct, but complementary standpoints. In different ways, *Jack Maggs* and *Mister Pip* mark a shift, as I will argue, from

the idea of '*Bildung*' to an evocative process of 'mending fragments', the metaphorical and metafictional implications of which deserve more attention than they have received thus far. In this sense, the Japanese technique of Kintsugi – that 'exhibits the scars' between the broken parts of repaired pottery by means of gold lines – provides a powerful metaphorical equivalent, as the paper will argue, for the new model of self-formation/self-narration illustrated by the two novels. Besides calling attention to the wholeness vs. fragmentation paradigm that has been shown to be constitutive of the postmodern "Protean Self" (Lifton 1993; McCracken 2008; Belamghari 2020), the Kintsugi technique brings into sharper focus the individual search for balance between weakness and strength, loss and resilience, between the ephemerality and the permanence of existence, never hiding the traces of its frailty. As the paper will eventually illustrate, the Kintsugi metaphor underpinning the 'narratives of the self' in *Mack Maggs* and *Mister Pip* may help us re-examine Dickens's novel in a new light, and reconsider how, and to what extent, *Great Expectations* also "broke from the critical position articulated by Franco Moretti" (Taft 2020).

Chiara Sciarino, *Come resistere alla narrazione e deformare il romanzo di formazione: The Hard Life di Flann O'Brien (1911-1966)*

The Hard Life, Flann O'Brien's fourth novel, is, very much like his prose, difficult to be categorized. Generally and simplistically defined as an all-Irish example of *Bildungsroman*, the novel is striking for the presentation of an environment in which comic transgressions seek to invalidate the social occasions on which the protagonist finds himself. While the conventions of the genre itself invoke a possible but distant progression and acquired maturity for the 'unhero', a story of failure and despair, an "exegesis of squalor" takes over, with attacks to the Roman Catholic Church and the education received at its schools as a constant *motif*. The aim of my contribution would be to analyse the way in which language is used as a source of humour to give voice to the story of an orphaned distanced narrator named Finbarr and evaluate how the text draws inspiration and distances itself from another canonical Irish *Bildungsroman*, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a young Man*.

Angelo Monaco, *A Vulnerable Heroine?: Trauma and Self-Begetting in William Trevor's The Story of Lucy Gault*

William Trevor's *The Story of Lucy Gault* (2002) depicts, in contemporary *Bildungsroman* fashion, the life and quest for self-identity of the eponymous heroine. The novel is set in Trevor's native Ireland, specifically in Lahardane, a mansion along the coast of County Cork. Irish history impacts adversely on Lucy's story, as readers follow the heroine from her childhood years during the Troubles in the 1920s to World War II and Ireland's economic miracle at the dawn of the third millennium. The only child of a Protestant family, Lucy refuses to leave Lahardane in the aftermath of a failed arson attack by three local Catholics, thus resigning herself to a sort of self-imposed exile from the world. In Lahardane, which becomes a healing and contemplative place, the heroine devotes herself to reading Victorian novels, keeping bees and gardening, thereby espousing her wounds which however turn out to be "paradoxically productive" (Butler 2003). As usual in Trevor's fiction, *The Story of Lucy Gault* can then be read as a trauma story where individual and collective grief experiences are intertwined. Moving from these claims, my paper addresses Lucy's painful coming-of-age as trauma and self-begetting fiction. I will first argue that Trevor exploits the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* to illuminate the mystery of human mind, juxtaposing realism with other non-realist genres such as the gothic and the elegiac. Then, I will discuss the influence that trauma exercises on Lucy's painful growth. Finally, I will examine how the wounded heroine's exile from the world can be read as a deliberate declaration of autonomy, thereby lending a self-begetting quality to the novel since the heroine is both the object and the producer of the narrative.

Francesca Pierini, "*Sharing the Same Soil:*" Sally Rooney's *Normal People and the Coming-of-Age Romance*

Sally Rooney's *Normal People* (2018) is a refined, touching, and quintessentially current coming-of-age narrative that explores the romantic encounter and its effects upon the psyches and aspirations of two young people, Marianne and Connell, who experience the extraordinary luck (and misfortune?) of finding one another before becoming adults.

Featuring a persistent subtheme of inequality among social classes, and the effects of such disparity on the lives of young generations, the narrative weaves together 'the personal' and 'the structural' in an elegantly told

portrayal of young love. The novel does not only signal a welcome return of the topic of politics to a context – the contemporary construction of love and literary representation of romantic relationships – often dominated by a logic of purely individual responsibility, but it also portrays the specific burden, most achingly felt by the young, that comes with having one’s possibilities for love (and disappointment) multiplied in the current era.

By discussing the novel as a romance narrative, this essay will argue for the importance and validity of a genre and the field of expertise attached to it – scholarship of the (popular) romance – that has developed, during the last decades, and especially since the beginning of the current century, important analytical tools for reading and understanding the representation of love in literary as well as popular narratives. Despite the undeniable revitalisation generic forms of literature are currently undergoing, the romance – and its critics – tend to remain excluded from academic debates concerning such revival.

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