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FEMALE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MODERN NOVEL: NEERA,
GEORGE ELIOT, SUSANNA TAMARO, SIBILLA ALERAMO, DORIS
LESSING, AND GERTRUDE STEIN

by

LISA DOWNWARD

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

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Abstract

FEMALE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MODERN NOVEL: NEERA, GEORGE ELIOT, SUSANNA TAMARO, SIBILLA ALERAMO, DORIS LESSING, AND GERTRUDE STEIN

by

Lisa Downward

Adviser: Professor Burton Pike

This dissertation questions the validity of the term “female Bildungsroman” as a response to the Bildungsroman’s presumed failure to account for female development. It begins with a dismantling of simplistic male/female paradigms of the Bildungsroman and a rejection of a fixed categorical divide between the genders. As a result, what emerges is the Bildungsroman as a spectrum which reflects different degrees of exchange between the developing protagonist and his/her world.

Part one focuses on the two primary and contradictory concepts of “Bildung” which surfaced in 18th century Germany and a close reading of the prototype of the genre: Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship. As Goethe’s irony

is emphasized, the novel's display of multiple and changing roles, which make fixed and stable gender identities difficult to identify, is accentuated. Part two considers female developments in two 19th century women authors: Neera and George Eliot. In part three, Nancy Chodorow's Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory and Marianne Hirsch's The Mother/Daughter Plot serve as theoretical points of departure for a discussion of a variety of 20th century writers such as Susanna Tamaro, Sibilla Aleramo, Doris Lessing, and Gertrude Stein. Other topics include autobiography's relationship to the Bildungsroman, and a common theme that emerges in novels concerning female development: a preoccupation with repetition.

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Introduction

What is the Bildungsroman? In spite of the many attempts at answering this question, the dispute over its definition only seems to be exacerbated by the passage of time. In fact, a comparative analysis would reveal that any attempts at clarification only result in a proliferation of possibilities. Trying therefore to understand a term like the “female Bildungsroman,” as a response to the Bildungsroman, is an even more difficult task, since theoretical debate continues as to whether it is a revision, a variant, a subgenre, an expansion, or an impossibility.¹ Since much of the criticism and theory on the “female Bildungsroman” emphasizes the traditional Bildungsroman’s failure to account for specifically female experience,² and how up until recently the Bildungsroman was considered only in male-centered terms,³ I will take up a starting point beyond questions of gender bias. My aim to dismantle simplistic

¹ Laura Sue Fuderer. The Female Bildungsroman in English: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism (New York: MLA, 1990) 6.

² Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, eds., The Voyage In: Fictions in Female Development (Hanover: UP of New England for Dartmouth College, 1983) 5.

³ Esther Kleinbord Labovitz. The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century: Dorothy Richardson, Simone de Beauvoir, Doris Lessing, Christa Wolf (New York: Lang, 1986) 245.

male/female paradigms of the Bildungsroman may be aligned with Elizabeth Grosz's work on authorship and the signature. Like Grosz, I abandon the sex of the author, the content of the text, the sex of the reader and the style of the text as insufficient criteria to definitively distinguish feminist from mainstream texts.⁴ Rather than reinforce a fixed categorical divide between the genders, which would involve privileging gender as the sole lens through which to read novels which concern development, I will problematize it.

The result of my rejection of a binary, male/female oppositional paradigm will be the emergence of the Bildungsroman as a spectrum which reflects different degrees of exchange between the developing protagonist and his/her world. At the center of the spectrum is development which comes about through the mutual give-and-take between the "Bildung" protagonist and his/her world. At extreme ends of the spectrum are developing protagonists who either are passively influenced by external forces, such as God and the outside environment, or actively motivated to change the world. As I analyze specific novels which consider a particular pattern of female development that

⁴ Elizabeth Grosz. "Sexual Signatures: Feminism After the Death of the Author." Space, Time and Perversion (New York: Routledge, 1995) 9-24.

focuses on love and marriage, I will extrapolate important characteristics from these works, compare and contrast them, and ultimately present them as nuances along the greater spectrum which is the Bildungsroman. The terms I will use to identify these various shades are the “novel of awakening,” the “novel of development,” and the “feminist novel.” As my research will show, these three terms have in common a female protagonist who struggles with the limits society imposes upon her individual freedom. They differ in the way in which the protagonist responds to such limits. In the “novel of awakening,” the protagonist, who feels incapable of overcoming societal restrictions, commits suicide. In the “novel of development,” she tries to cope with these limits and achieve a compromise within her society in a mild and ambiguous manner. In the “feminist novel,” the protagonist attempts to change her world clearly and aggressively.

After considering the two primary and contradictory concepts of “Bildung” which surfaced in 18th century Germany, in which the Bildungsroman took root, I will provide a close reading of the prototype of the genre, Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship. As I emphasize Goethe’s irony, I will accentuate the novel’s display of multiple and changing roles, which make fixed and stable

gender identities difficult to identify. I will also undercut two related ideas which prevail in criticism of the Bildungsroman today: social success is the sole indicator of a fulfilled formation, and, the achievement of social integration marks the end of “male” Bildungsromane. Proving that these assumptions are inadequate will stimulate a rethinking of the “male” Bildungsroman. It will also provide alternate criteria with which to judge “female” Bildungsromane which, because they have only been considered in opposition to novels about male development, are frequently deemed failed. By showing that from its inception the Bildungsroman has destabilized traditional notions of gender, I aim to prove that clear-cut gender distinctions regarding development are neither possible nor desirable. Ultimately, I hope to provide a deeper understanding of narratives of development of both genders.

Next I will explore a selection of novels by women authors of different places and times, although greatest emphasis will be placed on late 19th and 20th century Italy. In part two I will focus on two 19th century authors: Neera and George Eliot. In part three I will concentrate on a variety of 20th century writers and theorists. In works by Neera, Susanna Tamaro, Sibilla Aleramo and Doris Lessing a developing female protagonist struggles to reconcile the demands

posed by the mutually exclusive roles of selfhood and motherhood. In the novels of the late 19th century, conflict imbues the mind of the female protagonist whereas in the 20th century novels the developing female protagonist's growing self-awareness eventually propels her to attempt to resolve this conflict through action. I will demonstrate that factors upon which terminological distinction relies are the degree to which the "Bildung" protagonist is aware of and reflective about him/herself and the world, and the way in which this knowledge motivates or impedes the development of the protagonist, as well as the development of the narrative. I will show that access to social integration alone does not ensure insight into the self for either gender. My treatment of the question of self-reflectiveness in the Bildungsroman will be introduced by a juxtaposition of the concept of "Bildung" with the psychoanalytic notion of development, which pervades the 20th century. As I cite Nancy Chodorow's Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory and Marianne Hirsch's The Mother/Daughter Plot I will demonstrate that when the psychoanalytic process of differentiation is reformulated as relational, intersubjectivity can be recognized as fundamental to satisfactory development. The alternative to differentiation's separation between self and the world,

subject and object is a self that is connected to others, such as members of a family, particularly the mother. As a result of considering mother and daughter in relation to each other, the mother is esteemed beyond her presumed obligation to satisfy the child's needs exclusively which allows her to emerge as a subject with her own needs, voice and plot.

After considering female developments in a selection of novels I will highlight a common theme that emerges: a preoccupation with repetition. In Neera, Aleramo, Lessing and Tamaro, repetition is something to be avoided. Female protagonists revisit the unfulfilled and sacrifice-ridden lives of their mothers and foremothers, recognize undesirable patterns of self-denial in them and put a stop to a ritualization of pain in their own lives. Once the protagonists break the destructive cycles they are heir to, they can move forward, grow, and pave new paths toward well being. Because they repeat the lives of their mothers only in their minds, but actually live lives that are different, these protagonists supplant a potentially repetitive narrative with a unique one. In Gertrude Stein on the other hand, repetitive patterns are biologically determined and thus inescapable, but not necessarily negative. Repetition is manifest primarily in Stein's writing style, more so than in its content, as Stein does not concern

herself with the motherhood/selfhood conflict.

Stein's works will also serve the purpose of making my aim to clarify genres particularly challenging. As I consider autobiography's relationship to the Bildungsroman, I will address the increasing presence of first-person narration in 20th century works which concern development, and then compare and contrast the first-person narration of 19th century European autobiography to the third-person narration most characteristic of the Bildungsroman. After pointing out characteristics which seem to distinguish autobiography and the Bildungsroman, I will show how Stein's The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas and Everybody's Autobiography erode genre distinctions, in spite of my attempts to clarify them.

Part One: The Bildungsroman and Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship
Chapter One

The Concept of "Bildung"

Although in depth research has already been done on the history of the term "Bildung" by Germanists, a brief history here will aid in illustrating what I see as the contradictory nature of the genre that transcends sex differences.

Todd Kontje points out that the concept of "Bildung" changed significantly in the course of the 18th century.¹ He explains that it originally referred to both the external form or appearance of an individual (Gestalt), and to the process of giving form (Gestaltung), and that medieval mystics and 18th century Pietists conceived of "Bildung" as God's active transformation of the passive Christian. Since human beings have fallen out of their unity with God, and have become deformed through Original Sin, they must prepare to receive God's grace. The believer remains passive, as God impresses his image onto the fallen individual, and effects a redemptive transformation of the disfigured sinner back into the image of God. Kontje observes that later in the 18th century

¹ Todd Curtis Kontje, The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993) 2-4.

a secular, humanistic concept of “Bildung” emerges. Instead of being passive recipients of a preexistent form, individuals now gradually develop their own innate potential through interaction with their environment. In turn, organic imagery of natural growth replaces a model of divine intervention, and transformation into the perfect unity of God turns into the development of one’s unique self. In this view, no fall from grace has occurred; humans, like the rest of God’s creation, are essentially good. God no longer stands apart from the world, but becomes a force of nature. Kontje adds that the concept of “Bildung” takes part in the general transformation of Western thought that occurred during the last decades of the 18th century. According to Kontje, Herder was the most influential disseminator of the secular concept of “Bildung”: for Herder “Bildung” involved the development of an innate genetic potential under the influence of a particular geographical and cultural setting. The concept of “Bildung” also played a central role in the work of the Weimar Classicists Goethe, Schiller, and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Goethe stressed the necessity for freedom in human development, and Humboldt, although sharing Herder’s belief in the primacy of genetics, and employing organic metaphors to describe human development, emphasized that passive

ripening is not good enough for human beings. In other words, nature provides the “seed,” but it is up to humans to develop their potential through active engagement with the world around them. Schiller shared Humboldt's belief in the human ability to shape destiny, and insisted that the free intellect impresses its stamp on an individual's outer form, not vice versa. Human freedom actually turns “Bildung” into an achievement of the will.

As we can see, the concept of “Bildung” is highly nuanced, and at times contradictory from its inception. It is both religious (Pietist), and secular and it encompasses both the passivity and activity of humans in their development. On the one hand “Bildung” entails the submission of human beings to the influence of God or the outside world on their growth. On the other hand “Bildung” requires the shaping of the world through human beings’ willful imposition of innate potential on it. It should not be surprising, therefore, but rather expected, that when “Bildung” is combined with “Roman” to form a genre, it will be polysemous.

I will turn now to Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and explain what Bildungsroman theorists mean when referring to it as the first Bildungsroman.

Wilhelm Meister and The Beautiful Soul

Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, written at the end of the 18th century, embodies the contrasting concepts of "Bildung" I have outlined, and displays additional disparities. Although most agree that it is the prototype of the Bildungsroman, most differ as to which aspect makes it so. I will demonstrate that all too frequently critics extract only one component of the novel, and always a different one, and make, not only a generalization about the novel, but about the genre as a whole. Keeping the complexity of "Bildung" in mind as we think about the novel, we cannot help but wonder: Is Goethe's novel religious or secular? Does it approach formation in a negative light, as the Pietists did with Original Sin in mind, or optimistically as did the humanists? Is Wilhelm passive or active regarding his development? Does Wilhelm develop by having form imposed upon him or is it primarily his will from within that makes him the person he becomes? But then again, does he really ever become anything?

If to the complexity of the concept of "Bildung" we add Wilhelm's inability to make decisions for himself it becomes even more obvious that clear answers to these questions are not to be found either in Wilhelm or the novel as

a whole. Like Hamlet, the role he loves most out of many he plays, Wilhelm is irresolute. Two examples which demonstrate Wilhelm's indecisiveness are in his choice of career and wife.

Wilhelm has always been drawn to the illusory world of the theater. At first he seems determined to follow his dream, but then, after the unfortunate end to his relationship with Mariane, he resigns himself to the static world of business. Then Wilhelm gets caught up with a troupe of actors, and subsequently meets many different types of people. One of them, Jarno, introduces him to Shakespeare, and Wilhelm enthusiastically explains that "The few glances [he] has cast into Shakespeare's world have impelled [him] more than anything else to take more resolute steps into the real world".² Ironically, after reading Shakespeare, Wilhelm gets increasingly involved in everything but reality. He becomes more active in the theater, and acquainted and intrigued by otherworldly figures such as Mignon, the Harper, and Natalie, the noble woman he refers to as the Amazon, who tends to his wounds after he gets shot. While wounded, Wilhelm, in a confused state, looks at her and observes:

- Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship. ed. and trans. Eric A. Blackall (Princeton: Princeton UP. 1995) 113.

Her head seemed to be surrounded by shafts of light and there was a glow spreading across her whole appearance. The surgeon was at that moment treating him rather less gently, he was about to extract the bullet that was still lodged in his wound. So the saint disappeared from his fainting sight: he lost all consciousness, and when he came to again, the horsemen and carriage, the beautiful lady and her attendants had all vanished into thin air. (135)

The vision Wilhelm gets of the Amazon in his dreamlike semi-conscious state turns out to be an ideal image, which invades his mind throughout the rest of the novel. It is later revealed that the Amazon is similar in character to her aunt, the Beautiful Soul, who, as we know, completely withdraws from the real world and finds retreat in spiritual communion with God.

After his first encounter with the Amazon, Wilhelm decides that “he did not want to continue drifting through life without a plan; his path into the future was now to be measured with purposeful steps” (141). So he writes a letter to his friend Werner, a businessman, saying that his desire to attain the harmonious development of his personality can only be achieved in the theater because only there can he really move and develop as he wishes (175). This seeming conviction does not last and eventually Wilhelm will come to realize that his mind has become increasingly turned away from the theater (296). He says that his reason for leaving it is to associate himself with men whose company is

bound to lead him “into a life of firm, honest activity” (300). In the end it is clear that his vacillation from theater to business world to theater to business world has not contributed much to his development.

We see the same indecisiveness in Wilhelm’s choice of a wife. After several encounters with different women, Wilhelm chooses to marry Therese toward the end of the novel. He says:

My decision to offer Therese my hand in marriage was perhaps the first that came to me entirely from within myself. I made my decision after careful consideration, my mind was completely made up, and my fondest hopes were to be filled by her acceptance. (327)

Once again Wilhelm seems self-assured, but of course he ends up not with Therese but with the Amazon. But does the full responsibility of Wilhelm’s decisions rest in his hands? Is he responsible for his constant changes of mind and lack of follow-through? In the beginning of the novel Wilhelm seems to be a wanderer who comes across people and circumstances at random. He has an impulse to follow his passion for the theater, rather than get trapped in his father’s world of business, so he must make choices. He does not have much success, but it seems as if he is simply a young man trying to find his way in the world. As the narrative progresses, an additional plane is revealed. We become

increasingly aware of the behind-the-scenes mechanics that influence Wilhelm's choices, as well as of a web of underlying connections. The reader is no longer only observing Wilhelm as he struggles to find his way. All is not what it seems.

At several points throughout the novel questions about fate, chance, and free will are brought up by various characters. I'll focus on the ones concerning Wilhelm. Early on Wilhelm seems to speak in defense of fate. When reflecting on his feelings about the sale of his grandfather's art collection, Wilhelm says he accepted the fact and respects it as a stroke of fate (38). The stranger to whom he is speaking reprimands him and says that he is sorry to hear the word 'fate' used by a young man at a time in his life when passionate inclinations are all too often interpreted as the workings of higher forces. He argues that "Everyone holds his fortune in his own hands, like a sculptor the raw material he will fashion into a figure" (39). Here belief in self-will is encouraged by a guide who is more experienced in life. Later in the novel this stranger, who opposes fate and appears to be connected to Wilhelm by chance, ends up being one of the members of the Tower Society who have pulled many of the strings of his life without his awareness. Ironically, this professor of will turns out to

be a manipulator of his professee's life. Wilhelm next meets this stranger just before he is granted his Certificate of Apprenticeship. The episode opens with an air of mystery and confusion. Wilhelm is suddenly pushed by Jarno through a door onto a palimpsest-like altar. Then a voice orders him to be seated, a voice that turns out to be that of the stranger, who reveals himself by saying "perhaps this time we could come to some agreement on fate and character" (302). But of course there is none. Wilhelm only gets more confused, and exclaims "Can there be some pattern in chance events? Is what we call 'fate' really only chance?" (302). But he does not get any opportunity to arrive at any understanding because he is assaulted by other voices. Another member of the Tower, whom he has difficulty recognizing, says:

The duty of a teacher is not to preserve man from error, but to guide him in error, in fact to let him drink it in, in full draughts. That is the wisdom of teachers. For the man who only sips at error, can make do with it for quite a time, delighting in it as a rare pleasure. But a man who drinks it to the dregs, must recognize the error of his ways, unless he is mad. (302)

Wilhelm takes his error to be his "seeking cultivation where none was to be found," that is, in the theater, and "imaging [that he] could acquire a talent to which [he] had no propensity" (302). So the members of the Tower society take

credit for being instrumental in Wilhelm's realization that there is not much promise for him in the theater. Once Wilhelm is aware of this he is granted the Certificate which closes the mysterious episode. A segment of the Certificate is provided which contains perplexing maxims and statements about the confusing nature of words: "Words are good, but they are not the best. The best is not made clear by words" (303). But it is always the Tower Society's words that are most ambiguous. Perhaps Wilhelm should not have so much confidence in their words?

A little further on we see that Wilhelm is skeptical about the Society's words of wisdom, and is frustrated. Jarno, when he starts explaining the Tower manual and speaks about development, says:

We assigned freedom of action only to those who felt deeply and saw clearly what they were born to, and had enough experience of their own to pursue their chosen course with ease and gladness. (337)

Wilhelm responds:

Well then...you were much too precipitate with me, for since that moment of liberation I know less than ever what I can do, or what I desire, or should do. (337)

Jarno then tries to offer some more insight:

A person who has great potentiality for development will in due course acquire knowledge of himself and the world. Few people have the understanding and simultaneously the ability to act. Understanding extends, but also immobilizes; action mobilizes, but also restricts. (337)

At his wit's end, Wilhelm interjects: "Do desist from giving me any more of these wondrous observations...Such verbiage has confused me quite enough" (337). Wilhelm is not convinced that the Tower Society's intervention in his life has had a good influence on him because he has not seen much of a change in himself. In fact he seems resigned about having the ability to give his life any direction. He ends up saying:

I consign myself entirely to my friends and their direction...for it is useless trying to act according to one's own will in this world...I leave entirely to you, what you decide about me. (364)

In terms of formation, the novel seems to end on a negative note. Wilhelm does not seem any better equipped to handle reality on his own, or to take the initiative to give his life some solid direction. After all his travels and encounters, he has not acquired greater wisdom. He can only prepare to go on another journey with the Marchese, which creates a sense of continued undecidedness and open-endedness. It seems as if the positive aspect of all these events, the happy ending, is not to be found in Wilhelm's definitive formation, which was

expected to have come about by means of his interaction with the real world. It is to be found, rather, in the ideal of human activity which Lothario believes Nature has prescribed for Natalie's beautiful soul, and which will always remain unattainable (372). At this point, there seems to be a strong implication that belief in an ideal has much greater developmental impetus than acquiring understanding of the real.

We can see this in Lothario's identifying Natalie as someone who has developed. But how? Perhaps her secret lies in her principles of cultivation. If we look at both the way she functions as a guide to the development of children under her care, or at the way her aunt, The Beautiful Soul, guided her, we come across a method of formation that is alternative to the Tower Society's. When Wilhelm asks Natalie if she allows each human being to develop by searching and losing his way, making mistakes and either happily reaching his goal or losing himself miserably in the process (323), Natalie responds in the negative. She believes instead that it is of the utmost importance "to enunciate certain principles and inculcate these into children-principles that will give their lives some stability" (323) because she is convinced that "it is better to err because of principles than to do so from arbitrariness of nature" (323). We can surmise

that, as a child, Natalie has had principles inculcated into her particularly in the way she expresses indebtedness to her aunt, The Beautiful Soul. When conversing with Wilhelm about the Beautiful Soul, after he mistakenly almost identifies her portrait as the niece's, Natalie speaks of her aunt as a light that shone especially brightly on her (317) and as being "outside us what ideals are inside us, models not to be imitated, but to be striven after" (318). She realizes the importance of not thinking solely of oneself with respect to self-cultivation, but remembering what one owes to others (317), presumably those who have helped along the way.

The different principles of cultivation represented by the Tower Society and the Beautiful Soul demonstrate the novel's complex portrayal of human development. Like the contrasting concepts of "Bildung," Wilhelm Meister and The Beautiful Soul display different shades of formation. Up until this point I have shown that the Tower Society's attempts at allowing Wilhelm to drink in error in full draughts, in the hope that he will eventually recognize the error of his ways, acquire knowledge of himself and the world, and make decisions about his life, have not been fruitful. At the end of his apprenticeship Wilhelm remains imperceptive about himself and others and had not given his life any

definite direction. His successful formation is therefore questionable. With this in mind let us have a look at *The Beautiful Soul*'s development and see how it compares with Wilhelm's.

“*The Confessions of a Beautiful Soul*” was influenced by the memory of a pietistic friend of Goethe's mother, Susanne von Klettenberg as well as by the author's close contact with pietistic circles in Frankfurt.³ This “religious book,” as Goethe called it, with its confessional tone and first-person narration contrasts with the third-person narration of the rest of the novel. Its exclusive treatment of the “*Bildung*” of a woman marks another divergence. Unlike Wilhelm who makes various attempts to become integrated into his world, the *Beautiful Soul* withdraws from it. Her religious conversion and movement inward into the self can be interpreted in different ways.

One contemporary feminist critic chooses to read the *Beautiful Soul*'s retreat from society as an indication of a wasted life, of unrealized potential. Marianne Hirsch writes about how in 19th century novels the fictional heroine, excluded from active participation from culture, is thrown back on herself.⁴ As

³ Eric A. Blackall. *Goethe and the Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1976) 113.

⁴ Marianne Hirsch. “Spiritual *Bildung*: The *Beautiful Soul* as Paradigm.” *The Voyage In: Fictions in Female Development*, eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland

a result of the dichotomy that “propels man outside and confines woman inside” (26), the intense inwardness that results allows her to explore and develop spiritually, emotionally, and morally, but at a cost, usually death (26). Hirsch relates the Beautiful Soul to these novels in its being the most forceful emblematic illustration of how female development is channeled inward (26). According to Hirsch, the Beautiful Soul realizes that the development of her inner qualities of sensitivity, memory, love, which she discovered in illness, can take place only outside society (30). Independence and self-determination are bought at the expense of relationship and community (32). All these points are well taken, but a few observations raise questions about them.

First, when handling a novel that abounds with cross-dressing, gender confusion and androgynous figures, clear dichotimizations about gender may be inappropriate. Second, the Beautiful Soul’s withdrawal from the world in order to develop spiritually can be understood as a sacrifice only if it is certain that the world has something to offer her. If we look at what the Beautiful Soul says about the world, we see this is not the case. She does not feel that spiritual retreat causes her to miss out. Instead she is convinced that her continued

(Hanover: UP of New England for Dartmouth Coll.. 1983) 23.

Soul is steadfast. She states:

I would never stubbornly insist on what I thought was right without listening to the opinions of others, but I myself must decide on my own happiness and I would not accept pressure from elsewhere. The reasoning of the greatest physician in the world would never persuade me to eat or drink something that was normally considered healthy and enjoyed by many, if I myself knew it would be harmful to me... (Goethe 230)

The Beautiful Soul's ability to maintain firm convictions about her well-being indicates a deep self-awareness. Ironically, Wilhelm, despite his travels, his contacts with many different types of people, and his reading of Shakespeare, never does attain self-knowledge.

For the Beautiful Soul, continued involvement in society and marriage would be the ultimate death, not withdrawal. Her active management of her life and altering its course suggest that independence and self-determination are not bought at the expense of relationship and community. On the contrary, relationship and community are rejected because of independence and self-determination. The end result is an affirmation of life:

There was nothing binding me to the world of society, and I was convinced that I would never find there what was right for me. And so I entered on a state of peace and calm, and in renouncing one sort of life, I was sustained in life. (235)

The achievement of the Beautiful Soul's will, which is in harmony with God's, makes it difficult to read Book six as tragic.

Another debatable point is the idea that the development of the Beautiful Soul's inner qualities such as sensitivity, memory and love can take place only outside society. In spite of her inwardness, the Beautiful Soul, because she functions as a guide or model, is an agent of "Bildung" for her niece Natalie, who does effect changes in the real world, through her active involvement in charitable organizations. In turn, Natalie serves as a model for others to follow in the real world. The Beautiful Soul therefore, should not be read as a figure who is completely severed from the world. Instead of being seen as a failed "Bildung," her relationship to her niece can be read as a family "Bildung" which gets progressively better through generations.

Thomas Saine observes that the idea of family plays such a central role in the novel.⁵ He believes this is due to Goethe's insights into the field of morphology and the law of metamorphosis which he had derived from the observation of plants and sought to apply to other living phenomena. Saine

⁵ Thomas Saine. "Was Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre Really Supposed to be a Bildungsroman?" Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman. ed. James Hardin (Columbia, SC: UP of South Carolina. 1991) 136.

writes:

Whenever a person's life history is related in the novel, the kind of family from which that person came turns out to be the most crucial element in the life history, for a person's present situation is inevitably the result of his or her development from those earliest beginnings. (136)

Although Saine points out that telling the life histories of characters is common in 18th century novels, the kind of emphasis Goethe seems to place on the role of family in the formation of character is very much his own (136). He concludes that the Lehrjahre is a novel about "Bildung," although it is not a Bildungsroman in the sense in which the term has come to be used by critics and scholars (139), particularly those who read the novel teleologically, with a developed Wilhelm being the result of the formation he has achieved in the course of the novel (120). Saine implies that this optimism with respect to harmonious human development may not be warranted by what goes on in the novel, but may be put there by its interpreters (121).

The Bildungsroman: Theory and Interpretation

If we look at the first writings on the theory of the Bildungsroman⁶ we find that the Enlightenment optimism that Saine makes reference to prevails. But the Enlightenment belief in harmonious human development, which entails a teleological reading, differs greatly from a Romantic emphasis on the disruptive principle of irony. These two opposing interpretations of both the Bildungsroman as genre, and of Wilhelm Meister as its prototype, indicate that the contradictory nature of the concept of "Bildung" worked its way into Bildungsroman theory at its very inception, and continues today. I have provided some background on the genre because I believe that anyone writing about it must be aware of its history and its many possible readings, and must clearly indicate their own position in relation to them. I have already shown my inclination toward a Romantic reading of the genre and will now go into greater detail as to why.

⁶ See Fritz Martini. "Bildungsroman-Term and Theory" Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman. ed. James Hardin (Columbia, SC: UP of South Carolina, 1991) 2-3. Martini credits Professor Karl von Morgenstern of Dorpat for being the first to use the term Bildungsroman in 1819 and 1820 in two of his lectures: "On the Nature of the Bildungsroman" and "On the History of the Bildungsroman," in his etymological work, and in a fragment of his lecture "On the Spirit and Connection of a Series of Philosophical Novel." Before Martini's discovery of Morgenstern's work, most believed the term was introduced by Wilhelm Dilthey, in his 1870 biography of the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (Kontje 15).

As I concentrate on the portrayal of female developments in the modern novel, I will question the adequacy of the term "female Bildungsroman." Most feminist critics resort to it because they believe the term Bildungsroman does not take into account female experience, but only social options available to men. Such a way of thinking assumes only one interpretation of development which sees the male protagonist's formation as successful and harmonious. Female development is subsequently seen in opposition to the male's, as absent, ignored, and enclosed within the sphere of the home. As the comparison between Wilhelm and the Beautiful Soul shows, I am skeptical of the all-too-neat dichotomous nature of such a way of thinking because it overlooks a nuanced concept of "Bildung" and oversimplifies the texts. I believe that questioning the teleological nature of both male and female narratives of development by focusing on plot construction will show that when the various nuances of "Bildung" are considered in relation to gender, the gap between male and female development may not seem so clear-cut after all.

The Bildungsroman and Questions of Plot

There is much dissent in contemporary criticism about how the Bildungsroman ends and how its plot is constructed. Some say that at the end of the Bildungsroman the protagonist's "ultimate victory is assured,"⁷ while others state that "the hero may be brought to an untimely death."⁸ Martin Swales speaks about the Bildungsroman's plot construction as "embodying a skepticism about the law of linear experience."⁹ Franco Moretti on the other hand, categorizes Wilhelm Meister as being organized by the principle whereby the meaning of events lies in their finality, and marriage is the "definitive and classifying act par excellence."¹⁰ Many of the feminist critics, sensitive to questions of gender, identify linear plot with male development, and cyclical plot with female.¹¹

⁷ Susanne Howe. Wilhelm Meister and His English Kinsmen: Apprentices to Life (New York: Columbia UP, 1930; AMS, 1966) 6.

⁸ Jerome Buckley. Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974) 24.

⁹ Martin Swales. The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978) 64.

¹⁰ Franco Moretti. The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture (London: Verso, 1987) 7.

¹¹ E.g. Annis Pratt. Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981) 11.

What is interesting about Moretti's work is that although he deals with both male and female narratives of development, he does not make gender distinctions. This is most evident in his comparative analysis of Wilhelm Meister and Pride and Prejudice. Moretti begins by speaking about the Bildungsroman as the 'symbolic form of modernity,' epitomized in mobility and interiority, whereby youth is chosen as the new epoch's (the turn of the 18th century) 'specific material sign' due to its ability to accentuate modernity's dynamism and instability.¹² Yet he acknowledges that to become a 'form' youth must be endowed with a very different, almost opposite feature: the notion that youth 'does not last forever' (5-6). Only by curbing its intrinsically boundless dynamism can modernity be represented (6). Moretti points out that such sharp contrasts (dynamism and limits) will necessarily render the Bildungsroman intrinsically contradictory (6). Although I agree that the Bildungsroman is intrinsically contradictory, I see some shortcomings in his categorization of certain texts in his analysis of plot differences.

According to Moretti, who follows Lotman, plot differences can be expressed as a variation in the weight of two principles of textual organization:

¹² Moretti 5.

the classification principle and the transformation principle (7). Although both are present in a narrative work, the prevalence of one rhetorical strategy over the other implies very different value choices and even opposite attitudes toward modernity (7). When classification is strongest, as in the English 'family romance' and in what he terms the classical Bildungsroman, narrative transformations have meaning in so far as they lead to a particularly marked ending: one that establishes a classification different from the initial one but is nonetheless perfectly clear and stable (7). In this teleological rhetoric, events acquire meaning when they lead to only one ending (7). Moretti continues to argue that under the transformation principle, as represented by Stendhal, Pushkin, Balzac, and Flaubert, the opposite is true: what makes a story meaningful is its narrativity, its being an open-ended process (7). Meaning is the result not of a fulfilled teleology but of the total rejection of such a solution (7). Moretti places the novel of marriage under classification, and the novel of adultery under transformation (7-8). Under classification, he places happiness as the highest value, but only to the detriment and eventual annulment of freedom. Also under classification is the idea of youth coming to an end, while under transformation youth cannot or does not give way to maturity (8). After

laying out the characteristics of these principles, Moretti reiterates that the Bildungsroman is the most contradictory of modern symbolic forms, and adds that socialization itself consists in the interiorization of contradiction (10).

After putting forth his theoretical approach, Moretti engages it in an analysis of a selected novels. He uses Wilhelm Meister and Pride and Prejudice as examples of texts organized by the classification principle. I find this problematic. Since I have already argued against Wilhelm Meister's being read as teleological, and have pointed out Goethe's ironic portrayal of Wilhelm's choosing a wife, it is difficult to accept marriage as the principle by which the narrative is organized. In Pride and Prejudice, marriage certainly is the central classifying act which brings about a perfectly meaningful conclusion, a full narrative stop, but it is precisely for this reason that it is not a Bildungsroman. In saying that in the classical Bildungsroman "A Bildung is truly such only if, at a certain point, it can be seen as concluded" (26), Moretti seems to be overlooking the fact that over time "Bildung" increasingly has been concerned with the process of becoming, not with the state of being. One could label Pride and Prejudice as a novel concerning "Bildung" only if one strictly applied the Pietist's conception of "Bildung" to it. As I have shown, such a notion

entails imposing form from without and does not at all factor in the organic shade of "Bildung," the idea of it as being a give-and-take between the individual and his/her society. The rigid hierarchical social structure of Pride and Prejudice makes such movement difficult.

Also, the characteristics of contradiction and irony which I see as central to Wilhelm, Moretti finds only in the French and Russian novels he places under the category of Bildungsromane organized under the transformation principle. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I believe that one could argue that the excess of will of Lucien, the "Bildung" protagonist in Balzac's Lost Illusions, as well as the lack of will of Flaubert's Frédéric in Sentimental Education would disqualify these novels from being Bildungsromane altogether. Lucien's vain attempt to conquer Paris by imposing himself as something he is not--a great poet, coupled with Paris' impenetrable and determined social structure which resists his will, preclude the mutual influence between individual and environment necessary for the process of Bildung to take place. Frédéric's refusal to attempt to become anything at all, and his passive anticipation of his uncle's inheritance indicate a lack of engagement with his world, and therefore an absence of Bildung.

Furthermore, the conclusion of Sentimental Education which implies that the happiest point in a man`s life occurs before adulthood, also seems anti-Bildung.

One important observation that Moretti makes, which I will return to in my discussion of women authors, is the prompting of the hero and the reader to look back towards the past, in spite of the future-oriented nature of the Bildungsroman. Moretti finds backward-looking only in the classical Bildungsroman as a result of a “refusal to see the future still ‘open’ which is an indication of maturity” (68). I think backward-looking may be read in female narratives of development not as a realization of a closed future, but as a crucial step in moving forward, in opening up to what the future has to offer.

I have been alluding to qualities which do not make a Bildungsroman: too rigid an imposition of form from without or too much or too little will from within. Perhaps at this point it is time to answer the question I posed at the outset of this chapter: What is the Bildungsroman?

The Bildungsroman: A Definition

Martin Swales makes reference to Todorov`s observations regarding the concept of genre. Citing Todorov`s The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a

Literary Genre, Swales highlights the Structuralist's insistence that "there is a qualitative difference as to the meanings of the term 'genre' or 'specimen,' depending on whether they are applied to natural beings or to the works of the mind" (9). He quotes Todorov:

In the former case the appearance of a new example does not necessarily modify the characteristics of the species; consequently, the properties of the new example are for the most part deducible from the pattern of the species.... The birth of a new tiger does not modify the species in its definition. But in art, every work modifies the sum of possible works, each new example alters the species.¹³

I think Todorov's distinction is an important one. His pointing out the different meanings of genre, and its relationship to what it is being applied to is similar to the complex concept of "Bildung" that I have been tracing throughout this chapter. We can think of Todorov's first meaning of genre, the one that is rigid and never modified, as corresponding to the earliest notion of "Bildung," the Pietist's notion, which imposes form on the individual. The second concept of genre which allows room for art to modify and alter corresponds to the more humanistic concept of "Bildung," which emphasizes a changing reciprocal relationship between individual and environment. If one were to apply

¹³ Swales 9-10.

Todorov's first definition of genre to works of literature, it would mean that the categorizing takes precedence over the works themselves. This, in fact, happens all too often with criticism of the Bildungsroman: A definition of the genre is presented, and what ensues is its application to a selection of works. I think Todorov's acknowledgement of the more flexible notion of genre is particularly suited to a discussion of the Bildungsroman.

Todorov's thoughts on genre echo T.S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which provides further understanding of the spirit in which I approach the Bildungsroman. Eliot states:

...what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new.¹⁴

I will attempt to summarize and critique the 'existing order' of the Bildungsroman as well as alter and 'readjust' it by incorporating novels by

¹⁴ T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends ed. David H. Richter. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.) 467.

Italian women authors into my exploration of the genre.

But then again, as Swales questions: "How, then, are we to define the constantly changing artistic species?"¹⁵ Swales handles this question by offering what he calls the notion of the hermeneutic circle, which entails a circular process of understanding (10). It involves "a constant movement between generality and specificity, between notional genre and a given work" (10). I think the word "movement" is key here. After stating his opinion that it is wrong to identify genre with teleology (11) and fulfilled or unfulfilled expectations (12) Swales goes on to explain that the Bildungsroman "is a novel form which esteems possibilities as much as actualities" (23). It

...operates with a tension between a concern for the sheer complexity of individual potentiality on the one hand and a recognition on the other that practical reality- marriage, family, career- is a necessary dimension of the hero's self-realization, albeit one that by definition implies a delimitation, indeed, a constriction, of the self... (29)

As I will show, this applies especially to novels which concern female development.

In many narratives of female development there is constant friction

¹⁵ Swales 10.

between individual potentiality and the limitations brought about by marriage and family. In response to this, feminist critics of the Bildungsroman argue that society is receptive to male development alone. They view male development as teleological and optimistic and female development as impeded by society. They call, therefore, for an alternative term, such as “female Bildungsroman” in order to account for female experience, which has been largely ignored throughout history. It is obvious that the tension between potentiality and limitation has been much greater for women than for men in western society, and that society has been more receptive to male development than to female, so the point no longer needs to be reiterated. Yet if we keep in mind what we have seen in the founding model, Wilhelm Meister, male development is not always unfettered and female development is not always entirely thwarted.

Before moving on to an analysis of some narratives of female development, I would like to summarize important characteristics of the Bildungsroman which have been highlighted in this chapter and others to be discussed in subsequent chapters. I will refer to this definition throughout; it will ultimately serve to arrive at greater understanding of the genre. Using Todorov’s notion of genre as being flexibly modified by individual literary works, I will

engage in a dialogue among the various works and these primary characteristics. These characteristics are therefore intended as points of departure for discussion, and are not meant to be read prescriptively.

The Bildungsroman is concerned with a protagonist whose development comes about in the following ways: by the influence of external forces, either God or the outside world; by the protagonist's imposition of innate potential on the world; or, most commonly, through a combination of both outward and inward shaping of the protagonist and his/her world. When perceived as a spectrum, the Bildungsroman's center can be identified as the point at which there is a balanced give and take or mutual exchange between individual and environment. A greater degree of either external forces on the protagonist's development or the protagonist's excessive will outward on the world's shaping would mark extreme ends of the spectrum. The "Bildung" protagonist, regardless of gender, demonstrates a becoming or emergence in time and usually belongs to the bourgeoisie, the class most conducive to the mobility necessary for the process of "Bildung." Unlike development in Freudian psychoanalysis, emergence involves a showing of time in its course, which is imperceptible and not easily divisible into clearly defined stages. The process of "Bildung" also

involves the putting together or building up of the ego, rather than the breaking up of the self into multiple parts. The “Bildung” protagonist’s emergence coincides with the world’s, and is at a transition point from one era to another. Becoming in transition creates tension, and frequently, a sense of contradiction, most evident in the protagonist’s vacillation between the ideal and the real, between potentiality and actuality. As a result, the Bildungsroman’s plot is open-ended and future-oriented, which means that it is not propelled by the achievement of an end, such as social integration or marriage. The end of the narrative itself may be ambiguous. Narration is always in the third person, which creates distance between the “Bildung” protagonist, often unaware of the process of development as it is happening, and the telling. Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship is the prototype of the genre.

After discussing a number of works which consider a particular pattern of female development which focuses on love and marriage, I will identify where they may be situated along the Bildungsroman spectrum. I will use terms such as the “novel of development,” the “novel of awakening,” and the “feminist novel” as indicator’s of the Bildungsroman’s various shades.

Part Two: Female Developments in the 19th Century

Chapter Two

It has become a tradition among critics of the Bildungsroman to expand the concept of the genre: first beyond the German prototypes, then beyond historical circumscription, now beyond the notion of Bildung as male and beyond the form of the developmental plot as a linear, foregrounded narrative structure. Our reformulation participates in a critical tradition by transforming a recognized historical and theoretical genre into a more flexible category whose validity lies in its usefulness as a conceptual tool.¹

Most Anglo-American critics of the Bildungsroman, such as the editors of the volume The Voyage In, acknowledge the importance of broadening the genre beyond 18th century Germany and exclusive consideration of male development. In this chapter I will concentrate on the relation of the Bildungsroman to two 19th century women writers, Neera in Italy and George Eliot in England. My addressing the manner in which place and time modify the Bildungsroman is related to Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope, or time-space. I will demonstrate that the type of emergence Bakhtin assigns to "male" texts is also relevant to "female" texts. That Bakhtin's understanding of the Bildungsroman, although he does not refer to female authors or female

¹ Abel 13-14.

protagonists in his analysis, lends itself so well to the female-authored and female-centered novels under discussion, provides further proof that rigid male/female categories of the Bildungsroman are inadequate. I will show that in these "female" novels, as in the "male" texts Bakhtin cites, emergence becomes less and less a private affair as the individual emerges along with the world. Of course the nature of the emergence is different for women, who emerge primarily from the domestic sphere. In subsequent chapters I will discuss female protagonists who emerge from the enclosed space of the home and the roles of wife and mother and become engaged in literature and politics. However, like that of their male counterparts, the world in which the female protagonists emerge is a changing world, and emergence itself, notwithstanding its different nature for women, occurs at a point of transition between two cultural periods. The future as an organizing force is also of utmost importance in the novels of both genders. After showing the manner in which each female protagonist develops within a specific place and time, a comparative analysis of these various protagonists will provide insight into the way female development in the novel evolves through time. I hope that marking the various phases of female development with terminological distinction will furnish a more precise

and complete understanding of its representation in literature.

The Bakhtinian Chronotope

Bakhtin's ideas about the chronotope and the Bildungsroman can be pieced together from two of his essays, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel"² and "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)."³ As Morson and Emerson maintain, the first essay, written during 1937 and 1938, which ends with Rabelais, seems to demand a continuation, while the second, written between 1936 and 1938, is in part fragmentary and appears in the form of a prospectus or outline.⁴ However, when read together, these essays complement each other and read as different parts of the same study. Despite the difficult task of

²Mikhail Bakhtin. "Forms of Time and of Chronotope in the Novel." trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. The Dialogic Imagination, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

³ Mikhail Bakhtin. "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)." trans. Vern W. McGee. Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

⁴ Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson. Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990) 405.

extracting a stable and precise definition of the chronotope in Bakhtin's essays,⁵ I find his overall contextualization of events and actions in place and time, and his characterization of place and time as shapers of plot particularly valuable and relevant to this study.

Bakhtin opens his essay on the Bildungsroman with a long list of novels which are major examples of the genre. He declares that since his list contains phenomena that are too diverse, he will aim to "sort out the entire problem of the so-called Bildungsroman,"⁶ by narrowing it down and defining it more precisely. In his treatment of various types of Bildungsromane, Bakhtin creates two major subcategories of the genre: novels without emergence and more important, novels of emergence. Bakhtin places Goethe's works under the category novels of emergence and gives Goethe the most praise for his ability to visualize historical time in literature. According to Bakhtin, Goethe's understanding of the fullness of time, which entails a successful connecting of past, present, and future, demonstrates his ability to read in everything *signs*

⁵ See Jay Ladin. "Fleshing Out the Chronotope." Critical Essays on Mikhail Bakhtin (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1999) 213. "The trouble with chronotopes is that Bakhtin never provides a systematic definition of the 'literary artistic chronotope,' nor does he present a clearly articulated protocol for identifying and analyzing chronotopes and the relations between them."

⁶ Bakhtin. "Bildungsroman" 20.

that show time in its course (25). Bakhtin believes the end product of Goethe's vision is a sense of becoming or emergence in time. Bakhtin uses the vision of historical time he credits Goethe for as a way of subdividing novels of emergence even further. He states that the essay's specific theme will be the image of *man in the process of becoming*. Bakhtin narrows the novel of historical emergence to five types according to their degree of assimilation of real historical time: the idyllic-cyclical chronotope, the *humoristic branch* of the Bildungsroman (in the narrow sense), the biographical and autobiographical type, the didactic-pedagogical novel, and the novel of historical emergence, which is the most significant. Bakhtin states that in the first four types man's emergence occurs within a single epoch, and proceeds against the immobile background of the world, which is stable. Man recognizes and submits to the existing laws of life and emerges, but the world itself does not. Man's development is also an exclusively private affair, and Bakhtin seems to imply that the lack of exchange between man and world necessarily makes it so. In the fifth category, on the other hand, man's individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence:

In such novels as Gargantua and Pantagruel, Simplicissimus, and Wilhelm Meister, however, human emergence is of a different nature. It is no longer man's own private affair. He emerges *along with the world* and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him. He is forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being. What is happening here is precisely the emergence of a new man. The organizing force held by the future is therefore extremely great here-and this is not, of course, the private biographical future, but the historical future. It is as though the very *foundations* of the world are changing, and man must change along with them. Understandably, in such a novel of emergence, problems of reality and man's potential, problems of freedom and necessity, and the problem of creative initiative rise to their full height. The image of the emerging man begins to surmount its private nature (with certain limits, of course) and enters into a completely new, *spatial* sphere of historical existence. (23-24)

It is interesting to note Bakhtin's use of the term Bildungsroman in a broad sense, which includes all of the works he lists at the outset of his essay, and in the narrow sense, to refer specifically to the works of Wieland, which pave the way for Goethe. According to Bakhtin's classification, Goethe's Wilhelm Meister is a Bildungsroman only in the broad sense. I believe that since in general, one can fault Bakhtin's classification for some inconsistency,⁷ greater attention should be paid to the content of his analysis of Goethe, Wilhelm

⁷ Morson and Emerson 410.

Meister, and the novel of historical emergence, rather than to the actual labels themselves.

The Search for the Bildungsroman in the Tradition of Italian Women's Writing: The Case of Neera

Anna Radius Zuccari, more commonly known by her pen name, Neera, is an author whose novels embody some of the nuanced and contradictory characteristics of "Bildung" I have presented in chapter 1. In her treatment of female development her protagonists seem passive as they submit to societal norms which shape them, and active as they attempt to shape their world through the influence of their individual potentialities. In other words, Neera presents female protagonists who engage in a mutual exchange with their world. Unlike her better known contemporary and feminist Sibilla Aleramo, whose Una donna (1906), frequently miscategorized as a Bildungsroman,⁸ clearly and emphatically advocates total rebellion against societal norms, Neera's position is often ambiguous. On the border between the 19th and 20th centuries, Neera's novels at times seem to condemn the living conditions which thwart the

⁸ In chapter 4 I argue that the term "feminist novel" more accurately categorizes Aleramo's novel.

growth of developing girls, whereas in her Le idee di una donna she comes across as reactionary. Neera argues that women should not fight against the fact that they are biologically tied to the home (“La vita naturale fisiologica della donna è nella casa”)⁹ [The natural physiological life of a woman is in the home],¹⁰ and privileges the hidden mothers behind great men over great women themselves (“la Eliot e la Sand poco diedero alla umanità in confronto delle oscure madri di Leonardo e di Dante”) (69) [Eliot and Sand gave little to humanity in comparison to the obscure mothers of Leonardo and Dante]. In many of her novels, such as Nel sogno (1883), Anima sola (1895) and Crevalcore (1907), there is frequent oscillation and juxtaposition between an ideal timeless world, that is associated with mystical contemplation, feeling and illusion, and a material world where time passes and concerns about money and death are stark reality.

I will focus my analysis on three of Neera’s novels which concern the development of young women, novels known together as the “ciclo della fanciulla” [young woman series]: Teresa (1886), Lydia (1887), and L'indomani

⁹ Neera . Le idee di una donna (Milano: Nazionale, 1904) 48.

¹⁰ All translations from Italian are mine.

[The day after] (1889). In Teresa we encounter a young woman who decides to be with the man she loves after dutifully caring for her family for many years. In Lydia a young woman commits suicide after becoming disillusioned about love. In L'indomani a young woman finds happiness and purpose in the idea of motherhood as she copes with an unsatisfying marriage. I will treat each work individually, and explore the ways they advance (or do not) discourse on the Bildungsroman. Then I will examine the various ways in which the mother-daughter conversation at the end of the trilogy can be interpreted. Before discussing Teresa I would like to refer briefly to Antonia Arslan's categorization of Neera's works under "romanzo-psicologico sentimentale" [psychological-sentimental novel].

Arslan uses this term to refer to the writing of several Italian women authors of the late 1800's, including Neera. In these works what is exposed is the following:

Un sistema di valori femminili...caratterizzato da una visione antagonistica dell'erotismo e del ruolo dei sessi e da una riflessione sostanzialmente negativa e autolimitativa della donna-scrittrice su se stessa e sul mondo che la circonda.¹¹

¹¹ Antonia Arslan. Dame, galline e regine: La scrittura femminile tra '800 e '900 (Milano: Guerini, 1998) 29.

[A system of feminine values...characterized by an antagonistic vision of eroticism and of the role of the sexes, and by a substantially negative and self-limiting reflection of the woman-writer to herself and her world.]

She goes on to say how these works lack a positive ending and are marked instead by a return to order. At first glance it may seem that if Neera's works deal with societal limits which stunt growth, then negativity and pessimism may disqualify them as Bildungsromane. In fact some critics, such as Esther Kleinbord Labovitz, argue that it is only in the 20th century that one can find a female Bildungsroman, since prior to this time female development is far too hindered by society. However, if we take into account the role narrative structure plays in the development of works of development rather than focusing exclusively on society, then perhaps it is possible to isolate more positive elements in pre-20th century narratives of female development.

After isolating the negative aspects, Arslan explains how these psychological-sentimental novels were written by their authors with "termini di sotteranea ambiguità del tessuto narrativo, giocato su due piani" (30) [hidden ambiguity played out on two planes within the narrative fabric]. She then explains what these two planes are:

...il ricostituirsi dell'ordine sociale turbato e insieme la sollecitazione di una simpatia, di un'affinità profonda determinata dalla comune condizione femminile ...e pertanto destinato a scontrarsi con il sistema sociale stabilito, di segno prevalentemente maschile. (30)

[...the reconstruction of the troubled social order and the solicitation of a sympathy, of a profound affinity brought about by the common feminine condition... and therefore destined to clash with the established social system, which is prevalently masculine.]

On the one hand, Neera exposes a particular social order which necessarily entails pointing out the male-female divide with regard to development. On the other hand, Neera goes beyond this to include, as Arslan says, an affinity among women, determined by their common feminine condition. Although the idea of a common feminine condition may risk sounding essentialist and reductive in its presumption that all women are linked together by their gender, it is important to keep the time and place Neera is writing about in mind. The differences we are aware of today, such as race, age, sexual orientation, and religion, cannot be applied to women in late 19th century Italian Literature. The paucity of roles and opportunities available to women a century ago prevented them from being as different as they might be in a climate tolerant of such differences. The idea of a common feminine condition therefore applied to Neera's writing is plausible.

Having said this I would add that I believe it is in this second aspect that Arslan mentions, the common feminine condition, that elements of “Bildung” are to be found. In Neera’s novels the most common roles available to women, those of wife and mother, are portrayed and explored by the female protagonists as they interact with other women as mothers and daughters, friends, and neighbors. This affinity among women aids the protagonists in coming to greater understanding of these roles, which in turn shapes their development positively. I believe that acknowledgment of this double plane is important, because it reveals the complexity of Neera’s portrayal of female development. Without it, the positive aspects of female development would be eclipsed entirely by a male-dominated social order which would render female development exclusively deterministic. We shall see that, as Arslan says, maternity in general can be read in Neera’s works as salvation, as an alternative to an ending of defeat and death, which were most often the by-products for female protagonists who live in a society unreceptive to female growth and expansion:

L’unica via d’uscita, riproposta in infinite variazioni, è la sublimazione della sensualità attraverso l’amor platonico e soprattutto la maternità. Il tema della donna-madre percorre tutti

questi romanzi con accenti di delirante e sospetto trionfalismo, come compenso e riscatto di ogni deprivazione sentimentale...La maternità si affaccia nelle ultimissime pagine come alternativa al suicidio delle protagoniste. (31)

[The only way out, suggested in an infinite number of variations, is the sublimation of sensuality through platonic love and above all maternity. The theme of the woman-mother runs through all of these novels with hints of delirious and suspect triumphalism, as compensation and redemption for all sentimental deprivation...Maternity manifests itself in the last pages as an alternative to the protagonists' suicide.]

There are two different ways in which Neera's idea of maternity as life-preserving and a source of growth can be related to the historical context in which she writes. Maternity as salvation can be understood as an echoing of post-Risorgimento assertions about women's role in society. As politicians and writers idealized maternity, women were called upon to become the mothers of the new nation.¹² However it is impossible to know definitively whether Neera's ideas about maternity stem from an assimilation of post-Risorgimento ideas about women's roles, or whether they are a reaction to the wave of feminism in her time that, in her words, was overly concerned with a "concetto materialista

¹² Sharon Wood. Italian Women's Writing: 1860-1994 (London: Athlone Press, 1995) 31.

della felicità”¹³ [material concept of happiness] that is, with the idea that women would be happier making money than raising children. This way of thinking she considers to be “la vera schiavitù dalla quale ella [la donna] deve liberarsi” (29) [the real slavery from which she [woman] must free herself].

In her defense of maternity Neera raises a question that now, a century later, in spite of all the advances feminism has made for women, has yet to be considered seriously: “Quand’anche riuscissero [le donne] a fare quello che fa l’uomo, chi farebbe quello che non vogliono fare più?” (27) [When [women] will have succeeded in doing what men do, who will do what they do not want to do anymore?]. In raising this question Neera, unlike her feminist contemporaries, refreshingly places importance on the work that women have done within the sphere of the home.

Teresa

Neera’s Teresa opens with a Verga-esque chorus of boatmen who for forty eight hours have been struggling to control the Po river that has overflowed and flooded after thirty- four days of rain. After references to “la provvidenza”

¹³ Neera . Idce 29.

[providence] and accounts of the casualties of the disaster, the narrative shifts to the home of signor Caccia, the tax collector, whose delicate wife “la signora Soave” [“Mrs. Mild”] is about to give birth to their fifth child. In the meantime their first daughter, fifteen-year-old Teresa, who has recently left school in order to devote herself entirely to helping her mother with the household chores, is feeling the weight of her new role: “Si sentiva a un tratto fatta donna- con un resentimento improvviso di dolori lontani...”¹⁴ [she felt all at once that she had become a woman- with a sudden presentiment of far away pains].

Although constant in her duty to her family, Teresa becomes increasingly aware of the limits it imposes. This is most evident in her comparison of the path her brother Carlino’s life is taking relative to her own, a comparison similar to Virginia Woolf’s thoughts on Shakespeare and his imaginary sister expressed a few years later in A Room of One’s Own. While thinking about the brother with whom she once had so much in common Teresa realizes that:

Le loro vite si svolgevano in senso opposto; avevano un concetto differente dell'esistenza e bisogni e idee differenti. E poi Teresina anelava, inconsciamente, all'intimità dell'uomo. La freddezza di Carlo la feriva in una fibra che, per essere inavvertita, non era meno potente. Ella soffriva accanto a quel giovane robusto e

¹⁴ Nccra. Teresa 31.

felice, a quel giovane pago, a cui i privilegi del suo sesso aprivano tutte le porte. Non ragionava così la fanciulla, ma aveva l'intuizione di una profonda ingiustizia, mentre l'istinto della donna la spingeva ciecamente verso il suo signore e padrone. (102)

[Their lives were developing in opposite directions; They had a different concept of existence and different needs and ideas. And so Teresina yearned, unconsciously, for a close relationship with her brother. Carlo's indifference struck such a deep chord in her that despite the fact that it remained unacknowledged it was no less intense. She suffered beside that robust and happy youth, beside that satisfied young man, for whom the privileges of his sex opened all doors. The young girl was not reasoning in this way, but she had the intuition of a profound injustice, while her instinct spurred her blindly toward her lord and master.]

After being away at school for ten months, Carlo comes home with the stamp of the outside world on him. His way of dressing, speaking, and the objects he brings back with him create a barrier between the once close siblings, as well as conflict within Teresa. Caught between her sense of duty toward her family and natural feelings of injustice, Teresa's thought is interrupted when she hears that her little sister needs tending to.

The path that the life of Teresa's boyfriend Orlandi is taking is very similar to Carlo's, and juxtaposes the contrast in male and female development once again. As with her regard for her brother, Teresa's feelings toward Orlandi are imbued with conflict. Shortly before meeting Orlandi, Teresa is given the

rare opportunity to go to the opera for the first time. While watching Rigoletto, her passion is ignited. Deeply moved by the emotions of the characters to whom love is revealed as suffering, as well as by Gilda's tragic end, Teresa bursts into tears. It is at this point, as the character's pain resonates within her, that Teresa begins to form in her mind an "ideale sicuro" (82) [secure ideal] which she carries inside her and which sustains her throughout the novel. This ideal can be understood as a model of romantic love to be striven for and to imitate. Teresa seems to have come to terms with the fact that love entails pain, and embraces it with open arms. However, we shall see that Teresa's aim to attain romantic love does not occur at the expense of her life, as it does for Gilda. Eventually the reader will come to learn that Teresa's constant hoping and dreaming about romantic love will influence her development in a positive way, and ultimately save her life. Furthermore, Teresa's fascination with the illusory world of the opera at the beginning of the novel is quite similar to Wilhelm's enchantment with the theater. It seems that in these novels that deal with development, regardless of gender, the stage, the place where various and multiple roles are acted out, plays its own role in protagonists' becoming.

Shortly after her visit to the opera Teresa receives her first note from

Orlandi, which is “*morbido come una carezza, pungente come una ferita*” (119) [as soft as a caress, as sharp as a wound]. As their relationship progresses by means of secret notes and brief stolen moments, Teresa’s happiness and hopes for romantic love increase, but not for long. As Orlandi is off in Milan attempting to become a journalist, he writes to Teresa. In one letter, which Teresa reads with her heart divided between “*l’amore e il dolore*” (173) [love and pain], Orlandi tells her about his new acquaintances, university friends, and evenings at la Scala. From beginning to end, Teresa’s feelings for Orlandi entail conflict.

Teresa’s increasing awareness of the disadvantages society poses to female growth does not depend exclusively on comparisons between her own development and those of her brother and boyfriend. Two other female characters in the novel, Calliope, the intriguing neighbor, and Teresa’s mother, function as mirrors that reflect what is in store in the future for Teresa’s development.

Calliope is a mysterious woman who spends most of her time shut up in her home. Her past is uncertain and nobody knows much about her, other than that she has strange habits, but occasionally one glimpses her through her barred

window. As a character she is not central to the narrative, yet her life and death have a considerable impact on Teresa's self-awareness. At the beginning of the novel Teresa, out of curiosity, fixes her eyes on Calliope's window, as if hypnotized. But little is said about Calliope until the latter part of the novel, right after Teresa receives Orlandi's letter explaining what a great time he is having in Milan. Subsequently there is a break in the narrative, and the reader learns that Calliope has suddenly died after having suffered from "mal di cuore" (168) [illness of the heart]. Affected by the news, Teresa weeps "chiedendosi sommessamente se anche il suo amore finirebbe così" (170) [wondering quietly if her love would also end in this way]. Clearly Teresa sees a direct connection between Calliope's fate and her own, and this intensifies her conflicting feelings for Orlandi, whom she both loves and resents. As she acquires more and more insight, she associates Calliope's and her own fate with the fate of young girls in general. She notes the continual struggle girls undergo as they find themselves the recipients of the mixed messages sent by nature and society, "la società che le dice respingi, la natura che le grida accetta" (179) [society which tells her to resist and nature which commands her to accept]. She begins to understand that:

...la sua condizione di donna le imponeva anzitutto la rassegnazione al suo destino - un destino ch'ella non era libera di dirigere - che doveva accettare così come le giungeva, mozzato dalle esigenze della famiglia, sottoposto ai bisogni e ai desideri degli altri. (195)

[...her condition of being a woman imposed above all resignation to her fate-- a fate that she was not free to direct-- which she had to accept as it presented itself to her, cut short by the needs of family, subordinate to the needs and desires of others.]

Teresa now knows that progression to womanhood involves increasing sacrifice of the self and eventual resignation to fate. As she realizes this her mother, whose "aria di rassegnazione stanca" (197) [air of tired resignation] she repeats, dies.

At this point it would seem that the strong presence of destiny, which inhibits any give-and-take relationship between the individual and society, places Teresa far away from the Bildungsroman. The open-ended and unknown aspect of the future so central to the genre does not factor in Teresa's life. Her path, the novel's foreshadowing implies, only leads to death. Yet it is important to note that the narrative does not end with Teresa's misfortune. Instead, it ends unexpectedly with her active intervention in her own life, altering its course. In fact, Teresa's rejection of the path leading toward self-destruction is

reminiscent of the Beautiful Soul's in Wilhelm Meister.

After her ill father dies and all her siblings have left home, Teresa finds herself alone and finally, past the age of thirty, free to decide how and with whom she would like to live. After receiving another note from Orlandi, who informs her that he is ill, Teresa makes up her mind to leave home to be with him, despite her friend's cautioning about the gossip such a decision would create. The novel closes with her waving goodbye to her friend at the station as her train departs.

Teresa's decision to go to Orlandi and care for him may be disturbing to our post-feminist sensibility. After so many years of hoping for a future with Orlandi, who only kept her waiting, some readers may prefer that she not submit but begin a life independent of him. Lucianne Kroha speaks of the novel's dénouement as ambiguous:

Teresa's decision to leave home and join Egidio [Orlandi] may well be an act of self-affirmation for *her*, but to the reader it is more likely an act of submission. At this point in her life Teresa has no more family ties: one cannot help but note that she is once more going to minister to a sick and worn out man, after having nursed her father for so many years. Rebellion, Neera seems to be suggesting, is futile, since woman's lot is always the same in the

end.¹⁵

I believe that, although there is no harm in acknowledging the way in which Teresa's decision may be interpreted today, it is of no consequence. It is only logical that a critic of the 20th century, cognizant of the many possible roles available to women today, would find it problematic that Teresa ends up as a helpmate. However, when Teresa's decision is approached in its historical context, it may be understood as liberating and life-sustaining, and is therefore of utmost importance. Is Teresa spurred toward Orlandi by his needs alone, or is she motivated rather by an awareness of what not going to him may do to her? As we have seen, toward the end of the novel Teresa has become aware of the fact that society's dictates do not coincide with her own. She is not entirely free to respond to her natural feelings of affection for Orlandi because she has been trained to silence them, and put the needs of others first, in particular, those of her family. Teresa also begins to link her fate to that of women at large, as she witnesses the death of her mother and Calliope. Teresa's mother, filled with an air of resignation, dies after having lived a life caring only for others, but not

¹⁵ Lucienne Kroha. "The Search for Literary Mothers: Neera's Teresa." The Woman Writer in Late-Nineteenth-Century Italy: Gender and the Formation of Literary Identity (New York: Edwin Mellen Press. 1992) 92.

herself. Calliope, at first seemingly the opposite of “la signora Suave” in her unconventional habit of wandering alone in the countryside with loose hair and a rifle worn over her shoulder and across her chest, dies alone in her barred house ostracized by the townspeople, who are incapable of assimilating such behavior. Teresa’s mother’s and Calliope’s failure at rebellion actually push Teresa toward rebellion. The lives and deaths of both women communicate a similar message to Teresa. Through Calliope’s dying of “mal di cuore,” [illness of the heart] and Teresa’s mother’s last words “segui il tuo cuore,”¹⁶ [follow your heart] Teresa understands that if she is to save her life she must begin to act according to her own dictates. In following her mother’s advice and attempting to actualize her dream of love by going to Orlandi, Teresa triumphs in not succumbing, as her mother and Calliope did, to the destiny prescribed to her. Instead, for the first time in her life, Teresa acts in the social world out of motivation and desire from within without heeding what her sisters, brother, and the townspeople will think of her after she leaves. Teresa’s interaction with her environment, and the novel’s open and future-oriented ending, seem to indicate that it possesses many of the characteristics I have been associating with the

¹⁶ Neera. Teresa 204.

Bildungsroman. We might look at other terms along the Bildungsroman spectrum to see whether they have anything to offer in categorizing Neera's novel.

One possible term is the "novel of awakening." Susan J. Rosowski indicates that the "novel of awakening" is similar to the Bildungsroman in recounting the attempts of a sensitive protagonist to learn the nature of the world, discover its meaning and pattern and acquire a philosophy of life. It differs in the protagonist's learning life's lessons as a woman.¹⁷ Yet if we recall Goethe's novel, *Wilhelm* remains imperceptive about the world and fails to acquire a philosophy of life while the *Beautiful Soul* understands the world and adopts Pietism. While Rosowski's male-female generalizations are questionable, her thoughts about a particular pattern of female development defined by love and marriage are useful:

The subject and action of the novel of awakening characteristically consist of a protagonist who attempts to find value in a world defined by love and marriage. The direction of awakening follows what is becoming a pattern in literature by and about women: movement is inward, toward greater self knowledge that leads in turn to a revelation of the disparity between that self knowledge

¹⁷ Susan J. Rosowski. "The Novel of Awakening." *The Voyage In: Fictions in Female Development* (Hanover: UP of New England for Dartmouth College, 1983) 49.

and the nature of the world. The protagonist's growth results typically not with "an art of living" as for her male counterpart, but instead with a realization that for a woman such an art of living is difficult or impossible: it is an awakening to limitations. (49)

Rosowski speaks about five novels which illustrate elements of the "novel of awakening." She begins with Flaubert's Madame Bovary which she cites as its prototype. Rosowski stresses Emma Bovary's passivity: the reader asks of Emma not what will she bring about, but what will happen to her, and her greatness is measured by the extent to which she awakens to impossibilities (50). Rosowski then analyses The Awakening, My Mortal Enemy, Daughter of Earth, and Middlemarch, and draws some conclusions. She points out that although the five novels she chooses treat the theme of awakening differently, they have something important in common: an awakening to limitations as well as a resolution at great cost to the protagonist. Emma and Edna commit suicide, Dorothea turns away from a direct, active public life (68).

If we return to Teresa, it becomes clear that although a great part of the novel involves Teresa's awakening to the social limitations of her sex, it does not end there. Toward the end of the novel, when Teresa finds herself isolated and at the brink of insanity, she does not passively resign herself to death. The

“novel of awakening,” as Rosowski defines it, therefore, does not seem to adequately categorize Teresa.

Another term, “novel of development,” is also frequently used to refer to novels in which female protagonists try to find their way in the world. Annis Pratt, who uses “novel of development” interchangeably with *Bildungsroman*, explains that in the woman’s *Bildungsroman* “we find a genre that pursues the opposite of its generic intent- it provides models for ‘growing down’ rather than for ‘growing up.’”¹⁸ In other words, Pratt exposes the limitations imposed upon female development which thwart it. In what she calls the “growing-up-grotesque archetype,” portrayed in the “novel of development,” the protagonist is destined for disappointment because “the vitality and hopefulness characterizing the adolescent hero’s attitude toward her future here meet and conflict with the expectations and dictates of the surrounding society” (29). According to this definition, the term “novel of development” does not possess any characteristics that distinguish it from “novel of awakening,” other than references to archetypes. Both the “novel of awakening” and the “novel of development” emphasize female defeat in contrast to assumed male success.

¹⁸ Pratt 14.

Pratt concludes with a comparison of particular aspects of the male and female Bildungsroman that reveals the shaky ground of her argument based on male-female oppositions. The male Bildungsroman is, Pratt says:

...based on the concept of Bildung, or the ideal of personal fulfillment within a culture. It is not enough that a hero leave his family and undergo adventures teaching him the proper choice of friends, mate, and vocation or even that he learn to make moral choices within the reference of his society. These social goals must be accompanied by a conscious attempt to develop the self, to realize and exercise his inner powers. (36)

If we recall the prototype of the Bildungsroman, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, and Goethe's irony in his depiction of Wilhelm's development, we cannot help but remember that any conscious attempts on Wilhelm's part regarding his development are put into question. The constant intervention of the Tower Society in the turn of events, as well as Wilhelm's consigning himself to his friends for direction at the end of the novel strongly undermine the idea that this male protagonist can successfully contribute to the shaping of his formation. Furthermore, we see in Teresa an example of how a female protagonist actually does make a conscious attempt to exercise inner powers.

The point I am trying to make is that strict polarizations regarding male/female Bildungsromane are too simplistic. Some male protagonists will be

more passive in contributing to their development, and some females more active. There is a fundamental problem relying on an archetypal analysis, in particular a Jungian analysis, to further understanding of the Bildungsroman, or, as she terms it, the "novel of development." Since archetypes by nature universalize and generalize, they are unmarked by time and place. As we have seen, although the Bildungsroman may be expanded beyond time and place, it cannot be entirely severed from them. Such a critical approach therefore, is not adequate for a deeper understanding of the Bildungsroman. What is problematic about Pratt's argument is that in speaking of archetypes she takes a universalizing critical stance, but then also speaks of society's impediments to female development which differ according to place and time, even if one assumes that all cultures are patriarchal.

But perhaps the term "novel of development" need not be scrapped. In fact, I would propose that it only need be defined by alternate criteria. There is another characteristic that surfaces in debates about the Bildungsroman that will aid in the attempt to categorize novels that deal with the question of development: the degree to which the "Bildung" protagonist is aware of and reflective about himself and the world and people around him, and the way in

which this knowledge propels or impedes the development of the protagonist as well as the narrative. If we think back once again to Wilhelm Meister, we remember that Aurelie is amazed at Wilhelm's obliviousness. She says:

I admire your profound insights into literature, especially dramatic literature. You are able to penetrate to the very depths of what was in the poet's mind and to appreciate the subtlest nuances in its presentation. Without having ever seen things in reality you can recognize the truthfulness of their image. It seems as if some presentiment of the whole world lies within you, and this is brought to life and developed by your contact with poetry. For truly, she went on, nothing comes into you from the outside world. I have rarely met anyone who knew so little of the people with whom he lives--indeed fundamentally misjudges them. Let me say this: when I hear you explaining Shakespeare, it seems as if you have just come from a council of the gods and heard them discussing how to make humans; but when you are associating with real people, you seem like some first child of creation growing up to gape at lions and monkeys, sheep and elephants in strange astonishment and good-natured devotion, treating them affably as your equals simply because they live and move... If your destiny is to become an artist, you cannot continue for much longer in a state of such imperception and ingenuousness.¹⁹

In spite of all the knowledge he has acquired about poetry, Wilhelm remains imperceptive. We see that the access a male "Bildung" protagonist has to the outside world does not guarantee an enhancement of insight into the self. Likewise, if we compare Teresa's trajectory of awareness, we learn that despite

¹⁹ Goethe 153.

her confinement to the sphere of the home. she grows perceptive about the people around her, and increasingly gains self-knowledge to the point of salvation. The presence of consciousness, therefore, has nothing to do with the gender of the protagonists. I believe that there must be a distinction in terminology that acknowledges either the presence or absence of the female protagonist's developing consciousness. For this reason I think the term, "novel of development," if understood as being concerned with consciousness raising, would best categorize a novel like Teresa. In the "novel of development" the protagonist's increased self-awareness contributes to the turn of events, which may even depend on it.

Up until this point, through an analysis of Teresa, I have presented and compared and contrasted three working definitions of terms frequently used to categorize novels which treat female development: the Bildungsroman, the "novel of awakening," and the "novel of development." Before continuing with an analysis of Neera's other works, I would like to reflect briefly on the term "female Bildungsroman" and see how it fits in relation to the others.

In response to the question of whether the Bildungsroman is plausible in the pluralistic and fragmented society of the 20th century, Esther Kleinbord

Labovitz claims that the belated arrival of the “female Bildungsroman” only invites comparison and contrast to the male Bildungsroman. By means of an analysis of recurring thematic patterns, Labovitz proposes that the Bildungsroman is no less a viable structure for the female heroine by virtue of her different developmental process, but rather is a vehicle advocating fuller exploration of women’s goals and expectations which in turn allows for a re-defining of the genre.²⁰ Labovitz identifies the quest of the female heroine as that which has formed the basic assumption of a definition of the “female Bildungsroman”: “Through the quest motif, the heroine undergoes experiences which she both seeks and demands, either through goals set by herself or by an ideal she follows” (246). Labovitz’s insistence on the developing character’s seeking, demanding, will for choice, conscious choosing and unconventional and rebellious nature (246) emphasizes the imposition of the protagonist on her world rather than a the mutual give and take between the protagonist and her society. This is problematic. In re-defining the Bildungsroman to account for female experience Labovitz takes into account only one pattern of female development. Not all developing protagonists are bold, rebellious, and

²⁰ Labovitz 8.

demanding. Not all women want to change the world. Labovitz's not taking into account other patterns of female development greatly narrows her analysis and counters her aim to advocate "fuller explorations of women's goals and expectations." Overall, it seems that whenever the term "female Bildungsroman" is used for categorization, "female" is overinflated at the expense of "Bildungsroman."

I agree with Susan Fraiman when she says that "this is the time to jettison once and for all the notion of a 'female Bildungsroman.'"²¹ In her notion of plural formations, which involves both an unstable "I" and the notion of formation as differentiated not only by gender but by class, country, race, and time, Fraiman points out that it is no longer possible to speak of a uniform fiction of female development.

Lydia

In Lydia, the second of the three of Neera's novels which comprise the young woman cycle, we find a young female protagonist very different from

²¹ Susan Fraiman. "Is There a Female Bildungsroman?." Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development (New York: Columbia UP, 1993) 13.

Teresa. Unlike the introspective, complaisant, and sentimental Teresa, bound to family, the aristocratic Lydia, having full liberty to do as she wishes, makes caring for her appearance her primary concern. From the very first pages, when her motto "Divertirsi!"²² [Enjoy Yourself!] is revealed, it becomes clear that this time we are not dealing with a character whose growth is hindered by too strong an imposition from the outside world. Instead Lydia, devoid of sentiment but filled with "sangue ribelle" (69) [rebellious blood] challenges it: "Ella, il mondo, lo sfidava" (51) [She challenged the world]. From the outset we learn that, as the talk of the town, Lydia is different from other girls her age. In the following episode, which her uncle Leopoldo fears compromises her reputation far too much, Lydia's strong character is disclosed by means of a letter her friend Costanza writes about her to another friend, Eva:

Ella passeggiava dunque sola, in riva al lago, verso un piccolo seno dove vanno le donne del paese a lavare. Una appunto di queste donne, una vecchietta, vi si trovava allora con un nipotino di tre anni. Chi sa come, non è per altro difficile a immaginare, il bimbo cadde nell'acqua, andò a fondo e ritornò a galla qualche metro lontano. La vecchietta gridava, desolata e imponente; alcuni pescatori, sull'altra riva, non riuscivano a comprendere di che cosa si trattasse: ed ecco che Lydia, spogliatasi in un batter d'occhi quasi tutta, si tuffa nell'acqua; ma son io che dico *quasi* per rispetto,

²² Neera. Lydia (Lecco: Periplo. 1997) 27.

capisci! I pescatori si avvicinavano rapidamente.... Tutta la nostra amica è qui, in questo fatto che noi non abbiamo bisogno di commentare. (29-30)

[She was walking alone, on the river bank, toward a little inlet where the women of the town do the washing. One of these, an elderly woman, was there with her three year old grandson. Who knows how, it's not difficult to imagine, the little boy fell in the water, went to the bottom and came up some meters away. The elderly woman yelled, desolate and commanding; some fishermen, on the other side of the bank, couldn't understand what it was all about. Lydia, undressed almost completely in the twinkling of an eye, plunged into the water; but it is I who am saying *almost* out of respect, you understand! The fishermen were approaching rapidly.... Our friend is all here, in this event which speaks for itself.]

Lydia's disrobing without heeding the fishermen is most uncharacteristic of a young woman of her time. As I mentioned in chapter one, an excess of will in the developing protagonist would be located at one of the extremes of the Bildungsroman spectrum, rather than at its center. Furthermore, Lydia's belonging to the aristocracy is atypical of the traditional Bildungsroman, whose protagonist most often belongs to the bourgeoisie. As I have mentioned, the mobility of the middle class makes it most conducive to the process of "Bildung."

There is one other aspect of the Bildungsroman that we have found in

both Wilhelm Meister and Teresa that is missing in Lydia, and that is the “Bildung” character’s constant vacillation between the ideal and the real. I have concluded that the presence of Teresa’s growing consciousness and her active intervention in the course of her life at the end of the novel require that her process of development be categorized differently from Wilhelm’s (who as we have seen in the end is not much more self aware and does not possess any firm convictions about directing his own life). However Teresa’s movement into and out of both a dreamworld of romantic love, and the harsh reality of every day responsibilities seems to be an important characteristic that this novel of development shares in common with the Bildungsroman. Lydia, on the other hand, unlike Wilhelm and Teresa, continually loses grasp of ideals as she learns the falsehood behind them. This ultimately leads to her downfall.

Lydia’s motto “Divertirsi!” is her first ideal. At the beginning of the novel, we learn that Lydia has no intention of finding a husband. Instead, she prefers to flirt with different men and pass her time perfuming herself and looking in the mirror. She does not understand sentimental love, and is incapable of any depth of feeling. As time passes and she gets older, she begins to feel out of place after her friends move on with their lives. Eva marries and Costanza becomes

actively involved in charity. Lydia realizes that the liberty she feels she has due to her social class has not made her immune to unhappiness. For a short while she tries in vain to imitate Costanza by trying to help others in need, but that does not eliminate her feeling of emptiness. Neither does attempting to occupy her mind through reading. She finally observes that her spirit, which she thought so strong, cannot destroy the great divide that exists in her society between married and unmarried women. She learns that with marriage comes freedom and without it great restrictions.

In need of company, Lydia seeks the friendship of the baronessa Thea von Stern. Lydia confesses to her that she feels abandoned by everyone, and that in spite of all the men who are interested in her, or as she says, in her dowry, she has not come across any who please her. Soon she sees a picture of the baronessa's cousin Riccardo Keptsky, and she is attracted to him immediately. Thinking herself lucky to be invited to the baronessa's home in Vienna, Lydia meets Keptsky. Their encounter is an intense one, made so by the episode that directly precedes it. During her stay with Thea, Lydia wanders one morning onto a path that puts her in contact with nature, which awakens her senses for the first time. While feeling the freshness of the grass and air, and

taking in the view of the hills, Lydia encounters a group of women walking to an unclear destination. Curious to learn where they are going, Lydia asks, and finds that they are on their way to church to celebrate the day of Saint Anna, the patron saint of women. She accompanies them overcome by their song and clouds of incense. and impressed by their unity and happiness, Lydia struggles to understand the enigma of their ritual. She realizes that the force of their ecstasy is due to their being transported by an ideal:

Cento anime ardenti, innamorate, volavano, insieme al canto divino, su in alto, fuori del mondo, trasportate da un ideale che Lydia non aveva- ed esultavano, erano felici...Felici! Ecco dunque ciò che le sarebbe mancato sempre. Un affanno la prese, una tristezza senza nome e insieme la paura nel trovarsi così profondamente sola. Un minuto ancora ch'ella restasse nella chiesuola. e piangeva: sì, avrebbe pianto in mezzo a quelle donne, invidiandole, morsa al cuore dalla disperazione di non poter amare. (143)

[One hundred ardent souls, captivated, flew, together with the divine chant, up above, beyond, transported by an ideal which Lydia didn't possess- and they rejoiced, they were happy...Happy! Here was that which she would never have. A worry seized her, a sadness without name together with the fear of finding oneself so profoundly alone. If she had remained in the church a minute longer, and she wept; yes, she would have cried in the midst of those women, envying them, pierced in the heart by the desperation of not being able to love.]

After this abrupt awakening Lydia runs back to the baronessa's. As she enters

she is surprised to find Keptsky there.

After the transformational effect of the ritual, Lydia cannot help but see Keptsky in an ideal light. Initially her feelings are confused, but soon are elevated to such a degree that she feels as if she is living a dream. The following is a description of Lydia's view of Keptsky as she and Thea look at him:

Da quella oscurità usciva, raggianti di luce propria, il volto di Keptsky. Esse lo vedevano, nella sua calma di semidio, nella imponenza della sua altera bellezza; quella fronte elevata, luminosa; la linea della guancia di una purezza classica, il profilo nobile, il mento fermo e gentile, la bocca perfetta nell'immobilità affascinante nel sorriso, e gli occhi colore di due cupi zaffiri. Per un fenomeno strano degli spiriti, non solo ognuna di esse sentiva la presenza di Keptsky, ma sentivano entrambe che l'altra pure la sentiva. (146)

[Out of the darkness Keptsky's face emerged, beaming in its own light. They looked at him, in his semi-divine tranquillity, in the grandeur of his dignified beauty; that elevated luminous forehead; the curve of the cheek of classical purity, the noble profile, the firm and delicate chin, the mouth perfect in the fascinating stillness of the smile, the eyes the color of two dark sapphires. Due to a strange phenomenon of the spirits, not only did each of them feel Keptsky's presence, they both perceived that the other also sensed it.]

At this point it appears that Lydia is at the point of no return. She has finally found an object of attainment to live for, and puts all of her effort into getting to know Keptsky. The happiness which she for so long sought elsewhere in vain

seems finally within her grasp, and only increases as she gets the impression that her feelings for Keptsky are reciprocated. Lydia and Keptsky spend much time together, and eventually their marriage is planned and made known to all. A happy ending seems inevitable.

But at the official announcement of the event Lydia's lawyer friend Calmi informs her that he has discovered some information about Keptsky's past that he feels she should know. Afraid of waking from her dream Lydia hesitates at first, but then listens to what Calmi has to say. Lydia learns that Keptsky is deeply in debt, and is interested in her only for her dowry. He is also Thea von Stern's lover. Feeling humiliated and betrayed by both Keptsky and von Stern, Lydia declares "Ho finito di vivere...Non ho nessun ideale che mi sostenga: non ho nemmeno più la possibilità di godere, perchè, guardi, i capelli bianchi incominciano..." (186) [I have finished living...I have no ideal which sustains me: I do not even have the possibility of joy any longer because, look, the grey hairs are beginning...]. The next morning Calmi finds Lydia's room transformed into a funeral chamber. Lydia had shot herself with a revolver. Incapable of living without an ideal, Lydia ends her life.

At the beginning of this chapter I stated that in Neera's works there is

often a double plane. In addition to a male-dominated social order, there also exists an affinity among women in which elements of “Bildung” may be found. In Teresa, the mother’s advice, “segui il tuo cuore” [follow your heart] aids greatly in Teresa’s development. I suggested that if this dual structure were not recognized, discourse about female development would be reduced to society’s hostility toward it. In Lydia, the affinity among women Lydia finds in the procession of women on their way to church initially seems to serve the purpose of helping Lydia find a life-sustaining ideal. But Thea and Keptsky’s greed and betrayal put an end to Lydia’s upward growth. For this reason I would categorize Lydia as a “novel of awakening.” Here an awakening to limitations takes center stage, and in the end puts a stop to the growth of the protagonist, as well as the narrative. It is unlike Teresa, and the “novel of development” in general, in which an awakening to limitations serves as a point of departure for change and becoming, which are given greater emphasis.

L’indomani [The Day After]

The last novel of Neera’s young woman series L’indomani expands the notion of female development in an interesting way, evident in the very first

paragraph. Rather than opening with a developing character ready to begin the process of finding a suitable mate, the reader is introduced to her waking up one morning in her new bedroom to the realization that she is now a married woman. The period of development which, as we have seen in Neera's other novels, normally begins before marriage and then leads up to it, is pushed forward. As a result, marriage, rather than being the end of plot, marks its outset.

Marta, "amica dell'ordine e del sistema,"²³ [loyal to order and custom] eagerly embraces her new status, believing her dream of romantic love has come true. After having left her home, family, and friends, she begins to become acquainted with her husband Alberto, whom she had only met two months before, as well as his home and friends. Almost immediately Marta's ideal vision of marital bliss begins to erode. The more she observes the world around her, the more disappointed she is to learn that men and women have very different expectations of each other with respect to marriage. Her first surprise comes when she finds out that one of Alberto's friends, Mirelli, a married man with five children, is nonchalantly having an affair with his servant. Disgusted, she cannot comprehend why her husband would care to

²³ Neera. *L'indomani* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1990) 10.

have him as a friend. Shortly after, Marta reflects on how her own marriage has brought about for her only a change in name, and is disappointed that otherwise she is essentially the same person:

Ella non si sentiva cambiata per nulla, si meravigliava e quasi si accusava di non aver scoperto nessuna ebbrezza nuova, e niente, ma niente, di quel trasporto che, giovinetta, le suscitava la sola parola: Amore. (43)

[She did not feel at all different, she marveled and almost blamed herself for not having unearthed any new intoxication, and nothing, nothing, of that rapture that, as a little girl, gave rise to only one word: Love.]

As time passes Marta suffers increasingly from lack of affection from Alberto, whom she perceives as cold and entirely lacking in feeling. She also learns about some of her husband's past experiences with women, which cause her great anguish. Desperate to find some vestige of the ideal love she has so longed for, she pays a visit to a couple in town known to everyone for their story-book romance. Although rarely seen in society, the Gavazzinis are reputed to have been so much in love that they fled together to the top of a mountain for their honeymoon, carved their names in trees, and once even drank each other's blood. One day she knocks on their door with a friend on the excuse that they are collecting offerings for charity. While waiting to meet the couple Marta

catches a glimpse of the fruit of their love--an anemic four-year-old boy with melancholy eyes. When the couple finally appears Marta perceives, from the husband's agitated expression, and the wife's bitter demeanor, that they have just had an argument, and are miserable. Disconcerted, Marta leaves, disillusioned once again.

As she grows more aware she cannot help but wonder why no one has ever spoken to her about the kind of love she encounters all around her in reality, which is so strikingly different from the love she has imagined and heard about.

She questions:

Ma perché nessuno, né la Collini, né i poeti, né i pittori, né le amiche, e nemmeno la madre, le avevano parlato dell'amore come ella lo aveva trovato? Perché non le avevano detto: Tu entrerai, ignota, nel letto di un ignoto: il vostro contatto sarà senza delirio e i vostri cuori si avvicineranno senza fondersi? (71)

[Why hadn't anyone, neither Collini, nor the poets, nor the painters, nor her friends, and not even her mother, spoken to her about the love that she had found? Why hadn't they told her: You will enter, a stranger, into the bed of a stranger; your contact will lack stimulation and your hearts will approach each other without uniting?]

Marta feels deceived by them all. No longer able to find motivation in the false ideal of romantic love, and completely inexperienced in the real world, she is left

alone to struggle to establish for herself a sense of equilibrium and purpose for her life. Shortly before Marta finds out that she is pregnant, she has a conversation with one of her husband's more intelligent friends, "il dottorone" [the intellectual]. One September day, while they are out strolling, he suddenly stops short to get a closer look at a spider repairing one of the broken threads of its web. Amazed at the spider's diligence, and eager to point out its courage to Marta, il dottorone flicks the newly spun web with his finger, and watches the spider re-spin that same thread once again. He exclaims:

Guardi, guardi...esso torna a zampettare, bravo; bravo, ti dico. E così vita natural durante, sa? Questa bestiolina non si avvilisce mai; rotto un filo ne getta un altro; il secondo si spezza, viene il terzo. Avanti, sempre avanti! È il suo motto gentilizio. Osservi come è già salito: è all'apice. (104)

[Look, look...it continues to scurry, good; good, I tell you. This is how it is for the whole of life, you know? This little creature never loses heart: when one thread breaks it spins another; when the second one breaks, it makes a third. Forward, always forward! That is its noble motto. Look how it has already climbed; it is at the top.]

They then resume their walk. We will witness at the end of the novel the re-weaving of this image, and how it marks a turning point in Marta's attitude and outlook and in the novel as a whole.

Just as Marta has reached the point of believing that happiness is an illusion, she is shown that it is not. In an episode reminiscent of the one in Lydia in which the developing character unexpectedly encounters a group of women on their way to celebrate Saint Anna's day, Marta, after finding that her husband has left work early, is deflected from her routine of meeting him on his way home by accepting a farmer's wife's invitation to come inside her home. In doing so Marta enters a female realm which, as in the case of Lydia, results in an important realization and thus development as well. When she enters the house, Marta is struck by the farmer's wife's demeanor while holding her baby.

For the first time Marta witnesses a perfectly content woman in real life:

Baciucchiando il suo bimbo la giovane madre si animava. Aveva due labbra fresche e mobili che dovevano conoscere i baci; un riso perlato di donna felice; il collo sciolto, il seno palpitante velato appena; una morbidezza in tutti i movimenti, un calore di membra appagate, di sangue circolante, sano, nella completa espansione del benessere. (132)

[Kissing her child repeatedly the young mother lit up. She had two fresh and moving lips which must have known kisses; the pearly smile of a happy woman; her smooth neck, her barely veiled palpitating breast; a softness in all of her movements, a warmth of satisfied limbs, of circulating blood, healthy, in the complete expansion of well-being.]

While absorbing the movements of the mother and child, Marta feels the pulse

of life and the revelation of love as her own child moves within her. Then, startled by the sudden entry of the farmer, she runs home. As soon as she enters, she encounters her mother, who has come for an unexpected visit.

The mother and daughter begin to talk about Marta's marriage, and soon the focus of the conversation centers around the question of whether love exists, or is simply an illusion. At first they seem to disagree. The mother is convinced that the best marriages are those brought about through reason rather than feeling, and that love is simply a dream, a mirage. Marta on the other hand, remembering the farmer's wife's interaction with her child, adamantly insists that love does exist.

Marta also reflects on two principles that are the foundation of female upbringing: modesty and love. In characterizing these principles as being cruelly linked, Marta seems to be emphasizing the belief that modesty, which entails a suppression of emotion, and love, an instinctual feeling that is celebrated as the height of happiness for women in her society, are intrinsically contradictory. After arguing back and forth, defending their positions, it appears as though both mother and daughter are saying essentially the same thing. Both see in maternity the opportunity for women to experience love and happiness. Unlike Teresa and

Lydia, whose lives are sustained only as long as they have an ideal to look forward to. Marta finds through maternity salvation in the real, material world.

The novel then comes to a close with Marta's vision.

At the end of the novel, as Marta feels her child move inside her once again, she recalls the image of the spider weaving and re-weaving its web, always moving forward:

E Marta rivedeva in una specie di visione magnetica la bella campagna estiva, gli alberi frondosi ramificanti sopra lo sfondo azzurro e un meschino insetto che tendeva i suoi fili d'argento. Spezzato un filo gettava l'altro, e un altro ancora e ancora, sempre avanti. la tela prendeva proporzioni gigantesche, i fili abbracciavano tutto il creato, salivano ad altezze vertiginose, toccavano il cielo.

Era la vasta tela della vita umana, il lavoro ogni giorno rinnovato di chi soffre e combatte; il lavoro temerario che poggia nel vuoto guardando arditamente la luce; lo sforzo immane di milioni di esseri, intelligenze torturate, cuori spasimanti, schiavi in pena, tutti sorgenti dalle loro catene, tutti lanciando i loro filo d'argento al misterioso Ignoto. E i fili si spezzano e la tela si strappa e la felicità dondola sempre sospesa all'impalpabile bava di un aracnide. Che importa? Tutto muore, tutto nasce, tutto cambia, tutto si rinnova, le tombe scoperchiate servono di culla, i cuori insanguinati e piangenti danno nuovo sangue e nuove agrime alla vita. Avanti, coraggio! (144)

[And once again Martha saw, in a sort of magnetic vision, the beautiful summer countryside, the leafy trees branching out toward the sky and a pitiful insect which was extending its silver threads

outward. Once one thread broke, it cast another, and another again and again, always forward, the web took on gigantic proportions, the threads embraced all of creation, they reached vertiginous heights, they touched the sky.

It was the vast web of human life, the work renewed every day by him who suffers and fights; the reckless work that sustains itself on emptiness as it looks daringly into the light; the tremendous effort of millions of creatures, tormented beings, tortured hearts, enslaved in suffering, all rising from their chains, all casting out their silver thread to the mysterious Unknown. And the threads break and the web tears and happiness dangles suspended always by the impalpable filament of a spider. What does it matter? All dies, all is born, all changes, all repeats, the uncovered tombs serve as cradles, bloodcovered and weeping hearts give new blood and new tears to life. Forward! Be brave!]

Marta, through motherhood, finally establishes a meaningful connection and meshes with the web of humanity. The ending of the novel, with the image of the cyclical, repetitious nature of both the spider's and Marta's works of creation, which constantly renew and grow, as well as the future-oriented title of the novel seem very characteristic of the Bildungsroman. So too does the putting forth of the contradictory nature of the protagonist's development. But I would categorize L'indomani as a "novel of development" because it, like Teresa, presents a developing character whose salvation depends upon her increasing self-reflective awareness, which is essential in leaving the unfulfilling fate she

is heir to. Although I would agree once again with Lucienne Kroha's line of thinking, which views Marta's finding salvation only in motherhood as problematic today, I disagree with her conviction that "Teresa, Lydia and Marta share one common trait: powerlessness in the face of their own destinies."²⁴ As we have seen, only Lydia succumbs. Due to their acquired awareness, Teresa and Marta manage in some way to work with their restrictive social environments, and achieve some sense of hope and purpose in their lives.

²⁴ Lucienne Kroha. "Neera: The Literary Career." The Woman Writer in Late-Nineteenth-Century Italy: Gender and Formation of Literary Identity. (New York: Edwin Mellen Press. 1982) 77.

Middlemarch

George Eliot's Middlemarch, which appeared in 1871, offers an interesting contrast to Neera's novels. Despite the fact that Neera and Eliot were contemporaries, and treat a pattern of female development concerned with love and marriage, Neera's work focuses almost exclusively on this theme, while Eliot's addresses it along with others. In addition to being a story about Dorothea Brooke's experiences with love and marriage, Middlemarch is a study of provincial life in 19th century England and its climate of reform: electoral, medical, scientific, industrial and vocational. While Eliot's presentation of Middlemarch's changing world is clear, there is ambiguity about whether her characters emerge along with it. Since the protagonist's emergence in the course of time along with the world is one of the central characteristics of the Bildungsroman. I will question the presence of it in Middlemarch. A comparison of Middlemarch with Neera's works will offer additional insight into the portrayal of female developments in the novel and its terminology.

I have used the term "novel of awakening" to refer to Neera's Lydia, and "novel of development" to characterize Teresa and L'indomani. Following Bakhtin's ideas about the Bildungsroman as showing emergence in the course

of time, I have presented these terms as nuances of the genre Bildungsroman. The type of emergence that all three of Neera's novels have in common is that of a protagonist's self-awareness and increased understanding of the limitations social mores impose. They also demonstrate, in different ways, a protagonist's response to her understanding of these limits: Lydia commits suicide, Teresa is prompted to follow her love, Marta seeks refuge in motherhood. With Neera's novels in mind as examples of the "novel of awakening" and the "novel of development," let us see how Middlemarch can be categorized.

Susan Rosowski includes Middlemarch in her essay on the "novel of awakening." However, I believe this term inadequately characterizes Eliot's novel. In the "novel of awakening," the female protagonist's defeat or inability to overcome constraints is expressed as well as her downfall, which usually ends in suicide. While the idea that women are hemmed in is expressed from the very outset of Middlemarch with a reference to St. Theresa whose "spiritual grandeur" was "ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity,"²⁵ this is not the only point of view that Eliot presents. It is true that Dorothea never gets a

²⁵ George Eliot. Middlemarch (London: Penguin, 1994) 3.

chance to build cottages. She does not succeed vocationally, but neither do most of the men in the novel: After a life of research, Casaubon dies without ever finding the “Key to all Mythologies”; Lydgate’s innovative medical treatments fail to increase his status at the new hospital and only lead to his losing money and gambling; Ladislav never makes it as an artist; Bulstrode is forced to give up managing the new hospital after his greed is discovered. In short, Eliot does not restrict vocational unfulfillment to women in Middlemarch. By not doing so she accomplishes two things: she refrains from resorting to a juxtaposition of male and female experience as in Teresa, which compared Teresa’s lack of opportunity to the satisfying work and travel experiences of her brother and boyfriend. Eliot also leaves room for social success to be defined by work that does not depend on the acquisition of capital, a technique she shares with Neera.

In Le idee di una donna Neera spoke against the current of feminist thought of her time which, in her estimation, overemphasized a “material concept in happiness.” She argued that having the opportunity to work and earn money as men do does not guarantee complete satisfaction for women. Neera believed that financial gain is not the sole barometer for fulfillment, and that the

unpaid work that women accomplish in the private sphere is important and gratifying. Eliot expresses a similar idea in Middlemarch through Dorothea Brooke's passion for helping others and the narrator's conclusion that "the growing good of the world" is dependent upon women like Dorothea whose effect on others is "incalculably diffusive" (838). Alan Mintz notes that these final words of the novel can be interpreted as retroactive instructions about how the work as a whole should be read and how Dorothea's character might be viewed:²⁶

Life can be valued in two ways: as vocation and as "unhistoric" action. Vocational achievements take their place in the world of culture: they involve the objectification of the self that stands on its own in the larger life of man: books, tracts, colonies, discoveries, reforms, improvements, professional services. Unhistoric acts deposit no independent record; they unfold in a personal space beyond which they will never be known: these are acts of kindness, redemption, mothering, and self-restraint. (112)

While the vocational-historical acts of the novel are not successful for both men and women. Dorothea's unhistoric acts, which involve helping people, are fulfilled, and greatly impact the people of Middlemarch. The greatest examples can be found in Dorothea's influence on Lydgate, Rosamond, and Ladislaw.

²⁶ Alan L. Mintz. George Eliot and the Novel of Vocation (Cambridge: Harvard UP. 1978) 112.

Toward the end of the novel, Lydgate and Ladislaw, after their seemingly vain attempts to become a doctor and an artist are compromised further by Bulstrode's unethical financial dealings, are derided by Middlemarch society. As a result, Lydgate nearly goes bankrupt and turns to gambling, and his marriage begins to disintegrate. Ladislaw's social position is besmirched by his ancestors' affiliation with Bulstrode. At this point in the novel Dorothea intervenes in these characters' lives and exercises her redemptive powers. Through three separate conversations with Rosamond, Lydgate, and Ladislaw, Dorothea voices her belief in their potential to overcome their difficulties and fortifies their spirits. In response to Dorothea's efforts to restore her marriage, Rosamond "ke[pt] in religious remembrance the generosity which had come to her aid in the sharpest crisis of her life."²⁷ Lydgate tells Dorothea: "You have made a great difference in my courage in believing in me. Everything seems more bearable since I have talked to you" (768). Similarly, Ladislaw states of Dorothea: "I had no hope before-- not much-- of anything better to come. But I had one certainty-- that she believed in me. Whatever people had said or done about me, she believed in me" (778). While Dorothea's

²⁷ Eliot 835.

encouragement may not be vocational, her effect on Lydgate and Ladislaw does indirectly influence their vocations. Lydgate decides to continue to practice medicine and Ladislaw becomes an ardent public man involved in the reforms of the time. Dorothea's ability to effect changes in the public sphere through Lydgate and Ladislaw despite her exclusion from it brings to mind the Beautiful Soul. Like Dorothea, the Beautiful Soul influenced her world indirectly by her impact on those close to her, such as her niece Natalie who was actively involved in charitable organizations.

Eliot's affirmation that a woman can positively influence the world through those around her in spite of obstacles to her direct involvement in it highlights the importance of human relationships in the novel. The sense of connectedness fostered by relationships is suggested by an image that we have encountered in Neera's L'indomani: the web. As in Neera's novel, regard for connectedness is found predominantly in the women in Middlemarch. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note,

many critics have noticed that Middlemarch society is described as if it were a web woven from different interrelated lives...but what has been less obvious, perhaps, is that it is women who are associated with spinning the fabric of opinion that constitutes the community, because it is they that sew together the threads of

connection.²⁸

The description of *Middlemarch* as a web woven from different lives is found in the novel itself:

I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe. (141)

Here the image of the web is used not only to convey the sense of interrelatedness of the *Middlemarchers'* lives, which people like Dorothea help keep together. It is also a metaphor for the act of writing. It is interesting that the web refers to a typically female-oriented task-- keeping people together, which is not historical or vocational, yet it simultaneously signifies the typically male-centered vocation of writing, which Eliot, a woman, masters.

It is clear that female development can be characterized as failed in *Middlemarch* only if one uses an active public life as the sole indicator of success. Eliot's presentation of the way in which Dorothea both is hindered by limits and influences others as well as the dual signification of the web

²⁸ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press. 1979) 522.

demonstrates a complexity of viewpoint which poses a challenge to categorization. With this in mind let us now see if the term novel of development can be applied to Middlemarch.

As I have shown in my analysis of Teresa and L'indomani, it is the workings of the protagonists' minds which are the essence of the novel of development. In the course of these novels conflict arises as the characters struggle with binding social demands, attempt to overcome them, and eventually achieve greater self-awareness. In Middlemarch, on the other hand, Dorothea's conflict about the limitations social mores impose upon her are evident to a much lesser degree. In the course of the novel Dorothea experiences some conflict, but her self-awareness does not increase to the point that it prompts her to a new course of action as in Teresa and L'indomani. Dorothea's ardent nature is uniform throughout, and is repeated in the novel like an epithet. What unfolds in Middlemarch are opportunities for Dorothea's nature to display itself as it is, not as it develops.

A factor that contributes to the attenuation of Dorothea's developing consciousness as compared to Neera's female protagonists is the stronger presence of the narrator's consciousness in Eliot's novel. Since Middlemarch

is also a story about provincial life, the narrator makes comments and judgments about society and the roles of men and women in it. Rather than focus solely on Dorothea's individual consciousness in its development, the narrator frequently uses her, as well as the other characters, to make generalizations about people. As a result what arises are types of people who for the most part are already formed. The following examples demonstrate how the narrator shifts from talking about specific characters to making observations about people in general:

Mr. Casaubon's behavior about settlements was highly satisfactory to Mr. Brooke, and the preliminaries of marriage rolled smoothly along, shortening the weeks of courtship. The betrothed bride must see her future home, and dictate any changes that she would like to have made there. A woman dictates before marriage in order that she may have an appetite for submission afterwards. (73)

For the moment, Will's admiration was accompanied with a chilling sense of remoteness. A man is seldom ashamed of feeling that he cannot love a woman so well when he sees a certain greatness in her: nature having intended greatness for men. But nature has sometimes made sad oversights in carrying out her intentions...(389)

Whether Providence had taken equal care of Miss Brooke in presenting her with Mr. Casaubon was an idea which could hardly occur to him. Society never made the preposterous demand that a man should think as much about his own qualifications for making a charming girl happy as he thinks of hers for making himself

happy. (279)

The narrator's firm opinions describe what people are like, not what they become. In the second and third quotes Will's and Casaubon's attitudes are judged typical of men who seek women for marriage. The qualities these characters embody do not appear as if they would be altered significantly by the passage of time. The characters therefore do not emerge in time. What does emerge, however, is greater understanding about men and women on the part of the reader. Middlemarch gives the reader a lesson about provincial life.

Middlemarch is neither a "novel of awakening" nor a "novel of development." Unlike Neera's characters Eliot's Dorothea is not shaped by her experiences. She does not develop in the course of time. She does, however, have some direct impact on the unhistoric world of the novel, which in turn indirectly affects the novel's historic world. If "Bildung" is to be found in the novel, it is primarily in Dorothea's influence on others and in the reader's emerging understanding of provincial life and human nature.

Part Three: Female Developments in the 20th Century

Chapter Three

In the previous chapter we saw that in the series of Neera's young women incidents of interactions and conversations between women which establish an affinity among them are prominent. In Teresa we have the protagonist's mother's life-saving advice: "segui il tuo cuore;" in Lydia the inspirational procession of women on their way to church in celebration of Saint Anna, the patron saint of women, and in L'indomani Marta's encounter with the farmer's wife, followed by her mother's surprise visit which leads to her vision and embracing of motherhood. When considered as an alternate plane to the limits the male-dominated social order imposes on female development, which often takes center stage in feminist criticism of the 19th century novel, these relationships place female development in a much more optimistic light. Approaching pre-20th century novels which see beyond the patriarchal limitations that thwart female development aids in contradicting the line of thinking, such as Labovitz's, which views social integration as the only gauge of successful development. Now we will see that with the passage of time, relationships among women become increasingly prominent in literature, on the

example of Susanna Tamaro's Va' dove ti porta il cuore (1994). Through it we will take a closer look at how relationships among women are portrayed in 20th century narratives, and how they influence the development of female protagonists and plot.

Before focusing on this particular text, I want to briefly explore how psychoanalysis has changed the way we think about development. I will use Nancy Chodorow's Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory, and Marianne Hirsch's The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis and Feminism as theoretical points of departure for an understanding of Tamaro's novel.

Psychoanalytic Notion of Development vs. "Bildung"

According to Freudian psychoanalysis, the period of human development is concentrated in the first few years of life and is categorized in clearly defined phases, such as Oedipal and pre-Oedipal. In addition, early psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on unconscious mental processes and its idea that human behavior is motivated by sexual impulses, explains unconscious factors in society as the source of taboos, which drive these instinctive impulses into the unconscious mind. Psychoanalysis, in the end, breaks up the ego.

This way of conceptualizing development differs greatly from the idea of "Bildung." The process of "Bildung" is not divisible into distinct stages, but is fluid, and the protagonist undergoing it is usually what we would call today an adolescent or a young adult. "Bildung" also requires a specific social environment which will engage in a give-and-take with the developing protagonist. In turn the protagonist may very likely become a member of society. As we have seen, in Goethe's novel it is difficult to isolate specific turning points in Wilhelm's journey into adulthood. The randomness of his encounters with many different types of people precludes the possibility of a fixed or predictable pattern of development. Wilhelm both acts in society and is influenced by it.

The end product of "Bildung" is an apparent coalescence of the ego. "Bildung" seems very different from the psychoanalytic process of differentiation which entails separation between the self and the world, between subject and object. However, more recently, object relations theorists such as Nancy Chodorow have shown how differentiation can be understood as relational.

Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory

In her Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory, Chodorow summarizes the object-relations perspective on feminine development and personality from her own writing:

... as a result of being parented primarily by a woman, men and women develop differently constructed selves and different experiences of their gender and gender identity. Through their early relationship with their mother, women develop a sense of self continuous with others and a richly constructed, bisexual, Oedipal-oscillating-with-pre-Oedipal inner self-object world that continuously engages unconscious and conscious activity: 'The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world'. This psychic structure and self-other process in turn help to reproduce mothering: 'Because women themselves are mothered by women, they grow up with the relational capacities and needs, and psychological definition of self-in-relationship, which commits them to mothering'...Feminist object-relations theorists have also argued strongly for theoretical and developmental treatment of the mother as a subject, against psychoanalytic (including object-relational) tendencies to treat her as an object whose role is evaluated in terms of the presumed needs and fantasies of the child alone. This leads to a reformulation of the psychoanalytic self as well, as it emphasizes not only that separateness, not connectedness, needs explaining, but that intersubjectivity and the mutual recognition of the other and the self are fundamental to satisfactory development.¹

Chodorow manages, in incorporating feminism into psychoanalysis, to

¹ Nancy Chodorow, Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) 184-185.

reformulate the notion of differentiation by means of an alternate viewpoint. She explains that object-relations theorists posit a transitional space between mother and child which is neither "me" nor "not me" (152), which means that the child's self takes in others, and is to some degree an incorporation and extension of others (107). Rather than placing the child at the center of inquiry and privileging its imagined needs, as in traditional psychoanalysis, Chodorow releases the mother from possessing the sole status of "not me," the object of the child's "me". Instead, she allows for the mother to be esteemed beyond her ability to gratify the infant's needs, and that involves understanding her as a separate being, with separate interests and activities that do not always coincide with what the infant wants (103). Differentiation is understood by Chodorow as a particular way of being connected to others (107). Chodorow admits that this idea of a relational self is problematic. She realizes that:

...women's relational self can be both a strength or a pitfall in feminine psychic life, as it enables empathy, nurturance, and intimacy but can also threaten lack of autonomy and dissolution of self into others. (186)

Chodorow, therefore, recognizes the ambivalence of women's relational self and of mothering.

It is interesting to note that the object-relations theorist's reworking of the concept of differentiation seems much more Bildung-like than early Freudian psychoanalysis. Rather than focus on separation between the self and the mother and father, differentiation treats the self in relation and emphasizes belonging.

The Mother/Daughter Plot

Marianne Hirsch also speaks about mothering. By including the concept of plot together with psychoanalysis and feminism in her The Mother/Daughter Plot, Hirsch enlarges the scope of maternal discourse and relates it to literature.

Hirsch organizes her analysis of plot into three parts which treat realist, modernist and postmodernist plots. According to Hirsch, conventional 19th century plots of heterosexual romance and marriage are marked by the heroine's disidentification with her mother, who is either absent, silent, devalued, or dead. The mother's absence in the daughter's life in turn creates the space in which the heroine's plot and her activity of plotting can evolve.² The 19th century heroine, determined to shape for herself a plot different from her

Marianne Hirsch. The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) 57.

mother's, tends not only to be separated from the figure and the story of the mother, but herself tries to avoid maternity at all costs (14). Maternity, therefore, according to Hirsch, is presented in realist plots as something that binds. I would add that, although Hirsch's observations about 19th century attitudes toward maternity as presented in literature may be true to a large degree, and seem to be generally accepted, Neera's protagonists may demonstrate that in terms of mother-daughter plots the 19th century novel may be more complex than is commonly believed.

With Modernism, and in particular with what Hirsch identifies as the female *künstlerroman* of the 1920's, there is a re-imagining of what constitutes the maternal (97). Connection between mother and daughter becomes possible and even necessary in spite of the fact that the daughter-artist herself still does not become a mother. After the daughter explores the mother's life it becomes incorporated into the daughter's vision. Hirsch categorizes these texts about mothers as elegies because they are composed by the daughters only after the mothers are dead.³ She notes that, in contrast to examples from Victorian

³ See footnote #21 to chapter three. Hirsch mentions that Virginia Woolf uses the term elegy to describe To the Lighthouse in her notebooks.

literature, death here enables the mothers to be present rather than absent (97). Although the dead mother herself does not speak as subject, her discourse is mediated through the voice of the daughter-artist who writes or paints as a daughter and not as a mother (118). Hirsch, therefore, sees Modernism as taking the mother-daughter plot a step ahead in its inclusion of the mother's voice, but notes that it is mediated, and that it is ultimately the daughter's voice that dominates.

In "Postmodernist Plots," Hirsch sees the woman-as-daughter as occupying the center of the global reconstruction of subjectivity and subject-object relation (136). Using Irigaray's theories as examples,⁴ Hirsch concludes that the woman-as-mother remains in the position of other, and that the emergence of feminine-daughterly subjectivity rests and depends on that continued and repeated process of othering the mother (136).

Hirsch finds fault with psychoanalytic feminisms, including object-relations theorists, because they have, as she says, added the female child to the male, but have not succeeded in inscribing the perspective of adult women (167).

⁴ "When Our Lips Speak Together" (1977). "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other" (1979).

The adult woman is a mother who continues to exist only in relation to her child but never as subject in her own right. Hirsch also offers a response to what she calls maternal silence, which is maternal anger. She believes that to be angry is to claim a place, to assert a right to expression and to discourse, a right to intelligibility (169). To be angry is to assert one's own self, not to subordinate it to the development of another's self (170).

Much still needs to be done in reconceptualizing subject-object relations in order that the mother may articulate herself as a subject. Chodorow's work is a step in this direction. Perhaps Hirsch was not fully acquainted with Chodorow's ideas in Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory, which was published in the same year as her The Mother/Daughter Plot. Furthermore, although Hirsch does not elaborate much on maternal anger as a response to maternal silence, and does acknowledge that in privileging anger she is representing maternal subjectivity from one limited vantage point, I fail to see this as opening the door to new possibilities of understanding. Mothers may very well express anger, but I would hope a lot more as well. Hirsch's conclusion, on the other hand, expresses what I see to be the key to maternal utterance, which entails a plurality of voices that will speak, not only the maternal, but also the

many voices of female subjectivity and experience.

In her conclusion, Hirsch declares that until feminists can find ways to speak as mothers, feminism as a social and intellectual movement will be unable to account for important experiential differences among women (196). She goes on to say that since a mother is simultaneously a daughter and a mother, a woman in the house and in the world, powerful and powerless, nurturing and nurtured, dependent and depended upon, maternal discourse is necessarily plural (196). Hirsch believes that her work initiates a study of the representation of maternal subjectivity and questions what model or definition of subjectivity might be derived from a theory that begins with mothers rather than with children (197). Hirsch expresses confidence that a different conception of subjectivity might emerge if we start our study of the subject with mothers rather than with children and wonders what shapes plotting that does not depend on maternal "othering" might take (197). As we now proceed to analyze Tamaro's novel we will address many of Hirsch's questions and see whether motherhood still remains the unspoken plot of Western culture.

Va` dove ti porta il cuore [Follow Your Heart]

In Susanna Tamaro`s Va` dove ti porta il cuore Olga, learning that due to an illness she has not much time left to live, decides to write a diary comprised of letters to her adolescent granddaughter in the hope that the granddaughter will find it when she returns from her study abroad in America. Olga`s first-person narration immediately signals a divergence from the third-person narrative of Neera`s novels and the novel of development, and from the Bildungsroman. The first-person narration combined with its backward-looking plot structure point to autobiography.⁵

Unlike the similar advice, "segui il tuo cuore," given to Teresa by her mother in Neera`s novel a century earlier, Olga`s advice to her granddaughter to follow her heart does more than serve the purpose of altering the course of her granddaughter`s life. It mingles with Olga`s need to give voice to aspects of her own life that society in her generation had forced her to silence.

What is most interesting about Olga`s story is the manner in which it is told. Convinced that the thoughts of the old are not future-oriented but are only

⁵ Since I compare and contrast autobiography and the Bildungsroman in detail in chapter 5, my analysis of Tamaro`s text will concentrate primarily on the question of motherhood, and how Tamaro articulates it.

directed backwards,⁶ Olga admits that although she has read a lot of books and been curious about many things, she never has been capable of creating a thread of discourse that unravels logically from beginning to end (46). She thinks this is because in the process of development she had to give thought to other things, such as childrearing and household chores. The stop-and-go-feel of Olga's narration, therefore, is marked by the rhythm of her life's routine. In fact, the direction of her plot reflects her view of the path of life as she had come to understand it twenty years before at the age of sixty:

Verso i sessanta, quando la strada alle tue spalle è più lunga di quella che hai davanti, vedi una cosa che non avevi mai visto prima: la via che hai percorso non era dritta ma piena di bivi, ad ogni passo c'era una freccia che indicava una direzione diversa; da lì si dipartiva un viottolo, da là una stradina erbosa che si perdeva nei boschi. Qualcuna di queste deviazioni l'hai imboccata senza accorgertene, qualcun'altra non l'avevi neanche vista; quelle che hai trascurato non sai dove ti avrebbero condotto, se in un posto migliore o peggiore; non lo sai ma ugualmente provi rimpianto. Potevi fare una cosa e non l'hai fatta, sei tornata indietro invece di andare avanti. Il gioco dell'oca, te lo ricordi? La vita procede pressappoco allo stesso modo. (52)

[Around sixty, when the path behind you is longer than the one in front of you, you become aware of something that you had never noticed before: the path you walked along was not straight but filled with crossroads, at every step there was an arrow which

Susanna Tamaro. Va' dove ti porta il cuore. (Milano: Baldini & Castoldi. 1994) 19.

pointed in a different direction: from here a path branched off. from there a grassy way which lost itself in the forest. You entered one of these detours without realizing it, another you had not even seen; you do not know where those which you neglected would have taken you, to a better or worse place; you don't know but you feel regret nonetheless. You could have done something and you did not, you went backward instead of forward. The game of the goose, do you remember it? Life proceeds in more or less the same way.]

The procession of life as viewed retrospectively by a sixty-year-old woman is very different from the forward-moving perspective of a young person. What comes through here is the sense of life as an inevitable multiplicity of paths and possibilities, and that what happens often is due to factors beyond our control. However, as the final words of the novel reveal, the way to confront a crossroads when it presents itself is to follow one's heart. But that can only come about after one knows oneself. Olga is convinced that in order to achieve self-knowledge one must understand where one came from, which, in turn, will allow movement forward without lies (142). After having come to a greater self-awareness due to her long experience of life, Olga passes this knowledge on to her granddaughter in the hopes that she will incorporate it into her life.

This need to understand the past in order not to repeat it, seems to be predominant in novels by women authors concerning female development.

Later I will explore in greater detail how the theme of repetition plays itself out in female novels of development. For now, I want to take a closer look at the major events in Olga's life which influence her eventual achievement of self-awareness.

As Olga thinks back randomly to different points in her life she reveals her various roles: daughter, wife, lover, mother, and grandmother. As a daughter, she believes she learned that appearance is all that matters. She frequently sought refuge in solitude as the only way to come to terms with her parents' lack of involvement in her development. In order to be loved, she pretended to be what she was not by abandoning her personality and becoming the character that her parents wanted her to be. As time passed and solitude began to weigh upon her, she decided to get married and ended up continuing to betray her sense of what she wanted and needed. Unsatisfied in marriage, she feigned happiness. At one point she decided to take a vacation by herself to Porretta Terme, and during that time she met Ernesto, with whom she fell in love and had an affair. During their three weeks together Olga lived more intensely than in any other period of her life. Leaving Porretta pregnant she returned home believing, mistakenly, that giving birth to a child who is the fruit

of love would solve all her other problems.

Determined to raise her child differently than she herself was raised, Olga did not impose any limits on her daughter Ilaria, and let her grow up free to do as she pleased, hoping to make her feel accepted in all she did. Looking back, Olga regrets not having intervened in Ilaria's life when she was most needed. She realizes that Ilaria spent too much time concerned with things of the mind, as shown by her frequent visits to a psychoanalyst and talk of ideology, and suppressed the voice of her heart. Despite her determination that her daughter have a different life, Olga realizes that Ilaria lacked a sense of identity and ability to feel just as much as she herself did.

After Ilaria died unexpectedly in a car accident, Ilaria's own daughter, who had been conceived on a trip to Turkey years before, is raised by Olga. By now experienced in the cycle of life to which she makes constant references Olga, all too familiar with the patterns in both her and her daughter's lives, makes communicating with her granddaughter a primary concern. Aware that her granddaughter, having reached the period of adolescence, is at the point in her life when, as Olga says, an invisible protective shell begins to form, Olga, her shell already shed, hopes to be a guide in her granddaughter's future journey

inward.

At the beginning of her narration, looking back at the women in her family, Olga perceives that they have all been unhappy, and that in general unhappiness is passed down by women from generation to generation:

L'infelicità abitualmente segue la linea femminile. Come certe anomalie genetiche, passa di madre in figlia. Passando, invece di smorzarsi, diviene via via più intensa, più inestirpabile e profonda.
(39)

[Unhappiness habitually proceeds along the female line. Like certain genetic anomalies, it passes on from mother to daughter. In passing, rather than fade it gradually becomes more intense, more ineradicable and deep.]

After coming to terms with certain negative aspects of her life that seem part of an inescapable repetitive cycle, Olga discovers a way of positively intervening in her granddaughter's life. Instead of recycling the unhappiness she herself had been heir to, Olga reminds her granddaughter of the time when they both agreed to make a cake together a year before. While teaching her granddaughter, Olga explains that in the future, after she is gone, the granddaughter will be able to make the cake herself and associate it with the person who had taught her. Prior to this recollection Olga had gone to her attic to get her own grandmother's cake mold, which she realizes is "l'unico oggetto rimasto di tutta

la storia femminile della nostra famiglia” (159) [The only remnant of the female history of our family]. Recalling how many diverse yet similar hands had worked with it she says:

L'ho portato giù per farlo vivere ancora, perché tu lo usi e magari, a tua volta, lo lasci in uso alle tue figlie, perché nella sua storia di oggetto umile riassume e ricordi la storia delle nostre generazioni. (159)

[I brought it down in order to bring it to life again, so that you can use it and perhaps, when it's your turn, you will leave it to your daughters to use, because in its history as a humble object it sums up and recalls the history of our generations.]

The mold, like Olga's narrative, establishes a link among the different generations of women in her family.

Olga's estimation of self as connected to both her daughter and granddaughter recalls object relations theory. Her constant references to the seasons, growth, and the cyclical aspects of nature and life in general show this. Yet it is important to note that Olga does not get swallowed up by a “not me” status. In other words, although confessing guilt about having lived a lie at different points in her life, and about not having intervened enough in Ilaria's, she also succeeds in giving space to a narration of her own needs, and in doing so portrays herself as a subject. She never regrets her affair with Ernesto, and

understands that with him she experienced the love and happiness which her husband never made possible. She understands that without Ernesto her thoughts of death after just three years of marriage would have persisted and would have led to her own destruction.

Olga, in possessing the ambivalence of mothering (and I would add grandmothering), is neither exclusively connected nor separate, but both. Through the stop-and-go narration of her story and its flashbacks, which are dictated by the rhythm of her life's discontinuous routine, Olga inscribes the perspectives of her many selves. This in fact seems to answer Hirsch's question regarding what shapes plotting might take that does not depend on maternal othering. However, unlike Hirsch, Olga does not privilege anger, but happiness and well-being. One critic would object to my optimistic reading of Tamaro's novel and Olga's good intentions: Giancarlo Lombardi expresses his conviction that Olga has "ulterior motives."⁷ He believes that it is only on a surface level that Olga's letters appear to serve the purpose of acknowledging her own responsibility in the suffering of those who surround her. Lombardi

Giancarlo Lombardi. "Thou Shalt not Break the Mold: Patriarchal Discourse in *Va' dove ti porta il cuore*." Romance Languages Annual 9 (1998): 238.

argues that Olga's past inability to handle her relationship with her own daughter appears to inform her desire to do right by Ilaria's offspring and abide by her yearning for freedom (240) in America. According to Lombardi, when examined more attentively Olga's epistles read as a last attempt to manipulate her granddaughter into becoming a replica of her grandmother: Olga is essentially reimposing the remorse and guilt she encountered in her formative years on the person she loves most, and by whom she was abandoned, despite Olga's affirmation of her own emancipation from the strains imposed by religious discourse (240). For Lombardi the cake mold, a unique reminder of a female lineage, symbolizes the life of restraint and captivity destined for those women who willingly embraced their subjection to patriarchy (242). The "stampo," which connotes imprinting, reflects the shaping of women by a paternalist discourse, as well as Olga's desire to perpetuate the same disempowerment to which she once fell victim (242). Lombardi concludes by adding that if Tamaro's novel had been truly epistolary, it would have contained the presence of the granddaughter. Instead, only one rendition of the facts, one ideologically informed series of utterances is presented (243).

Colleen Marie Ryan offers an interesting response to Lombardi's reading

of the cake mold. Ryan reminds the reader that within the larger cultural debates of our time mother's voices often remain marginal, and that it is most often the daughters' voices which are heard.⁸ In Ryan's estimation, Tamaro defies such patterns of daughtercentricity by giving voice not only to a mother, but to an eighty-plus-year-old grandmother, and goes against the grain of what contemporary women's literature proffers in terms of female subjectivity (360). Ryan sees Olga as the proponent of a new subjectivity generated from personal observations, sensations, and sentiments who propounds a return to the heart and its emotions, and believes that Tamaro is suggesting a human solution to solitude, emptiness, and unmediated regrets (361). Furthermore, grandmotherhood, as presented by Tamaro, implies a multiplicity of voices and social roles which across generations has produced a potential plurality of subjectivities (362). With respect to the cake baking, Ryan points out that Olga's gesture and the mold itself suggest a shared experience and a creative solution to the unhappiness that is generally passed down along the female line (362).

As we can see, Ryan's views, with their emphasis on the multiplicity of

⁸ Colleen Marie Ryan, "In the Heart of the Nineties: Theorizing a Grandmother's Subjectivity in Two Works By Susanna Tamaro," Romance Languages Annual 10 (1999): 360.

voices present in Olga's telling and Olga's passing down of happiness, reinforce my own interpretation of Tamaro's novel and contrast with Lombardi's. Ironically, Lombardi, who finds fault in what he terms the novel's patriarchal discourse, is actually a proponent of it. In his reading of the cake mold as a "reflection of the shaping of women by a paternalist discourse," and in his conviction that in the novel "only one ideologically informed series of utterances is presented," Lombardi himself imprisons Olga. He fails to recognize the complexity of her life's story and her different motives in disclosing it, both of which are imbued with conflict, when he makes an absolute judgment by saying that Olga is imposing a guilt on her granddaughter and attempting to restrict her freedom. Furthermore, Lombardi's contention regarding the absence of the granddaughter's "rage and frustration" over the grandmother's "ultimate attempt to break her wings" (243), by leaving the diary indicates that Lombardi cannot accept the grandmother's utterances if they are not dialogically engaged with the granddaughter's. In other words, Lombardi, in being overly preoccupied with the granddaughter's missing reaction to the grandmother's diary, fails to find value in the grandmother's narration for its own sake. His primary concern is the effect the story will have

on the granddaughter, which is not even part of the novel. This reveals that Lombardi is deaf not only to Olga's voices, but also to her separateness. Lastly, Lombardi's closing comment that Va' dove ti porta il cuore bespeaks the contradictory nature of an advanced society in which some women can still act as their own worst enemies (243) implies that there is a clear-cut distinction between right and wrong, between who is responsible for acting (Olga) and who is the victim of the acting (the granddaughter). Once again, this oversimplifies Olga's relationship to the members of her family, overlooking the nuanced nature of the interaction of the various members.

The different interpretations of Tamaro's novels by Ryan and Lombardi exemplify what the social psychologist Carol Gilligan characterizes as "two ways of speaking about moral problems, two modes of describing the relationship between other and self"¹ Although careful not to make definitive contrasts between male and female voices, and thus not make generalizations about either sex, Gilligan argues that in her years of research and listening to people talk about situations of moral conflict and choice she has come to realize

¹ Carol Gilligan. In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982) 1.

that men's and women's voices sound distinct. She prefaces her work by stating that the contrasts she makes between male and female voices are presented in order to highlight a difference between two modes of thought, and to focus on a problem of interpretation. She makes no claims about the origins of the differences described or their distribution in a wider population across cultures or through time (2).

The first moral ideology Gilligan outlines, which I believe corresponds to Lombardi's reading of Tamaro's novel, is an ethic of justice wherein the individual is bound by judgments which are absolute, general, and clear cut, and involve categorical formulation. An ethic of justice entails distinguishing between right and wrong, and such a distinction involves separation. When we relate this moral ideology to Tamaro's novel, the grandmother and granddaughter's self and other can only be articulated in terms of separation. If separation is the principle by which self and other are defined, then any impediment to separation will be read as a threat to the moral order. This is obvious in Lombardi's conclusion that:

Tamaro's grandmother ends her letter/diary by performing an extremely bleak gesture: instead of setting her free, Olga effectively sets out to draw her fugitive granddaughter back into

the stuffy rooms of the suffocating house.¹⁰

Here the diary is interpreted as a way of hooking the granddaughter, and therefore is a threat to her separation and progression forward along her one-way path away from her home.

However, if we consider the second moral ideology outlined by Gilligan, an ethic of care, which I believe corresponds to Ryan's reading of the novel, we see how separation is replaced by attachment, connection, and nurturance. As Gilligan points out, an ethic of care is a morality which arises from recognition of the self in relation and belief in communication as the mode of conflict resolution.¹¹ Reading Olga's leaving of the diary in this light, her action may be understood as an invitation to connection and thus to salvation. Olga is determined to make her granddaughter aware of the destructive power lack of connection and feeling between herself and the members of her family (self and parents, self and husband, self and daughter) have had on all of their lives. In addition Olga, in accord with an ethic of care, sees life, not as a single path but as a multiplicity of paths. We see this in the concluding paragraph of

¹⁰ Lombardi 243.

¹¹ Gilligan 30.

the novel, as she gives her granddaughter advice about what to do in the future when she comes to a crossroads: “E quando poi davanti a te si apriranno tante strade e non saprai quale prendere, non imboccarne una a caso...”¹² [And when many paths open up in front of you and you do not know which one to choose, do not take one by chance...]. Both Olga’s invitation to her granddaughter to connect, as well as her acknowledgement of life’s offering of a plurality of possible paths echo Gilligan’s imaging of an ethic of care as a web.¹³ I have shown in Neera’s L’indomani and George Eliot’s Middlemarch how the web is associated with redemption, hope, and connectedness. So too is Tamaro’s novel.

The Ritualization of Pain

We have seen that Olga, through her acquisition of self-knowledge, has come to detect that unhappiness has been passed down along the female members of her family from generation to generation. Rather than perpetuate a pattern of negativity Olga interrupts it, and substitutes for it the passing down of

¹² Tamaro 165.

¹³ Gilligan 148.

the cake mold. Laura Rorato, who builds on the ideas of E.H. Erikson, characterizes the pattern of unhappiness that Olga rejects as a ritualization of pain. Her article opens with a description of the nature of ritualization, and how it becomes established:

A network of apparently insignificant patterns is built up from infancy onward, helping man to feel part of reality and to give life a meaning. When a process of ritualization reaches its apex, it crystallizes in what is often called a world view, a way of looking at things which relates both to the universal hopes of the unconscious and to the expectations fostered by single individuals through daily ritualization during childhood. A traumatic experience, however, or a shift in the perspective of reality may subvert this order, making way for the creation of a new process of ritualization.¹⁴

After realizing that the pattern of negativity has become crystallized along the female line, and in its passing down has become ritualized, Olga develops a shift in perspective which makes her capable of subverting the pattern she is heir to. This process of recognition of the ritualization of pain, as well as the substitution of an alternative process of ritualization for it seems to be a constant in novels concerned with the question of female development, regardless of place. In order to demonstrate this further I will present a comparative analysis

¹⁴ Laura Rorato. "Childhood Prisons. Denied Dreams and Denied Realities: The Ritualization of Pain in the Novels of Susanna Tamaro." *Romance Studies* 28 (Autumn 1996): 62.

of two novels of female development set in different places, Italy, and Zambesia, which offer evidence of this theme and whose plots are strikingly similar.

Chapter Four

Before I highlight the similar plot structures of Una donna and A Proper Marriage for the purpose of providing further evidence of repetition, a theme I believe is common to novels which concern the development of female protagonists regardless of place, I will first introduce them by returning to the central question of definition and categorization. As we shall see, these novels, Una donna in particular, have had applied to them many of the labels outlined in chapter two, such as Bildungsroman, "female Bildungsroman," "novel of development," and "novel of awakening," as well as autobiography. (Autobiography will be addressed in depth in the next chapter.) Such interchanging of terms only complicates further my attempt to establish greater distinction among them. I will begin by turning to how Aleramo's novel Una donna has been received by critics over the years since its publication at the start of the 20th century, and then attempt to provide some clarification and distinction among the various terms that have been applied to it.

.

Una donna

Since its publication in 1906, Una donna has elicited a variety of responses from critics who have emphasized diverse aspects of the novel. As Fiora Bassanese states, some have focused on the novel's interiority because for the author herself the novel functioned as memoir, avowal, exposé and self-examination, while others have highlighted its feminist message, placing it under the rubric of "bibbia del femminismo" [bible of feminism].¹ The end result of such different emphases has been the interpretation of Una donna as a book that is simultaneously autobiography and novel, confession and paradigm, personal and universal (41). While I am in perfect agreement with critics who recognize the novel's multifaceted nature, as well as the different motives behind its making, I think that too often critics exaggerate and perpetuate the seeming categorical nebulosity of Una donna. As I will show, I find it difficult to accept that this novel, or any novel, can be simultaneously a feminist manifesto, a Bildungsroman, and an autobiographical novel. Although ambiguity certainly is part of the novel's design, and because this is so, it is to be expected that more

¹ Fiora Bassanese, "Una donna: Autobiography as Exemplary Text," Quaderni d'italianistica 11.1 (1990): 41.

than one term would surface in the attempts to categorize it, but important differences among the terms employed must not be overlooked.

In Bassanese's essay we encounter the suggestion that there is an inherent affinity between the design of Una donna and the patterns of the Bildungsroman (44). Following recent studies on novels of female maturation, such as Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction and The Voyage In: Fictions in Female Development, Bassanese agrees that many of the topoi utilized in a male "Bildung" process, such as leaving childhood, exploring the world, achieving a private identity, and integrating into a social group and adopting its values, cannot apply to female protagonists because of the diverse natures of their socio-sexual development (44). Bassanese identifies a response to this difference in two models proposed for the 19th century: the "novel of female development" and the "novel of awakening." The first is a conventional and conservative female "Bildung" that emphasizes patriarchal values such as chastity, domesticity, submissiveness, and altruism, and teaches girls to subordinate their individuality and will to others in order to become good wives and mothers. The second is a sub-genre of the "novel of development" which deals with the struggle and often failure of women to achieve ethical autonomy within

traditional society (44-45). In this variation the protagonist comes to understand the disparity between social expectations and personal aspirations. Due to this negative realization, many novels of awakening end tragically with adultery, loss, madness, and even death because of the impossibility of integrating individual needs and the demands of social conformity (45).

Before continuing with Bassanese's application of these terms to Aleramo's novel I would like to point out how the terminology she uses differs from mine. While our characterizations of the "novel of awakening" are very similar, Bassanese seems to equate the terms "female Bildung novel" with "novel of development." I, on the other hand, dispense with the term "female Bildungsroman" and focus greater attention on a comparison and contrast between the prototype of the Bildungsroman and the "novel of development." As shown in my analysis of Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, the "Bildung" character, who is male, is not aware of his development while it is happening. There is a sense of randomness in the turn of events. Wilhelm is oblivious about his growth, and there is even doubt as to whether in the end he has actually become significantly different from what was at the start. In the "novel of development" the developing character, who is female, will grow mainly by

means of her increasing awareness of the limits her environment imposes. Once the developing character has achieved this understanding she may act to improve it but, as I have shown in my analyses of Neera's Teresa and L'indomani, the developing female characters never completely rebel against society or traditional female roles, such as wife and mother, or values, such as self-sacrifice. The life-saving awareness of the protagonists pushes them to act, but they act within social bounds, they do not attempt to radically change them. The "novel of development," therefore, is more centrally located along the Bildungsroman spectrum as it maintains a balance between society's influence on the individual and what the individual in turn does with what society proffers. The "novel of development" also demonstrates the protagonist's awareness of the process of development.

Bassanese applies her definition of terms to Una donna as she concentrates on narrative patterns. Rather than using one term to categorize the entire novel, she labels its various parts. She begins by observing that the book's first chapters appear to herald a standard male Bildungsroman: as a child the protagonist rejects passivity and domesticity in favor of action and energy, emulates her father's work ethic, works in a factory, and refuses

feminine tasks (45). As puberty advances the heroine is raped by a co-worker, and at this point Bassanese believes the text implies that cross-sexual attitudes call for the downfall of the "masculine" heroine as a negative model (46). The rape is both the price the protagonist pays for rebellion and marks the introduction of a more conventional female development pattern: she marries, has a child and becomes increasingly unhappy as her world narrows (46-47). Here Bassanese believes that Aleramo shifts the action so that the book clearly presents itself as a "novel of awakening," rather than a classic "novel of female development," since rather than exalt passive womanly virtues and praise married life, it presents the protagonist's increasing consciousness of inner needs (47). The first of the novel's three parts concerns a woman who is the victim of a duality, caught between society's dicta and her private self. Suicide then becomes the last possibility for the woman suffocating in her optionless life (48). Of course the narrative does not end with a suicide, and therefore the work as a whole is not a "novel of awakening."

According to Bassanese, in part two the attempted suicide is defined by the protagonist as a means of canceling out the past and beginning anew, as the voyage to the realm of the dead becomes the instrument of rebirth (51).

Enclosed in her domestic prison, the heroine explores the only space open to her: the mind, as she transforms her jail into a cloister devoted to spiritual growth. She begins to read and write, and discovers the vast community beyond her provincial town and family. By sending her writing to a woman's magazine the heroine communicates with others, affirms her spiritual freedom, and discovers her similarity to other women. She realizes the paradigmatic qualities of her individual experience, and interprets herself as a member of the general female condition (52). But in spite of the fact that her horizons are enlarged through her personal achievements and professional accomplishments, the protagonist does not achieve freedom, but returns to defeat and bondage when she refuses the option of separating from her husband and the consequence such a decision would bring about: the loss of her son. Up to this point I agree with Bassanese's analysis of the first two parts of Una donna. She recognizes that part one follows the pattern of a "novel of awakening" and that part two, in its offering of a fundamentally non-sexual mode of development unrelated to traditional female roles, concentrates primarily on spiritual awareness and growth.

However, I disagree with her analysis of part three. Bassanese says that

it is only in the third and final section of the novel that the heroine resolves the dichotomy between motherly selflessness and individual self-realization (53). In the end the heroine realizes that the love of her son comes at the cost of his mother's humiliation and self-denial, which proves too great a sacrifice for both. So she opts to be true to herself and sacrifice her son to renew herself (54). This prototypical woman completes her voyage from the enclosed spaces of her traditional past to the open possibilities of an uncertain future (55). This leads Bassanese to conclude that at this point Aleramo is returning to the model of the male novel of development or Bildungsroman (55). While I agree that the protagonist's only opportunity for freedom involves leaving her husband, I am not convinced that her giving up her son resolves anything. Instead, I read her leaving as the culminating point of conflict, and doubt whether sacrificing her son can fully lead to a complete renewal of self. Only if one views the breaking of family ties as the only recourse to self-fulfillment can Una donna's ending be read as the mark of an achieving of selfhood. When the heroine leaves, she does so only after having made an impossible decision. Staying home or leaving both entail an inevitable sacrifice. She must choose between providing herself with spiritual growth and severing a bond of love with her son, or maintaining that

bond and putting up with the burden of self-sacrifice. Since selfhood and motherhood are mutually exclusive, which is not the case with selfhood and fatherhood, only a woman would be confronted with such a choice. I am skeptical, therefore, of Bassanese's conclusion that links Una donna to the "male" Bildungsroman. She states:

Within the Bildungsroman tradition, she [Aleramo] is returning, in essence, to the model of the male novel of development, cruelly truncated in the first chapters of the Parte Prima by biological predetermination: this return is at mid-point, just as the Bildung hero is about to venture into the outside world, as yet uncertain as to what awaits. The distinctions between male and female are erased offering the beginning, if not the whole, of a genderless novel of development. (55)

The point that Bassanese identifies as the one in which Una donna most resembles a "male" Bildungsroman, the leaving of the protagonist, I would identify as being most gendered. Bassanese incorrectly attenuates a fundamental difference between male and female development.

Another problem with linking Una donna to the "male" Bildungsroman is that the protagonist's leaving, and thus renouncing altogether traditional women's roles such as wife and mother, is not at all characteristic of the Bildungsroman. As I have already stated, what is central to the genre is an

exchange between society and the individual, not a rebelling against society. In the Bildungsroman a protagonist usually develops within society, through a balanced exchange of outer values and inner qualities.

With this in mind, it becomes obvious that Una donna's status as a "bible of feminism" places it at one of the extremes of the Bildungsroman spectrum. In Aleramo's novel, society does not provide the protagonist with much input from outside, so her development is entirely dependent upon her acting on society. The protagonist's forceful acting outward destroys the give-and-take relationship between the individual and his environment that is central to the Bildungsroman. So Una donna may be a novel that contains autobiographical elements, and also functions as a feminist manifesto, but it is not a Bildungsroman in the same way that Wilhelm Meister is.

If we reflect for a moment on the terms I have been making reference to throughout this dissertation which concern development, what becomes apparent is an evolution of terminology which marks important phases in female growth as it progresses through time. As we have seen, the "novel of development," as I define it, is centered along the Bildungsroman spectrum in its presentation of an exchange between society and the protagonist. It differs in

the protagonist's growing consciousness of her lot, which is essential to her growth. In the Bildungsroman, the protagonist's awareness of his own development is not as common or as necessary. In the "novel of development," the protagonist's increasing consciousness may instill in her the impulse to break free from the confining patterns of female behavior she has inherited from her foremothers, but her action is mild, as she does not attempt to radically change society. It may also be ambivalent. For example, we saw at the end of Neera's novel Teresa that the protagonist finally leaves home to be with the man she loves, fulfilling a desire so long denied her, yet after all her realizations that she has done nothing but subordinate her needs to those of her parents, brother, and sisters, she ends up being a nurse once again to her boyfriend. Similarly, in Neera's L'indomani, motherhood provides Marta with an opportunity to experience love, happiness, and acceptance, but this is primarily because she does not have any other outlets for fulfillment.

Neera's Teresa and L'indomani, products of late 19th century Italy, represent the beginning of a change in female roles in society and their reflection in literature. Neera's female protagonists demonstrate increasing awareness of the paucity of opportunities available to them and begin to exhibit

discontent. Yet on the whole their dissatisfaction manifests itself in the workings of the mind rather than action. When they do act, their action is temperate. As one moves into the 20th century this current of change becomes more forceful, as female protagonists become less and less satisfied with what society has to offer, and more inclined to change it. I believe that terminology concerning development ought to make this change clear. I would propose the term "feminist novel." The "feminist novel" can be used to refer to an aspect of female development that goes hand in hand with social, political, and economic development. In addition it may consider gender issues together with questions of class and/or race. I think Una donna falls under the category "feminist novel," because unlike the protagonists in Neera's works, Aleramo's donna is politically and socially aware, and boldly acts to change her lot.

A Proper Marriage

Another example of a feminist novel can be found in Doris Lessing's A Proper Marriage. Like Una donna, this novel concerns a female protagonist whose opposition to society materializes into action. Yet Labovitz is of the opinion that Lessing's novel is a "female Bildungsroman." As I mentioned in

chapter 2, I take issue with this because I believe it overemphasizes femaleness and fails to acknowledge differences among women. If we take my analyses of Neera's and Aleramo's novels as cases in point, we see that even two Italian female authors who are contemporaries write about female development in ways that merit terminological distinction. Labovitz's approach actually confuses matters, because if one continually redefines only one term, "female Bildungsroman," as female development keeps changing and evolving, we may be in danger of erasing the progression or evolution of female development as represented in literature over time.

I must acknowledge, however, before explaining further why I believe Lessing's novel would be more appropriately labeled a "feminist novel" rather than a Bildungsroman, that Lessing herself characterizes her Children of Violence series as a Bildungsroman. In the Author's notes to The Four-Gated City, the final work in the series of which A Proper Marriage is a part, Lessing states:

This book is what the Germans call a Bildungsroman. We don't have a word for it. This kind of novel has been out of fashion for some time. This does not mean that there is anything wrong with

this kind of novel.²

While Lessing does use the term Bildungsroman, it is unclear what she means by it. Her reflection about the genre does not appear to be very profound, so it does not preclude other notions of it. Lessing was always hesitant about being classified as a feminist writer, and distanced herself from the feminist movement. Yet I must agree with Gayle Green, who argues that Lessing is deeply feminist in envisioning what Adrienne Rich terms a profound transformation of world society and of human relationships.³

One way in which A Proper Marriage is a "feminist novel" is in its demythification of motherhood. As Martha's pregnancy is recounted, emphasis is placed not on the woman's maternal glow but on how her body has become distorted and discolored. As she gives birth, her pain and discomfort are depicted in realistic detail. When she brings her daughter Caroline home, Martha's life is subordinated to her baby's clock, which causes her to harbor frustration and resentment, and to feel bored. Lessing doesn't present motherhood as an all-fulfilling positive experience. As in Ibsen's A Doll's

² Doris Lessing. The Four-Gated City (New York: Knopf, 1969) 615.

³ Gayle Green. Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) 28.

House, to which both Lessing's and Aleramo's novels make reference, A Proper Marriage points out that wearing the false mask of maternal contentment, which only perpetuates lies about female experience and hides true feelings, is detrimental to mental and emotional well-being. In all three works, A Doll's House, Una donna, and A Proper Marriage, the female protagonist's concern for her own individuality prevails over the preservation of social attitudes that encourage hypocrisy. However, before becoming liberated each character experiences a conflict between two selves, the self that longs to be free from tradition and the self that feels bound to it. In A Proper Marriage there are frequent references to Martha's "unhappily disconnected selves,"⁴ the "two Marthas" that have nothing to bridge them (145) and Martha and "that other Martha" (251). The idea of split selves is yet another reason why Bildungsroman would be an inadequate term for A Proper Marriage. The Bildungsroman is concerned with a putting together or building up of the self, rather than a breaking up of the self into multiple parts.

For theorists of the "female Bildungsroman" like Labovitz, who argue that it is only in the 20th century that we can begin to find a female version of the

⁴ Doris Lessing. A Proper Marriage (New York: New American Library, 1970) 64.

Bildungsroman, because it is the century in which cultural and social structures begin to support women's struggle for independence, to go out into the world, engage in careers, in self-discovery and fulfillment,⁵ I respond with the following quote from Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar. The protagonist, Esther Greenwood, expresses the challenge that having to choose one among several possibilities poses:

I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and Africa and South America, and another fig was Constantin and Socrates and Attila and a pack of other lovers with queer names and offbeat professions, and another fig was an Olympic lady crew champion, and beyond and above these were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet.⁶

Plath's image of the fig tree very effectively conveys a more perceptive and

⁵ Labovitz 7.

⁶ Sylvia Plath. The Bell Jar (New York: Knopf, 1998) 75.

complete understanding of female development. While it may be true that women in western society acquired much more freedom and opportunity for growth and self-fulfillment in the 20th century, many of them have felt forced to choose only one possibility among many, which creates a feeling of deprivation, rather than enrichment. Assigning a term like “female Bildungsroman” to 20th century narratives of female development would involve assuming that female development is identical to male development as it is measured primarily by social integration and professional success. Having many opportunities and feeling that choosing one means losing all the others creates a feeling of unfulfillment which women experience differently than men. It is therefore important not to assume that gender differences completely dissolve in the 20th century.

I have shown that both heroines in Una donna and A Proper Marriage had to choose either motherhood or selfhood, which for women are mutually exclusive, but as A Bell Jar shows, more choices do not completely eliminate the either/or question. Many women, and heroines such as Esther Greenwood, know that the problem is no longer having a scarcity of possibilities to choose from. In addition to the demythification of motherhood and the presence of a

multiple self, there is a third characteristic of A Proper Marriage for which it can be labeled a “feminist novel,” and that is its consideration of gender issues together with questions of class and race. Martha’s increasing awareness of the feeling of bondage that being a wife and mother brings about occurs hand in hand with her growing perception of, and sensitivity to the treatment of, the natives in Southern Rhodesia. Just as Martha begins attending a local circle on contemporary politics, which discusses communism and social change, she starts to think differently about her big new house and the many black servants who help run it. Martha’s enlightened political understanding makes telling servants what to do difficult:

As usual she was feeling uncomfortable; she hated giving orders and was always at a disadvantage with her servants. Since she could not look at Alice, the native nurse, without thinking that she ought to be married and looking after her own children, or at the garden boy without thinking that he should be at school, or at the cook in the kitchen without finding it intolerable that a grown man should be under the orders of a girl a third his age, her voice always had a tinge of guilt when she spoke to them.⁷

After attending political meetings, Martha’s self-knowledge begins to expand beyond the confines of her mind and home. This seems to me to mark an

⁷ Lessing, Proper 247.

important turning point in the evolution of narratives of female development. If we think back for a moment to Neera's works, such as Teresa and L'indomani, the female protagonist's disapproval of her lot occurs primarily in the mind. At most, she may become aware that her condition is similar to that of the women immediately around her, such as mothers and neighbors, but that is about the extent of it. Her awareness is temperate, as is her rebellion. As we progress into the 20th century it is clear in works like Una donna and A Proper Marriage that the female protagonist's awareness is much more profound, which makes her more equipped to connect her oppression to that of other groups. This in turn incites a more dramatic rebellion and a greater possibility of living a life that is not bound by tradition. Once again, the term "feminist novel" is useful in identifying this important difference in degree of awareness and rebellion of the female protagonist.

The Avoidance of Repetition in Una donna and A Proper Marriage

Now that I have provided background on these two novels and have shown why I think they would most appropriately be labeled "feminist novels," I would like to return to the theme of repetition. In Una donna and A Proper

Marriage, the theme of ritualization/repetition is dominant. In both novels a linear plot builds toward the female protagonists' decision to leave their husbands and children, which marks the end of the narrative, in order to resolve the conflict that arises from the realization that their own needs for achieving selfhood are in conflict with society's dicta. The stories begin with images of non-conformist characters who rebel against expected female behavior and institutions, such as passivity, domesticity, and motherhood. In spite of the fact that the characters feel that marriage is unsatisfactory, they submit to the role of wife. They temporarily welcome motherhood as an opportunity to regain a measure of meaningfulness in their lives, or to right the wrongs that have been done to them by hoping to provide their children with the freedom and love they themselves lack. Having entered the assigned female sphere, they experience their homes as prisons and their husbands as oppressors. They begin to imagine other possibilities of living outside the home which involve interacting with society, such as being a writer or activist. Since they are denied a formal education, the characters read extensively. This consciousness or awakening to the fact that their lives could be more fulfilling is hindered by the recognition that their fate is cyclical. The roles they play as wife and mother have been passed

down from their own mothers, who serve as inadequate role models. After much internal conflict and resistance from others, they decide to break the cycle of self-sacrifice. They leave the closed environment of the home and foray into the outside world, not only to free themselves, but to prevent themselves from becoming inadequate role models for their own children.

At the end of Una donna, when the protagonist becomes increasingly conscious of her need to break free from her stifling home environment but is hesitant to leave her young son behind, her own mother comes to mind. At one point she recalls a time when she had come across one of her mother's old letters that had particularly caught her attention. The letter, addressed to her mother's father, was neither completed nor sent. It expressed her mother's intention to leave her children because she felt herself to be on the brink of madness. Her mother desperately writes:

Debbo partire... qui impazzisco... lui non mi ama più... Ed io soffro tanto che non so più voler bene ai bambini... debbo andarmene, andarmene... Poveri figli miei, forse è meglio per loro!...⁸

I must leave... I will go crazy here... he does not love me anymore... And I am suffering so much that I do not know how to love the children anymore... I must go, go... My poor children,

⁸ Sibilla Alcramo. Una donna. (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1995) 192.

maybe it is better for them.]

As she recognizes in this fragment a moment of lucidity in her mother before she eventually succumbed to madness, the protagonist of Una donna begins to realize that difficult as it may be to leave her son, the alternative, staying, would be much more detrimental, not only to herself but also to her son. As the protagonist recognizes the ritualization of pain that has been passed on from her mother to herself she also connects it to the servitude of maternity:

Perché nella maternità adoriamo il sacrificio? Donde è scesa in noi questa inumana idea dell'immolazione materna? Di madre in figlia, da secoli, si tramanda il servaggio. È una mostruosa catena. (193)

[Why do we adore sacrifice in motherhood? Where did this inhuman idea of maternal immolation come from? From mother to daughter, for centuries, servitude is handed down. It is a monstrous chain.]

In the end it is awareness of the monstrous cyclical chain that gives the protagonist the final push forward to leave home.

In A Proper Marriage we have a similar coming to awareness on the part of the protagonist, Martha Quest, of the passing down from mother to daughter of a suffocating pattern of behavior, as Martha reflects one day while looking at her mother:

She was looking at Mrs. Quest in a deep abstract speculation, as if neither she nor her mother had any validity as persons, but were mere pawns in the hands of an old fatality. She could see a sequence of events, unalterable, behind her, and stretching unalterably into the future. She saw her mother, a prim-faced Edwardian schoolgirl, confronting, in this case, the Victorian father, the patriarchal father, with rebellion. She saw herself sitting where her mother now sat, a woman horribly metamorphosed, entirely dependent on her children for any interest in life, resented by them, and resenting them; opposite her, a young woman of whom she could distinguish nothing clearly but a set, obstinate face; and beside these women, a series of shadowy dependent men, broken-willed and sick with compelled diseases. This the nightmare, this the nightmare of a class and generation: repetition. And although Martha had read nothing of the great interpreters of the nightmare, she had been soaked in the literature of the last thirty years, which had dealt with very little else: a series of doomed individuals, carrying their doom *inside* them, like the seeds of a fatal disease. Nothing could alter the pattern.⁹

And as happens in Una donna, Martha does decide, after much deliberation, that she must leave in order to save both herself and her child. Before doing so she whispers to her three year old daughter: "You'll be perfectly free, Caroline. I'm setting you free" (340). It is interesting to note that in the three novels analyzed in chapters 3 and 4, Va` dove ti porta il cuore, Una donna and A Proper Marriage, repetitive patterns in women's development frequently have a negative connotation. Repetition is associated with an imposition of

⁹ Lessing. Proper 94-95.

confinement on the female protagonists and a curtailing of their liberty. Rather than being receptive to their development, social mores, and family in particular, hinder it. However, Tamaro's novel differs from the others in one important respect: Olga, the protagonist, does not simply reveal the unfortunate consequences of repetition. After acknowledging them, she supplants them by initiating an alternative cyclical pattern-- the symbolic passing down of the cake mold. What is unique about Olga's narration is that unlike Una donna and A Proper Marriage it does not progress in a strictly linear manner, which brings up a fundamental question. Does a non-linear plot provide greater room for a more optimistic portrayal of female development? Va' dove ti porta il cuore seems to suggest so. In both Una donna and A Proper Marriage, a linear plot only constructs female development in terms of loss or lack which offers more sacrifices than rewards overall. In both novels, the protagonists combat a husband who is an prisoner and a mother who is a model of what not to be. In an attempt to avoid the continuation of a repetitious cycle the protagonists must, after much deliberation, abandon their children. Only in Tamaro's novel is this not the case. The non-linear plot, in spite of its disclosure of the difficulties and challenges that Olga's relatives pose, concludes, not with an

obligatory severance of familial bonds, but with their reinforcement.

Chapter Five

Gertrude Stein's Women

Gertrude Stein is an example of another woman writer who, like Tamaro, approaches the question of repetition by means of a non-linear plot. Her writing offers an opportunity to explore further my contention that the more radically plot veers away from linearity, the more likely female development will be presented in a manner that is not exclusively detrimental.

In my analysis of Va' dove ti porta il cuore, I suggested that the narrative's advancing, stopping and retreating back into the past in different directions reflects the various paths Olga has taken in the course of her life, as opposed to a single path toward marriage and children. Although a ritualization of pain is acknowledged in Tamaro's novel, family ties are not severed, as in Una donna and A Proper Marriage, but reinforced, through Olga's passing down of the cake mold to her granddaughter. Tamaro's substitution of something positive for the ritualization of pain offers an alternative, a more optimistic view of the developing protagonist's relationship to her family.

Gertrude Stein's narratives veer even further from the linear than

Tamaro's, yet she is unique in not making family ties, either their reinforcement or severance, her central concern. Rather than focus on how women's roles are socially determined, Stein presents the idea of being rooted in and bound to family as something biologically determined and thus inescapable. If we take as examples Melanctha, from Stein's early story Three Lives, and Ida, from her late work Ida, A Novel, one cannot help but notice how unlike these women are from those we have encountered up to this point. Neither Melanctha nor Ida ever feels forced to make an impossible choice between motherhood and selfhood. This is due in large part because they are not mothers, but the fact that they do not ever attempt to take a single straightforward path with respect to any aspect of their lives, such as the places in which they live and the men they meet, is also a factor in their not having to make an either/or choice.

Melanctha, for example, tries out many men she comes into contact with during her evening wanderings. Ida marries in the various places she passes through, but always moves on and continues to marry other men. Marriage is not the single most meaningful event in these women's lives upon which their fate depends, nor is it the end toward which a plot builds. Yet while Melanctha and Ida are free to experiment and move freely because they are not hemmed in

by social attitudes, they are bound by their natures. Their social circumstances vary but their personalities do not change or evolve. The lack of malleability of Stein's characters offers an interesting contrast to the environmental shaping of character in the Bildungsroman. Rather than emerge as unique individuals, Stein's characters unfold as types that are already existing and that continually repeat themselves in an unrolling present. I will show that Stein's repetition is to be found primarily in her style of writing.

Another important characteristic that Melanctha and Ida have in common is their dislike of remembering. Unlike the female protagonists previously discussed, who remember the past mistakes of their foremothers in order not to repeat them, Melanctha and Ida do not possess a retrospective glance. In Stein ritual and concern for the past are replaced by a continuous present which is always moving. In the introduction to Gender and Genre in Gertrude Stein, Franziska Gygax observes that Stein's rupture of any temporal structure is similar to the notion of time in French feminism, as most explicitly expressed in Kristeva's "About Chinese Women."¹ Gygax builds on Kristeva's suggestion that the disruption of a temporal order permits speaking beyond past-present-

¹ Franziska Gygax. Gender and Genre in Gertrude Stein (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998) 7.

future by adding that doing away with chronology and linearity implies a dismissal of traditional genres which rely on hierarchies and taxonomies, or an ordering principle (8). As I will show, Stein's characters are not influenced by privileged moments at particular points in time because they are not shaped by experiences. Since Stein's characters do not change over time, their whole selves are always present at any point in the narrative. In speaking about Stein's characterology Donald Sutherland states:

Within the single individual the diffusion or concentration, the gentleness or toughness, the ways of attack or defense or dependency...do not essentially vary. In short the whole composition of character can really be present in any moment, in the continuous present, and not as a thing remembered, not as an accumulation of personal history.²

Stein's continuous present reinforces the biological determinism of her characters. It best conveys the sense that what the characters are is the same as what they were and always will be. The passage of time does not affect them.³

² Donald Sutherland. Gertrude Stein: A Biography of Her Work (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951) 10.

³ See as an example Stein's Ida. A Novel (New York: Cooper Square, 1971) 135. "One day did not come after another day to Ida. Ida never took on yesterday or tomorrow. she did not take on months either nor did she take on years. Why should she when she had always been the same. whatever happened there she was..."

The most important influence on Stein's employment of the continuous present is her professor William James. In The Principles of Psychology James writes about the stream of thought and the perception of time. His discussion about the relationship of words and how they are put together to express ideas sheds light on Stein's technique:

...the total idea may be and usually is present not only before and after the phrase has been spoken, but also whilst each separate word is uttered...In our feeling of each word there chimes an echo or foretaste of every other. The consciousness of the 'Idea' and that of the words are thus consubstantial. They are made of the same 'mind-stuff,' and form an unbroken stream. Annihilate a mind at any instant, cut its thought through whilst yet uncompleted, and examine the object present to the cross-section thus suddenly made; you will find, not the bald word in process of utterance, but that word suffused with the whole idea.⁴

Stein's approach to character is very much like James' thoughts about the "total idea." The different components of her characters are fluidly linked as James' "separate words" are. If one were to "cut-through" any of Stein's characters and examine a part of it, that part would have the essence of the whole character. Stein shares with James the idea of a "community of self" which "the time gap cannot break in twain" (239). This community of self experiences time as a

⁴ William James. The Principles of Psychology vol. I (New York: Dover, 1950) 281-282.

whole:

The unit of composition of our perception of time is a *duration*, with a bow and a stern, as it were—a rearward and a forward-looking end. It is only as parts of this *duration-block* that the relation of succession of one end to another is perceived. We do not first feel one end and then feel the other after it, and from the perception of the succession infer an interval of time between, but we seem to feel the interval of time as a whole... (609-610).

We shall revisit the question of time in Stein's autobiographies and analyze it in greater depth. Here we shall proceed with the theme of repetition and see how it operates in Stein.

Repetition and Gertrude Stein

When reading Stein's work one is struck immediately by what seems to be the omnipresence of repetition. Yet the impression of repetition does not come about from the social narrative, from the stifling socially-imposed limits which bind the developing female characters and cause them to repeat their mothers' problematic lives. In Stein, a sense of repetition is communicated primarily through language. In a single passage the same words may appear over and over again and then resurface in subsequent passages. In her lecture "Portraits and Repetition" Stein writes about the repetitions she discerns when

listening to people talk. She states that when she creates a portrait of people, rather than descriptions, as she does in her The Making of Americans, she comes to perceive the rhythm of anybody's personality.⁵ Through listening, Stein becomes aware of the patterns of that person's personality and then compares it to patterns of similar types. What emerges is a typology of personalities. Since the processes of listening and talking are alive and present, they do not necessitate remembering (175). (Remembering was central to the recognition of repetitious patterns of development in Aleramo, Lessing and Tamaro.) Stein compares her writing technique to the cinema: "I was doing what the cinema was doing, I was making a continuous succession of the statement of what that person was... (176) In a cinema picture no two pictures are exactly alike each one is just that much different from the one before..." (177). The end product of Stein's listening is the creation of a portrait that comes about as something presently existing. Stein sums up her thoughts about repetition:

No matter how complicated anything is, if it is not mixed up with remembering there is no confusion, but and that is the trouble with a great many so called intelligent people they mix up remembering with talking and listening, and as a result they have they have

⁵ Gertrude Stein. "Portraits and Repetition." Lectures in America (Boston: Beacon Hill, 1935) 174.

theories about anything but as remembering is repetition and confusion, and being existing that is listening and talking is action and not repetition intelligent people although they talk as if they knew something are really confusing, because they are so to speak keeping two times going at once, the repetition time of remembering and the actual time of talking but, and as they are rarely talking and listening, that is the talking being listening and the listening being talking, although they are clearly saying something they are not clearly creating something, because they are because they always are remembering, they are not at the same time talking and listening. Do you understand. Do any or all of you understand. Anyway that is the way it is. And you hear it even if you do not say it in the way I say it as I hear it and say it. (179-180)

We can see that the principal motives for Stein's doing away with remembering are the confusion that is created by keeping two times going at once, the repetition time of remembering and the actual time of talking, and her interest more in the intensity and movement of existing (182) rather than in a description of what one does while existing. Let us return for a moment to "Melanctha" and look at some examples of how Stein uses repetition to create a sense of movement in her categorization of types.

Stein's preoccupation with types is reminiscent of George Eliot's. Like Eliot, Stein formulates generalizations about the natures of people by speaking about both individuals and kinds of the same type. In chapter 2, I argued that

Eliot's Middlemarch does not display emergence in the course of time because rather than developing, which involves change, the characters remain essentially the same. They are not fundamentally different at the end of the narrative from what they were at the beginning. While the same holds true in Stein, her technique marks an important difference. Although there is a narrator in "Melanctha" who does make generalizations about types, the characters' feelings are not as strongly mediated by it. Stein also allows her characters to express their thoughts and feelings in their own language. Each character's thought pattern has its own rhythm and shapes a speech pattern. In "Melanctha," which deals primarily with the struggle between two very different people to come to terms with their feelings about each other, Melanctha and Jeff reveal their fixed natures through repetition. Jeff's speech pattern is generally slow, hesitant and deliberative which reflects his cautious nature, while Melanctha's is quick like her impulsive nature.⁹ The following are examples of Jeff's and Melanctha's speech patterns:

You see, Melanctha, it's like this way with me;... You see it's just

⁹ For an in-depth comparative analysis of Jeff's and Melanctha's speech patterns see Norman Weinstein. "'Melanctha': Toward a Definition of Character." Gertrude Stein and the Literature of the Modern Consciousness (New York: Frederick Ungar. 1970) 19-24.

this way, with me now, Melanctha. Sometimes you seem like one kind of a girl to me, and sometimes you are like a girl that is all different to me, and the two kinds of girls is certainly very different to each other, and I can't see any way they seem to have much to do, to be together in you. They certainly don't seem to be made much like as if they could have anything really to do with each other.⁷

I am sorry Dr. Campbell, but *I certainly am afraid I can't stand it no more from you the way you have been just acting. I certainly can't stand it any more the way you act when you have been as if you thought I was always good enough for anybody to have with them, and then you act as if I was a bad one and you always just despise me. I certainly am afraid Dr. Campbell I can't stand it any more like that. I certainly can't stand it any more the way you are always changing* (145).⁸

While Jeff and Melanctha accuse each other of always changing, they do not change much at all. Neither Jeff nor Melanctha become different in the course of their relationship from what they were at the beginning. The repetition of their language reinforces this. In the second quote, Melanctha expresses the simple fact that she is fed up with Jeff and disapproves of his way of acting. This idea is repeated four times, yet each repetition is slightly varied, which creates a sense of movement. Jeff, Melanctha's love-object, remains the same, but

⁷ Gertrude Stein. "Melanctha." Three Lives (Norfolk: New Directions. 1933) 138.

⁸ Italics mine.

Melanctha's thoughts about him alter from moment to moment. This showing of thought in constant change demonstrates yet another example of the influence of William James' psychological principles on Stein's writing:

...there is no proof that the same bodily sensation is ever got by us twice. What is got by us twice is the same OBJECT. We hear the same note over and over again; we see the same quality of green, or smell the same objective perfume, or experience the same species of pain. The realities, concrete and abstract, physical and ideal, whose permanent existence we believe in, seem to be constantly coming up again before our thought, and lead us, in our carelessness, to suppose that our 'ideas' of them are the same ideas... We take no heed, as a rule, of the different way in which the same things look and sound and smell at different distances and under different circumstances. (James 231)

"Melanctha" is unique in its treatment of the way in which a stable object is perceived in different ways by a single mind in motion.

Once Stein provides room for the characters to show their struggle directly through their conversations with each other, which occupy most of the narrative, the narrator concludes that Jeff and Melanctha are different types that will never overcome their differences:

It was a struggle, sure to be going on between them. It was a struggle that was as sure always to be going on between them, as their minds and hearts always were to have different ways of

working.⁹

After establishing that the rhythm of their natures will never synchronize, the narrator elaborates on the two different natures that Jeff and Melanctha represent, tender hearted natures and passionate natures respectively:

In tender hearted natures, those that mostly never feel strong passion, suffering often comes to make them harder. When these do not know in themselves what it is to suffer, suffering is then very awful to them and they badly want to help everyone who ever has to suffer, and they have a deep reverence for anybody who knows really how to always suffer. But when it comes to them to really suffer, they soon begin to lose their fear and tenderness and wonder... Passionate natures who have always made themselves, to suffer, that is all the kind of people who have emotions that come to them as sharp as a sensation, they always get more tender-hearted when they suffer, and it always does them good to suffer. (186-187)

At the end of their relationship Melanctha and Jeff stand as types who represent two different ways of loving. The classification of natures or types in "Melanctha" is taken up again by Stein in The Making of Americans. Eventually the repetitious patterns will cease their referential function, as they no longer serve the purpose of identifying types. Instead they will express Stein's fascination with language.

⁹ Stein. "Melanctha." 153.

The Concept of Type in The Making of Americans

In her monumental The Making of Americans Stein writes that repeating exists in everyone and that each time one repeats something slight modifications of the utterance can be detected. She insists that the listener must be careful not to allow his/her attention to be dulled by repetition or else achieving complete understanding of that speaker is not possible:

All men and all women, if they keep on in their living come to the repeating that makes it clear to anyone who listens to them then the real nature of them.¹⁰

Repeating then is always coming out of every one, always in the repeating of every one and coming out of them there is a little changing. There is always then repeating in all the millions of each kind of men and women, there is repeating then in all of them of each kind of them but in every one of each kind of them the repeating is a little changing. (191)

Every one always is repeating the whole of them. Always, one having loving repeating to getting completed understanding must have in them an open feeling, a sense for all the slightest variations in repeating, must never lose themselves so in the solid steadiness of all repeating that they do not hear the slightest variation. If they get deadened by the steady pounding of repeating they will not learn from each one even though each one always is repeating the whole of them they will not learn the completed history of them, they will not know the being really in them. (294)

¹⁰ Gertrude Stein. The Making of Americans: Being a History of a Family's Progress (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995) 141.

As in "Melanctha," repetition is passed down from parents so character is determined biologically rather than a product of socialization. This marks another divergence from the novels analyzed in the previous chapters. Up until this point, socially imposed repetition has been perceived as something undesirable for women because it has created obstacles to their development and advancement. In Stein, repetition does not discriminate. Both men and women have it in them and the author's attitude toward it is not entirely negative:

Some find it interesting to find inside them repeating in them of some one they have known or some relation to them coming out in them, some never have any such feeling in them, some have not any liking for such being in them. Some like to see such being in others around them but not in themselves inside them. There are many ways of feeling in one about all these kinds of repeating.
(297)

The multiplicity of ways in which individuals may react to the repetition that is inside them points once more to Stein's interest in the general, the collective pattern rather than the single case. Some people may be interested in repetition, others may be indifferent toward it.

As Stein listens to the patterns of people's personalities she begins to categorize them in groups, but her grouping is not restricted to family. Unlike the

women authors previously cited, Stein does not simply associate women's personality patterns with their mothers. Instead, the patterns which can be detected in all members of the family, regardless of gender, can be traced back to either parent. Once Stein detects patterns in families she uses them as points of departure for talking about the way all people can be classified into groups:

In recognizing them as being of one group or of another group of them, that is one kind or another kind of men and women, everything in them, anything in them, their looks, their feelings, their expressions, their way of doing anything, their way of doing everything, everything, anything in them is to be noticed in its resemblance to something in another one. So then there come to be groups of kinds of men and women. (342)

Stein begins with portraits of her family members and communicates, through repetition, how that pattern in that person has come to be inherited. Then she uses that particular person to lead into a generalization about all people of that same type. Once the types are created, Stein goes on to further classification. In some of her wittiest passages she presents lists of ways various types of people behave with respect to the most banal aspects of existing. The following are two examples: the first regards different attitudes toward washing, the second concerns different degrees of preference for the sharpness of knives and scissors:

Washing is very common, almost everyone does some washing, with some it is only for cleansing, with some it is a refreshing, with some a ceremonial thing that makes them important to every one who knows them. In those who have religion in them as washing is to some of them who make it a distinction in them, in some who have religion in them as washing is to some who do it as a necessary part of their daily living, such have from it a distinction; washing is not a natural thing to happen like eating or sleeping, washing is not like eating or sleeping. It has in it a distinction and to them who do it every day as a natural thing to them, they have it in them to be important to every one who knows them, when religion is in any one as this washing is in some who have it in them, then such a one is important to every one who knows him. (111)

Some certainly are liking to be working with sharp knives or sharp scissors, some are not liking to be working with sharp knives or sharp scissors, some have angry feeling when some one has been sharpening the knives or scissors they have been using, some have angry feeling in them when some one has sharpened a knife or a scissor for them, some have very angry feeling when some one will not let the knife or scissors they are using be sharpened so that they will be sharp ones, some are very angry when some one is wanting to be using knives and scissors which are not sharp ones and is preferring them to be not sharp ones. Some are asking always that some one sharpen the knives or the scissors they are using, some are angry when they find that some one will not sharpen a knife or a pair of scissors for them. (773-774)

How does the categorization of people into types influence the way in which we think about them? Let us compare Stein's approach to types with the creation of character by Neera. In Neera's Teresa and Lydia, the characters evolve.

They think and reflect, which eventually causes them to act. The action of the characters moves the story forward. As the narrative advances, more and more of the character is revealed making it increasingly concrete in the eyes of the reader. The characters, although they may be representative of a certain type or category of fiction of the period, such as woman, daughter, abandoned lover, member of the middle class or aristocracy, are presented as unique individuals, evident in the titles of these novels which bear their names. Stein, on the other hand, destabilizes the association of character and narrative density, and thus the idea of a unique sense of self. Instead, she abstracts the patterns of people, links them to others of the same pattern, and makes a generalization about the type that share the same pattern. Rather than build up one character in particular Stein breaks it down into fragments:

Every one to me just now is in pieces to me. That is to say every one is to me just now as pieces to me. That is to say that each complete one is only as a piece to me, that all there is of each one at any time in them gives to me a feeling of pieces not of a whole thing, that is to say I am having just now with each one I am knowing or remembering a feeling an emotion from them as if they were each one not a whole thing. (520)

Despite the fact that each person is fragmented by Stein's perception, the individual, as already shown, also functions as a tessera in the building up of a

greater mosaic, which is type.

The Making of Americans, a Bildungsroman?

Stein's building up of types and the idea of making and progress suggested in the full title of her work The Making of Americans: Being a History of a Family's Progress brings us back to the question of the Bildungsroman. Can Stein's work contribute to a definition of the genre, and if so, how? Rather than attempt to categorize Stein's colossal work, which I do not believe is fully possible, I would like instead to offer some observations about several affinities I find between the prototype of the genre, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, and The Making of Americans.

Steven Meyer observes that the title The Making of Americans may be understood in two ways: as the process whereby Americans are made (The making of what? The making of Americans) or the process whereby Americans make anything (The what of Americans? The making of Americans)¹¹ (xvi). The first possibility, the understanding of the work as the way Americans are made, together with the rest of the title, "Being a History of a Family's

¹¹ Steven Meyer. "Introduction." The Making of Americans (Normal: Dalkey Archive, 1995) xvi.

Progress,” seems to point possibly to the idea of the “Bildung” of a family. Yet the family’s “progress” is not presented in a progressive manner. Once again, we see that Stein’s narrative does not begin at a specific point and move forward toward an end, but wanders aimlessly. The sense of meandering in The Making of Americans is reminiscent of Wilhelm Meisters Apprenticeship. Of course, in Goethe’s novel the wandering is restricted to Wilhelm’s travels and is not reflected in the form, as it is in Stein. However, the sense of doubt that Stein creates about whether her types ever really become anything more as individuals in the course of the novel than they are at the outset seems parallel to the doubt that Goethe’s work raises as to whether or not Wilhelm has become any more defined at the end of the novel than when he first started. The purpose of Wilhelm’s journeys remains unclear, and the fact that he prepares himself to start yet another journey at the end of the novel seems to cast doubt on the idea that his process of becoming is completely behind him. In Stein’s work, it is not obvious what the progress consists of either. Unique to Stein, however, is the detection of patterns in families, rather than individuals, that progresses further still to an even greater portrait of all types that are existing. The exclusion of events or action, upon which the narrative’s movement usually depends,

leaves the reader at the end of work with a sense of uncertainty as to where development begins and ends or whether it has even taken place at all. Eventually even Stein's family patterns which progress into types dissolve into representation of pure existence:

Some are doing something. Any one is doing something. Some one is doing something and standing. Some are doing something and standing. Any one is doing something and standing. Some one was doing something and standing.

Any one doing something and standing is one doing something and standing. Some one was doing something and was standing.

Any one doing something and standing is one doing something and standing. Any one doing something and standing is one who is standing and doing something. Some one was doing something and was standing. That one was doing something standing. (918)

Both Goethe and Stein make identifying clear-cut boundaries as to the beginning and end of progress or development impossible.

Another quality that Stein's and Goethe's works have in common is their characters' lack of reflection, deliberation, and introspection, which could lead to an eventual revisiting of their own past and/or that of their parents. As I mentioned briefly at the beginning of this chapter, unlike the characters in the works I have categorized as novels of awakening, novels of development, and

feminist novels, Stein's characters do not look back or dwell on the past. They are present-oriented. The absence in Stein's work of a knowable past causally connected to the present does not leave room for a predictable, and therefore determined, future, just a progression of present moments. In Stein, as in Goethe, the future is more open-ended and unknown. This present-orientedness means that the time of becoming and the time of narrating are basically simultaneous. Neither the reader nor the character in question has a privileged vantage point from which to regard the character's development, which is very different from autobiography. In the Bildungsroman a third person, that is, a narrator who is not the developing character, does the telling as things happen, or as in the case of Stein, do not. There is no room in the Bildungsroman for the doubling back that recollection entails.

The Bildungsroman and Autobiography

If we relate autobiography to the other terms I have used thus far to refer to development, such as the "novel of awakening," the "novel of development," and the "feminist novel," it becomes clear that autobiography has much more affinity with them than with the Bildungsroman. These other terms, like

autobiography, and unlike the Bildungsroman, are more complex temporally and rely on recalled moments of the past. Autobiography differs from these terms primarily in its use of the first person. Before I return to the other terms, I would like to probe more deeply into a comparison of the Bildungsroman with autobiography and the role time plays in both.

The two fundamental characteristics which separate autobiography from the Bildungsroman are first person narration and temporal complexity. In autobiography, the teller or narrator is also the subject of the narration. The process by which the self told is filtered through the mind of the self that tells relies upon the passage of time. The distance in time between the two selves inevitably requires that the self which tells possess a retrospective glance. The moments recalled in autobiography are retold because they have a particular resonance within the protagonist that another narrator could not have.

All too often, Bildungsroman and autobiography are blurred. Of course these terms do cover some common ground. For one, they have an important element in common; they are both written accounts which tell about a person's development. But the same can be said about the "novel of development," the "novel of awakening" and the "feminist novel," which is an indication that more

discriminating criteria must be established to differentiate these terms. I will begin by citing Roy Pascal's definition of autobiography. Then I will demonstrate why confusing them is problematic, as I question Claire Marrone's blending of the two terms.

Roy Pascal states that autobiography

...involves the reconstruction of the movement of a life, or a part of a life, in the actual circumstances in which it was lived. Its center of interest is the self, not the outside world, though necessarily the outside world must appear so that, in give and take with it, the personality finds its peculiar shape. But "reconstruction of a life" is an impossible task. A single day's experience is limitless in its radiation backward and forward. So that we have to hurry to qualify the above assertions by adding that autobiography is a shaping of the past. It imposes a pattern on a life, constructs out of it a coherent story. It establishes certain stages in an individual life, makes links between them, and defines, implicitly or explicitly, a certain consistency of relationship between the self and the outside world...This coherence implies that the writer takes a particular standpoint, the standpoint of the moment at which he reviews his life from it. The standpoint may be the actual social position of the writer, his acknowledged achievement in any field, his present philosophy; in every case it is his present position which enables him to see his life as something of a unity, something that may be reduced to order.¹²

If we compare Pascal's definition of autobiography to the definition of

¹² Roy Pascal. "What is an autobiography?" Design and Truth in Autobiography (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1960) 9.

Bildungsroman that I have been proposing throughout this dissertation, we see that the idea of a mutual give and take between the self and the world are common to both. What is unique to autobiography is its shaping of the past or imposing a pattern on it. Since the autobiographer must select moments to retell out of numerous possible ones, he/she, in choosing, gives a form to these moments which they would otherwise lack. In the Bildungsroman, because the moments told are simultaneous with their telling, there is no sense that a mold has been imposed on the telling. The present moment, because it is presented as being imminent, and not having been deliberated or preshaped, is open-ended and geared toward the future. In autobiography, the moments relayed are shaped and necessarily connected to the past. Keeping these differences between the Bildungsroman and autobiography in mind, let us proceed with Marrone, who confuses them.

In her introduction, Marrone implies that her treatment of autobiography and Bildungsroman is unlike any other:

While several critics discuss the autobiographical nature of novels of development as well as the emphasis on growth and maturation in many personal narratives, I am unaware of any systematic review of French and Italian women's autobiography read as

bildungsroman.¹³

Marrone, rather than use the Bildungsroman as a point of departure for discussing autobiography, as she claims several critics do, conflates the two terms. She starts with autobiography and “reads it through the lens of the bildungsroman,” (21) although I’m not quite sure what that involves. The end result of her analysis is further indistinction, not only between autobiography and Bildungsroman, but among the terms “novel of development” and “novel of awakening” as well.

In the section of her introduction “Women’s Autobiography as *Bildungsroman*: Gender and Genre,” Marrone summarizes, and basically accepts, conventional definitions of the Bildungsroman of both genders, most of which I have presented and rejected in chapter 1. She starts with male development by citing François Jost’s reading of Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship as a novel whose last page shows us a “mature man...sure of himself,” (16) which leads her to observe that the “male” *Bildungsroman* focuses on an outward, linear movement that allows the protagonist to achieve

¹³ Claire Marrone. Female Journeys: Autobiographical Expressions by French and Italian Women (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2000) 2.

self-realization (18). As I have argued, such a reading ignores the complex and contradictory nature of Goethe's work and therefore fails to discern that Wilhelm's successful development at the end of the novel is left open. Then, like most critics who accept the "male" Bildungsroman as successful and complete, Marrone adds that the "female" Bildungsroman, in comparison, must be defined differently. She acknowledges that with the female "Bildung" character, particularly in the 19th century, choices for development are few so that "Bildung" cannot be measured in the same terms used for male protagonists (17). For women, development is inwardly directed and occurs within the sphere of the home. Marrone explains that male-and female-oriented narrations concerning development are often marked by being characterized differently, as the Bildungsroman and the novel of awakening, respectively. It is interesting that after attempting to show how male and female narratives concerning development are different, Marrone claims "I do not view the categories of *bildungsroman* and "novel of awakening" as exclusive because, especially when reading autobiographical texts, there is a great deal of overlap between them" (18). This only confuses matters more. It seems as if Marrone does not want to draw lines anywhere.

If we turn for clarification to the next section of her introduction, “Common Elements and Distinctions Between Autobiography and *Bildungsroman*”, we do find some distinct characteristics pertaining to either the *Bildungsroman* or autobiography, but most seem to be downplayed by similarities. One particular example shows the danger of the blurring of terms. In referring to the structure of the *Bildungsroman* and autobiography, Marrone states:

...the structure of such *bildungsromane* as Dickens’ *Great Expectations* and Alessandro Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*) allows for strong moral messages to unfold. Frequently, autobiographical confessions or essays also have a significant didactic content, more so than other types of life writing. (23)

The strong moral messages which Marrone identifies as unfolding in *I promessi sposi*, in my estimation, would be an argument against its being labeled a *Bildungsroman*. The role of Providence in the turn of events, and the fact that good ultimately prevails, are very unlike the wandering open-endedness of the *Bildungsroman*. The only way Manzoni’s novel could be considered a *Bildungsroman* is if we think of it as incorporating the two different concepts of “*Bildung*” which develop in the course of the 18th century, which I outlined in chapter 1. There is the Pietists’ understanding of “*Bildung*” as God’s active

transformation of the passive Christian, and the secular humanistic concept of “Bildung” in which individuals gradually develop their own innate potential through interaction with their environment. If we read I promessi sposi as a work in which “the principles of divine Providence and free will are equally present and operative throughout the narrative,” as Robert Dombroski does¹⁴, then perhaps Manzoni’s novel might be considered an interesting example of a Bildungsroman. However, Marrone does not consider the presence of free will in the novel, and even Dombroski concludes that despite the presence of both Providence and free will, “the scales are tilted in favor of the absolute of God’s commands” as “the human values manifest in the deep process of self-knowledge are not sufficient and must be validated by transcendental necessity” (8). At this point I think it is clear that greater attention must be paid to the differences between the Bildungsroman and autobiography, since it is evident once again that an overemphasis on similarities results in insufficient attention to differences.

The most important criteria I use in chapters 2 and 4 for distinguishing

¹⁴ Robert Dombroski. “Alessandro Manzoni: The Cultural Transformation of Narrative”. in Properties of Writing: Ideological Discourse in Modern Italian Fiction (Baltimore. The Johns Hopkins UP. 1994) 8.

between the Bildungsroman and other terms employed in discourse about development, such as “novel of development” and “feminist novel,” is the degree of awareness the developing protagonist has about his/her becoming. I argued that with the Bildungsroman, the process of “Bildung” is imperceptive, and that there is a certain degree of unawareness, and at times even obliviousness, on the part of the “Bildung” character about his own change. With the “novel of development” and the “feminist novel” on the other hand, self-awareness is central to development and may even depend on it. If we now add autobiography to the mix, a narrative told about a self by a later version of that same self, then we can see that if it is similar to any of the previously mentioned terms, it is more like the “novel of development” and the “feminist novel,” except that it is told in the first person. In other words, the one characteristic that autobiography shares in common with the “novel of development” and the “feminist novel” is a reflecting upon the past, which necessarily requires a retrospective glance. The “novel of development” and “feminist novel,” like the Bildungsroman, are always narrated by a person other than the developing character, by someone whose possible awareness of the development of the “Bildung” character will not in any way interfere with it. Only narrative in the

third person can guarantee such distance. Of course with autobiography there is a degree of distance between the self that is a subject of the narration and the self that is the narrator, but the two selves may converge at various points.

Burton Pike's insights into the role of three time perspectives in autobiography reinforce just how much more temporally complex autobiography is in comparison to the Bildungsroman. As he refers to the concept of time as seen from a psychological point of view, Pike identifies an interplay between the undifferentiated time of the unconscious, the ego time of the adult narrator, and the shifting time of the child who is beginning to move from undifferentiated time to ego time.¹⁵ Since what is presented as "recall" of the past in autobiography is actually a creation of the later, present moment, which remains the dominant perspective (337), the present moment, the moment of writing is the determinant moment in autobiography. Thus autobiography is not simply an attempt to retell one's past life on a linear scale, but rather in effect a novel written in the present, with one's past life as its subject (337). This leads Pike to conclude that while not all fiction is autobiographical all autobiography is fiction (337).

¹⁵ Burton Pike. "Time in Autobiography." Comparative Literature 28 (Fall 1976): 336.

In connecting the autobiographer's obsessive preoccupation with the chronological aspect of time with the 19th century's concept of History as a progressive force, Pike facilitates defining autobiography by situating it temporally and spatially within the boundaries of 19th century Europe. Since the term autobiography is frequently used beyond 19th century Europe, how does one talk about 20th century non-European texts which pose as autobiographies? In attempting to arrive at an answer, I will turn to Gertrude Stein's The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas and Everybody's Autobiography. While it has been said that these works cannot be taken as genuine autobiographies because their generic classification can be debated, and because Stein's critics subsume different works under the autobiography genre,¹⁶ I will use these texts precisely because they move beyond 19th century European autobiography and make genre clarification of prose concerned with development challenging. In my analysis of these works I will continue to address the question of time and place in autobiography, but I will preface them with a consideration of the role of gender in autobiography which has yet to be addressed. As we look at Stein's autobiographies, Pike's conclusion that all autobiography is fiction will

¹⁶ Gygas 61.

become increasingly evident.

The Role of Gender in Autobiography

Sidonie Smith identifies two underlying assumptions which have until very recently motivated approaches to autobiography: confidence in the referentiality of language, and a corollary confidence in the authenticity of the self.¹⁷ Smith states that with the advent of the structuralists and poststructuralists, the notion of referentiality and comfortable assumptions about an informing "I" have been challenged, and as a result a new concern for the *graphia* has emerged (5-6). But Smith questions whether in the maze of proliferating definitions and theories of autobiography there has been much consideration of woman's *bios*, woman's *aute*, woman's *graphia*, or woman's hermeneutics (7). After summarizing the work of some leading theorists of autobiography, Smith concludes that the impact of gender on the autobiographical project has not been a serious focus of critical or theoretical inquiry (7). After arriving at the conclusion that despite the critical ferment

¹⁷ Sidonie Smith. "Autobiography: Criticism and the Problematics of Gender." A Poetics of Women's Autobiography. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987) 5.

brought about by feminist critiques of the academy, of disciplinary methodologies, and of the canon, the majority of autobiography critics still persist in either erasing woman's story, relegating it to the margins of critical discourse or uncritically conflating the dynamics of male and female selfhood and textuality (15), Smith begins to suggest theories grounded in a variety of feminocentric phenomena.

Smith notes that the earliest and most conservative of theories of women's autobiography, which have attempted to articulate the specificity of women's autobiography, focus on thematic content. These theorists believe that rather than write about adventures and vocations as men do, women write about the sphere of domesticity and love. Smith believes that such an approach leads to an oversimplistic binarism. She also writes about female theorists of autobiography who focus on the style of writing and distinguish women's writing as fragmentary and discontinuous, but she follows up with the observation that there are women who write linear narratives and men who write in a non-linear manner. After citing additional ways in which feminist theorists have attempted to conceptualize difference, Smith states that what they all have in common is their recognition of woman's double bind. She quotes an

essay on women's writing by Xaviere Gauthier: As long as women remain silent, they will be outside the historical process, but if they begin to speak and write as men do, they will enter history subdued and alienated (18). I think Smith's underscoring the woman autobiographer's double bind is insightful, yet I would reiterate, as Smith does at various points in her essay, that the notions of how men write and how women write are slippery concepts which are in the process of changing. Gertrude Stein's autobiographies pre-date Smith's work on gender and autobiography, but Smith's observations are relevant to Stein's work, which destabilizes fixed gender roles and modes of writing.

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas and Everybody's Autobiography

Turning back to Gertrude Stein, several departures from Roy Pascal's definition of autobiography immediately come to mind. If we take as examples The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas and Everybody's Autobiography, we see that Stein does not "construct a coherent story" or "establish a consistency of relationship between the self and the outside world." She does not "take a particular standpoint," but posits several. Most important, Stein does not see her life as "something of a unity, something that may be reduced to order."

Instead Stein's autobiographies suggest a disruption of order, particularly through their unprecedented style and presentation of unconventional female roles.

As we consider Stein as a woman writing about the self, it is important to take into account that she was a lesbian. Even though women's roles were changing and expanding in 20th century America, consideration for or thought about homosexual women was far from mainstream. The knowledge that her sexual orientation was socially marginal leads Stein to inscribe her sexuality in autobiography in a veiled manner. In doing so Stein makes it impossible for the reader to identify stable, consistent, and thus predictable female roles.

In The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, the narrator is ostensibly Stein's partner, Alice B. Toklas. Estelle Jelinek describes this work as a *disguise* autobiography par excellence.¹⁸ Jelinek believes that by masking her literary voice in that of her friend and lover Stein attempts an ultimate concealment of her self as protection from judgmental readers (134). So on the one hand Stein conceals her sexual connection to Toklas, a private matter, while making

¹⁸ Estelle Jelinek, "Exotic Autobiography Intellectualized: The Legitimation of Gertrude Stein." The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to Present (Boston: Twayne, 1986) 134.

Toklas, the hidden partner in the relationship, public by giving the autobiography Toklas' name. Further proof of this autobiography's use of disguise can be found in the fact that although Toklas is the narrator of the autobiography, and a third person narrator, the autobiography is really about Gertrude Stein. Stein's play with the speaker of autobiography and the object of it, the self being written about, is a most interesting and original attempt at resolving the double bind that Smith recognizes the female autobiographer to be caught in. Stein does not remain completely silent, and thus outside of the historical process, nor does she use exclusively traditional male paradigms of selfhood, which revolve around individuality and separation. The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas is truly feminocentric.

The title of Stein's second autobiography, Everybody's Autobiography, demonstrates that it is impossible to extrapolate a univocal motive behind Stein's writing. Does the title merely establish distance between Stein the narrator and Stein the self, a technique that Everybody's Autobiography would share with Toklas? Does the "everybodyness" of the work refer to the sense of elation, pride and accomplishment that every writer feels who makes it and becomes famous? We cannot know for sure because Stein leaves it open. In

Everybody's Autobiography Stein also demonstrates another important diversion from Pascal's definition of autobiography in the way she handles time. Stein states:

There must be a reality that has nothing to do with the passage of time and it is very hard for any one to have that in them, not hard almost impossible, but there is no way of having it unless you have it, I have it...¹⁹

Yet Everybody's Autobiography is organized chronologically. Stein's declaration of the importance of not having a reality which has anything to do with the passage of time, in a work which is organized chronologically, reveals more of Stein's irony. It is in Toklas that linear chronology is absent. In addition, the shifting time from childhood to ego time present in 19th century European autobiography is eliminated in both works, particularly in Toklas, as adulthood takes center stage and supplants childhood. Overall, the three time perspectives outlined by Pike start to dissolve in Stein's autobiographies. Of course, as S.C. Neuman points out, in The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, the reader is still aware of a layering of time, as the writing time in the narrative tends to comment on the historical time in the editorializing manner of many

¹⁹ Gertrude Stein. Everybody's Autobiography. (New York: Random House. 1937) 154.

autobiographies, whereas in Everybody's Autobiography, anecdote does not exist for its own sake or as history as it did in Stein's first autobiography.²⁰ Instead, it functions as the observation from which generalizations are drawn (48). Neuman concludes that such use of anecdote in literature, as the experiential basis of a 'knowledge' manifested in generalization, is to abstract it from its usual historical function (49). Everybody's Autobiography, therefore, is more successful at avoiding historical narrative.

One other aspect of Stein's writing which exemplifies a deviation from Pascal's definition of autobiography is the idea that the individual cannot ever be known definitively, because "the minute you or anybody else knows what you are you are not it, you are what you or anybody else knows you are..."²¹ Stein is stating that knowing oneself or any one else's self is relative to who is doing the knowing, since each person's knowing is partial and different from anyone else's. If knowledge of the self is relative and shifting, then Pascal's definition of autobiography as a shaping of the past, as a form which imposes a pattern on a life, and constructs out of it a coherent story, no longer holds.

²⁰ S.C. Neuman, Gertrude Stein: Autobiography and the Problem of Narration (B.C. Canada: ELS Monograph, 1979) 47-48.

²¹ Gertrude Stein. Everybody's 92.

Stein's aversion to fixed forms or molds with respect to both the self and the past is expressed most effectively through her dislike for frames. In Everybody's Autobiography Stein talks about how picture frames imprison:

I am always hoping to have it happen the picture to be live inside in it, in that sense not to live in its frame, pictures have been imprisoned in frames, quite naturally and now when people are all all peoples are asking to be imprisoned in organization it is quite natural that pictures are trying to escape from the prison the prison of framing. For many years I have taken all pictures out of their frames, I never keep them in them, and now that I have let them out for so many years they want to get out by themselves, it is very interesting. (312)

In order for the picture to be alive it must be free from the frame. Stein's setting her pictures free is similar to what she does to the autobiographical subjects she writes about. In order to keep her subjects alive, she has them break free from the narrative frame. In The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas Stein displays a very clever manipulation of the frame. Toklas's narration encloses the autobiography's narration until the very end when Toklas and Stein are trying to convince one another that they should write their own autobiographies. Later, when Stein realizes that Toklas does not look as if she will ever go through with it, Stein offers her an alternative:

... it does not look to me as if you were ever going to write that autobiography. You know what I am going to do. I am going to write it for you. I am going to write it as simply as Defoe did the autobiography of Robinson Crusoe. And she has and this is it.²²

As I have already stated, in Toklas, the line between Stein's and Toklas's selves is somewhat blurred and blended. Just as the reader gets comfortable with the fact that Toklas is the narrator of an autobiography which bears her name, but deals primarily with Stein, there is a shift, a breaking out of the frame by Stein. As James E. Breslin notes, "the end of the book closes off and frames a life at the same time that it breaks out of its frame, its artificial closure, to affirm the ongoing process of the author's life."²³ While the work ends, Stein lives on. Stein's reference to Robinson Crusoe, a work of fiction by Defoe which Stein labels an autobiography, strongly implies, like Pike's essay, that autobiography is fiction. Essentially Stein's blurring of boundaries challenges my attempts to clarify genre distinctions.

²² Gertrude Stein. The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (London: Week-End Library, 1933) 337.

²³ James E. Breslin. "Gertrude Stein and the Problematics of Autobiography." Critical Essays on Gertrude Stein, ed. Michael J. Hoffman (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1986) 159.

Conclusion

This dissertation has been an attempt to question the validity of the term “female Bildungsroman” as a response to the Bildungsroman’s presumed failure to account for female development. Having given due consideration to the Bildungsroman genre with respect to different places and times, I believe that women’s novels do not benefit from a term that only acknowledges a difference in gender.

By approaching the Bildungsroman as a spectrum, I have sought to dismantle simplistic male/female paradigms of the Bildungsroman and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the genre’s own “Bildung.” I have taken the Bildungsroman’s nuanced and often contradictory nature into account, questioned various existing notions of the Bildungsroman, and suggested additional possibilities. My approach has allowed movement between current notions of the genre, my insights, novels traditionally considered Bildungsromane, and new works I have introduced by Italian women authors. When considered comparatively, the working definitions I have formulated of the Bildungsroman and other terms concerned with development¹ articulate the

¹ See Appendix.

development of female protagonists in the novel through time. If we consider a particular pattern of female development which focuses on love and marriage, we see that the “novel of awakening” evolves into the “novel of development,” which then becomes the “feminist novel.” In all three terms, there is an awakening to the limits that society imposes upon individual freedom, however each marks a unique way of coping with this understanding. In the “novel of awakening,” the protagonist who feels incapable of overcoming societal restrictions commits suicide. In the “novel of development,” the protagonist is able to act in some way to cope with her unsatisfactory situation in a mild and ambiguous manner. In the “feminist novel,” the protagonist’s attempt to change her world becomes clear and aggressive. The progression from suicide, to modest action, to bold rebellion, demonstrates the protagonist’s evolution in the novel through time, and each step warrants its own term.

I began my research by questioning the criteria with which success is identified in “male” texts, since, all too often, female development is deemed absent or failed when compared to what is commonly understood as successful male development. By problematizing the assumption that in the “male” Bildungsroman, social integration marks fulfilled formation as well as the

narrative's end, I have stimulated a reevaluating of the portrayal of male development in the novel and, in turn, female development. Rather than continue to perceive female development which does not emphasize social success as lacking, which inevitably entails locating positive portrayals of female development exclusively in the 20th century, in which women's social success is more tangible, due to greater freedom and opportunity, I have presented alternate possibilities for reading and writing female development. Often in the novels I have introduced, exchanges between women can be read between the lines of a more dominant critique of patriarchy which mark turning points in the female protagonist's growth. Conversations between women take place between mother and daughter, as is the case with Neera's Teresa and L'indomani, and Lessing's A Proper Marriage, between grandmother and granddaughter, as in Tamaro's Va' dove ti porta il cuore, or between female lovers, as in Stein's The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas. Often these exchanges provide space for the active involvement of women in their development which is not entirely eclipsed by the male-dominated social order. The end-product of female dialogue is the recognition of positive aspects of female development in 19th century narratives which portray women as more than helpless victims.

Another possibility for expressing female development in a new way is through narrative structure. In this dissertation, the more novels veer away from a linear plot, the more room they provide for a transgression of fixed traditional female roles. In Stein and Tamaro, non-linear plots make progression to the fulfillment of a sure end, such as marriage, impossible. Stein's Toklas suggests movement beyond enclosing frames and Tamaro's Va' dove ti porta il cuore, a plurality of paths.

Ultimately, these alternate possibilities for reading and articulating female development as portrayed in the novel through time allow it to be understood in a more profound and complete way.

Appendix

The following is a summary of working definitions of the Bildungsroman and other terms related to development in the novel, which I have derived from my research:

Bildungsroman Novels placed under this category are concerned with a protagonist whose development comes about in the following ways: by the influence of external forces, either God or the outside world; by the protagonist's imposition of innate potential on the world; or, most commonly, through a combination of both outward and inward shaping of the protagonist and his/her world. When perceived as a spectrum, the Bildungsroman's center can be identified as the point at which there is a balanced give and take or mutual exchange between individual and environment. A greater degree of either external forces on the protagonist's development or the protagonist's excessive will outward on the world's shaping would mark extreme ends of the spectrum. The "Bildung" protagonist, regardless of gender, demonstrates a becoming or emergence in time and usually belongs to the bourgeoisie, the class most conducive to the mobility necessary for the process of "Bildung." Unlike development in Freudian psychoanalysis, emergence involves a showing of time in its course, which is imperceptive and not easily divisible into clearly defined stages. The process of "Bildung" also involves the putting together or building up of the ego, rather than the breaking up of the self into multiple parts. The "Bildung" protagonist's emergence coincides with the world's, and is at a transition point from one era to another. Becoming in transition creates tension, and frequently a sense of contradiction, most evident in the protagonist's vacillation between the ideal and the real, between potentiality and actuality. As a result, the Bildungsroman's plot is open-ended and future-oriented, which means that it is not propelled by the achievement of an end, such as social integration or marriage. The end of the narrative itself may be ambiguous. Narration is always in the third person, which creates distance between the "Bildung" protagonist, often unaware of the process of development as it is

happening, and the telling. Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship is the prototype of the genre.

female Bildungsroman This term isolates "female" and overprivileges it at the expense of other axes of differentiation, such as race, class, and sexual orientation, and does not consider the contexts of place and time. Since it is no longer possible to speak of a uniform fiction of female development, this term is inadequate to describe development. Some critics, like Esther Kleinbord Labovitz, believe that the increased social integration of women in more recent history is an indication that the "female Bildungsroman" can only be found in the 20th century. Such a way of thinking is problematic for several reasons: it continues to view social achievement as the only indicator of successful development, and therefore excludes other criteria with which to identify development; it overemphasizes a strictly plotted female quest, or seeking and demanding of experiences and setting of goals, which undermines the spirit of the Bildungsroman, which requires an open plot and a more even exchange between self and world; it fails to acknowledge the difficulties and challenges that increased social involvement and setting of goals creates for women in the 20th century who often try act out new roles in society, particularly in the workplace, while continuing to assume traditional female roles such as wife and mother.

novel of awakening Although female development is not uniform, this term serves to describe a particular pattern of it, most prominent in the 19th century, which centers around love and marriage. The female protagonist develops primarily inwardly, and achieves greater self-knowledge, which leads to an awakening to societal limitations, and her inability to overcome them. The awakening marks the beginning of the protagonist's demise, and the novel ends with her suicide. Flaubert's Madame Bovary is its prototype. Kate Chopin's The Awakening and Neera's Lydia are other examples.

novel of development The "novel of development" marks a step beyond the "novel of awakening" in its not presenting societal limits as completely insurmountable for women. It therefore does not end in suicide, however preoccupation with love and marriage is still central to female development. A

female protagonist's struggle between societal expectations and inner demands is portrayed as well as an attempt to resolve the resulting tension such inner conflict creates. While the "novel of development" is more centrally located along the Bildungsroman spectrum in its presentation of a protagonist who is both shaped by her environment and shapes it, albeit mildly, its tendency toward resolution of tension marks a divergence from the Bildungsroman, as does the self-reflectiveness of the protagonist in question. Here, development of the protagonist, as well as the narrative, depend upon the protagonist's self-awareness, which increases in the course of the novel and leads to salvation. Although self-awareness may be identified in some pre-19th century narratives, the "novel of development" is most prominent at the end of the 19th century and continues into the 20th due to the advent of psychoanalysis. Novels under this category contain female protagonists who represent the beginning of a change in attitude toward, and perception of, traditional feminine roles. Neera's Teresa and L'indomani are examples of this type of novel.

feminist novel This term picks up where the "novel of development" leaves off. In the "novel of development," female protagonists begin to demonstrate disapproval of traditional female roles, but their resistance occurs primarily in the workings of the mind. Although the protagonist of the "novel of development" may attempt to act to change her lot in the world, her effort is mild and ambiguous, when compared to the protagonist of the "feminist novel." In the latter, women have a clear aim: to change society. Such bold initiative often involves a tremendous cost, such as having to choose between motherhood and selfhood, which are mutually exclusive. The female protagonist's personal development is linked closely with social, political and economic development, and gender is considered along with class and/or race. In this type of novel wifehood and motherhood are demythified, and the presentation of split or multiple selves is common. Aleramo's Una donna, and Lessing's A Proper Marriage are representative of this type of novel, whose dénouement is reminiscent of Ibsen's A Doll's House.

autobiography Autobiography's backward-looking glance is one of the main characteristics that separates it from the Bildungsroman, whose organizing principle is the future. As the autobiographer looks back to the past from the

present moment, s/he imposes a pattern on his/her life and constructs out of it a coherent story. The present moment of the telling is therefore the standpoint from which the autobiographer articulates his/her life. Unlike the Bildungsroman, the telling in autobiography is not simultaneous with the moments told, and the particular and individual perspective of the autobiographer necessitates first, rather than third, person narration. In the 19th century, in which autobiography is most prominent, a chronological, linear and progressive understanding of time coincides with the autobiographer's narrative time. In the 20th century however, autobiography becomes something completely different. The individual is no longer stable and as central as before, and chronology dissolves. As far as gender is concerned, as in the Bildungsroman, the theme and style of writing are insufficient criteria with which to identify definitive feminocentric phenomena. Dickens's David Copperfield is a 19th century example of autobiographical writing. Gertrude Stein's The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas and Everybody's Autobiography are 20th century examples.

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