



# CHANGE AND CONTINUITY:

**The Bildungsroman in English**

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*A dissertation for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor*

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September 2009



To my family; Kevin McCafferty, Liam Iversen McCafferty,  
Gunhild and Ivar Iversen, and Valborg and Arne Telnes.



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## Acknowledgements

First of all, I want to thank my supervisor Professor Fredrik Chr. Brøgger for reading and commenting on all the different versions of a study that grew beyond our plans in length as well as topic. I am grateful for his continued belief in the project and for providing a dinner party at a time when it was particularly welcome.

Thanks also to all those involved in the PhD seminar at the University of Tromsø's Department of Culture and Literature for interesting discussions, valuable comments and for contributing to a supportive and creative climate. The competent and informal leadership and sound advice of Lena Liepe and Marie-Theres Federhofer helped make the seminar unusually fruitful.

I want to thank Professor Orm Øverland for always believing in me and helping me get back on track when the theoretical concerns were threatening to become too dominant. Stian Sundell Torjussen and Monica Westervold provided physical and spiritual sustenance and introduced me to the pleasures of Carcassonne and Ticket to Ride. I have greatly appreciated the good lunches and wide-ranging talks with Åsta Haukås, who showed me that different fields and languages are no hindrance to enlightening discussion.

I am particularly grateful to my husband, Kevin McCafferty for proofing the book, but also for his practical and down-to-earth approach. Thanks also to Liam Iversen McCafferty for helping me keep things in perspective.





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# Introduction

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## The project

*Wilhelm Meisters 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. (Saine 1991, 139)

The second half of the English nineteenth century offers only a few *Bildungsromane* in the traditional sense of the word. Most of them are centered on the life of outcast or underprivileged children, or of prepubescent youths. ... David Copperfield is not Wilhelm Meister. The former quenches his thirst with milk, the latter with wine. (Jost 1983, 136)

If history can make cultural forms necessary, it can make them impossible as well, and this is what the war [WWI] did to the Bildungsroman. More precisely, perhaps, the war was the final act in a longer process – the cosmic coup de grâce to a genre that, at the turn of the century, was already doomed. (Moretti 2000, 229-230)

Ever since the word *Bildungsroman* gained currency in German around the turn of the last century, it has been hotly disputed. The above quotations illustrate a few of the innumerable bones of contention: How the term should be defined, whether such a genre in fact exists, and where, and whether or not it is still being written. Many experts consider it almost a sacrilege to claim that there is such a thing as a bildungsroman genre written in English. Others insist that the genre's life is over, and that the concept of *Bildung* implied by it has long since become impossible. Within German studies, there has been a tendency to restrict the genre to the period between 1796 and the mid-nineteenth century, while other scholars give it a much longer life span. Particularly striking is the gap between the scholarship of many theorists who

claim the genre died around the time of the First World War, and the enormous and growing literature on specific bildungsromans written since. Why this intense reluctance on the part of some scholars to let the bildungsroman cross national and linguistic borders when no such reticence exists for other genres, whether “serious” genres such as the romance, ode or tragedy, or popular ones such as the detective novel, the gothic, or the medical romance? Why should this one particular genre have such a limited extension and be allowed so little influence on the literatures of other countries or on posterity? And why do readers, publishers, bookshops, and reviewers refuse to stop calling non-German novels from many different time periods by the name bildungsroman?

This is a study of the bildungsroman in English, past and present. It is therefore necessarily a part of this long history of definition, redefinition, and controversy. Although initially intended simply as a study of change and continuity within the Anglo-American bildungsroman, this study had to engage with the critical debate. The problems and controversies concerning the question of definition could not be ignored. The project therefore combines a theoretical part with a study of particular texts. In addition to close readings of nine novels written between 1776 and 1989, I will discuss the reasons for the “genre wars” (Boes 2006, 230) that have plagued bildungsroman criticism, and the more general problem of how literary genres can most usefully be defined.

I have retained the German term “bildungsroman” in order to emphasize that my topic is the genre that is usually referred to by this name. The phrase “bildungsroman in English” is meant to emphasize that the genre comprises English-language novels as well as the classic German ones. It is also a fact that the term is commonly used in English and that no English equivalent has gained widespread currency.<sup>1</sup>

## Definitions at war

Both bildungsroman criticism and the history of the bildungsroman are found in at least two very different versions, one more common in Germany and within *Germanistik* or German studies, the other found particularly within English studies and the study of other national literatures. Since Susan Howe claimed that Wilhelm Meister had English kinsmen in 1930, some scholars have fought tooth and nail to keep the *Bildungsroman* (always spelled with a

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<sup>1</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the occurrence of the term in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* in 1910 as the oldest English use of the term (“Bildungsroman 2008b”).

capital) German, while generations of scholars around the world have ignored them and gone on publishing studies of books they call bildungsromans (or “novels of formation” or the like). I will distinguish between these two tendencies by calling the former the Germanist Purist position and the latter the International Pluralist view. This is a simplification in order to explain some of the disputed issues; scholars on either side of the divide disagree on a number of issues and do not constitute close-knit research communities.

At the heart of the genre wars lies the issue of definition. Germanist Purists accuse Internationalist Pluralists of not knowing what the term bildungsroman means, and of using it far too widely and divorced from the historical context that it is inextricably bound to. Internationalist Pluralists are generally less concerned with theoretical matters, but in theory as well as specific studies often oppose the Germanists on two counts: Firstly, they insist that there is a strong bildungsroman tradition outside Germany. Secondly, they claim that many twentieth- and twenty-first-century authors – especially female and minority authors – have reacted against and subverted “the traditional bildungsroman” in order to assert alternative views of subjectivity and ways of becoming an adult. This controversy, and the various ways the bildungsroman has been defined, is the subject of Chapter 1.

Teaching a course in British and American detective fiction a few years ago made me see one reason why genre definitions are so hard to agree on. The set texts were selected for quality rather than to illustrate particular definitions of detective fiction, and the students generally liked them. The “problem” was that there were no definitions of the genre that would fit even half of the works on the reading list. Most of them did something that several common definitions of the detective genre said they should not do. The texts varied in time from 1841 to 2000, and they were simply too different to be definable on the basis of a few traits. I realized that the way we usually define genres simply does not work for a number of reasons: Firstly, it is strange that readers seem to know intuitively what genres books belong to (this can be “proved” by that fact that people largely agree on their classifications), while literature scholars are unable to formulate definitions that work in the sense that they encompass most texts that readers include in the genre. Most TV-viewers, for instance, will probably agree that the Poirot series, CSI, and *The Wire in the Blood*, based on Val McDermid’s novels, belong to the same genre, but it would probably be impossible to create a definition that fits them all. And if such a definition could be made, someone would soon find a counterexample. Furthermore, some author would probably take the definition as a challenge and try to write a series that breaks with at least one of its features. There thus

seems to be a gap between the intuitive, maybe partly unconscious, understanding people have of genres based on their experience, and what experts are able to express about them.

Secondly, it is obvious that detective fiction has changed dramatically from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) to Minette Walters' *The Shape of Snakes* (2000), so how could the genre be definable by a set of invariable characteristics? What is commonly called "Aristotelian definitions" – that is, those that define members of a category by a number of necessary and sufficient properties shared by all – are logically immune to change. And yet it has been generally accepted at least since the 1920s that literature is created in the meeting of "tradition and the individual talent" (Eliot 1922). Whether genre conventions are strict, as for the sonnet, or loose and flexible, as for the bildungsroman, authors are doing a balancing act between being original on the one hand and following the conventions to such an extent that their texts will be read as part of a tradition on the other.

Thirdly, authors are sometimes inspired by a desire to break a particular generic "rule." Paul Auster's *Squeeze Play* and Anne Holt's *Løvens gap*, for instance, both defeat the reader's assumption that a presumed suicide in a detective story is really a murder. Instead, an assumed murder turns out to have been a suicide. Auster has also written a trilogy of "serious" novels in which he uses and breaks detective genre conventions for particular purposes. Sometimes the critical discovery of a generic convention, or an interpretation of it, is enough to spur writers to try to break it.<sup>2</sup>

The way genres have traditionally been defined is therefore in direct opposition to some very basic, widely held assumptions about them: We know that genre definitions clash with our classifications of specific works, yet are reluctant to do away with either the definition or the classification. We claim that genres change over time, yet want definitions to be stable and unchangeable. We see writers breaking genre "rules", but do not include that knowledge in our definitions of genre. For these reasons many scholars and students struggle with the incompatibility between their genre concepts and the literature they read. The persistence of such a situation is a serious barrier to the generation of new knowledge about genre in general and about specific genres.

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<sup>2</sup> A further example is Agatha Christie, who is believed to have written her first Poirot mystery after her sister challenged her to create a detective that did not follow the Sherlock Holmes pattern (Symons 1977, 27). And Stieg Larsson, whose detective/thriller trilogy has enjoyed phenomenal popularity in Scandinavia recently, deliberately created main characters who break with the generic prototype: The hero has none of the characteristics of the male detective, while the heroine is flat-chested, silent, violent, super-intelligent, and takes the law into her own hands.

Moreover, the problem of definition obscures much valuable research about genres and prevents us from making full use of it. Genre and genres have been studied from a number of perspectives – as conventions for authors to adhere to, as sets of codes found in the text, as ways of reading, and as a contract between reader and text, to mention a few. Genres have been defined and redefined; old genres have been discarded and new ones invented. Each theorist seems to hope to find the real essence of genre or a genre, the true definition or true taxonomy, but no system has become generally accepted, and a large number of genre definitions are disputed. Most of the genre theories on the market contain important partial truths, but are simultaneously totally wrong because they would like to be the *whole* truth. If genres were defined as complex phenomena with a large number of different characteristics and aspects, knowledge from different studies could come together to create a more complete picture of how genres work.

The main problem is thus definitions, but not in the sense that the existing definition (whatever that may be) is “wrong” and that we need a “better” one. What we need is a different attitude to definitions, and a different *kind* of definition. We need non-Aristotelian genre definitions, that is, definitions that do not consist of necessary and sufficient qualities. What we need are definitions that seek to make explicit what is *typical* of a genre rather than repeated attempts to find its *essence*. Recent theoretical work on genre has been going in the right direction, focusing less on rules and systems, and more on the workings of genres and how they change and overlap. But although these new trends have spurred numerous studies of non-literary genres, they have not resulted in alternative ways of defining literary genres.

Literary genres are not given by some god who keeps a record of the correct definition of each one. Genres arise out of other genres, out of historical trends and ideas, and from the creative imaginations of individual writers; they develop and change, are transformed and parodied, and sometimes die out. According to Eleanor Rosch, George Lakoff, and other cognitive scientists, our knowledge of concepts and categories is based on our own experience rather than abstract lists of characteristics. How we define a genre is therefore dependent on what we have read. Someone who has read a lot of Goethe and German literature from the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries will have a particular mental image of a *bildungsroman*. Someone ignorant of European literature but who has taken a course in “The African-American *bildungsroman*” will have a very different view. The stage is thus set for an academic debate, which, in the case of the *bildungsroman*, has been raging for at least a century.

The controversy over the definition of the bildungsroman has been so harsh that in 1991 a group of scholars found it necessary to publish a book in order to combat the “serious problem [of] the imprecise use of the word to categorize virtually any work that describes, even in the most far-fetched way, a protagonist’s formative years” (Hardin, x). In 1993, Todd Kontje, an American Germanist, found “Bildungsroman research a rapidly expanding literature of bewildering diversity, and it becomes increasingly difficult to hear the voice of reason above the din of conflicting opinion” (1993, 109). In addition to the dispute over definition, there have been intense debates over which novels belong to the genre, and which countries have produced bildungsromans. Even the very existence of the genre has been disputed. It has usually been hailed as the predominant genre in nineteenth-century Germany, but Jeffrey Sammons, after thorough examination, claims he has been “unable to locate this celebrated genre in the nineteenth century” (1981, 230). The low point of the German debate was probably Kurt May’s 1957 article “‘Wilhelm Meister’s Lehrjahre,’ ein Bildungsroman?“, which denied even *Wilhelm Meister* the privilege of being a bildungsroman. At the start of the new millennium, Todd Kontje saw a “paradoxical situation in which critical studies of the bildungsroman abound while the status of individual examples of the genre has remained open to question” (2000, 109). As reflected in criticism of particular books and authors, the history of the bildungsroman stretches from Germany in the late eighteenth century, to various Western countries in the nineteenth century, and finally, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the genre has spread to the third and fourth worlds. Theoretically, however, work on the bildungsroman is much more notable for its discrepancies, disagreements and controversies than for any clear sense of what is meant by the term and what works should be classified as bildungsromans.

One aim of this study is to show how a radical rethinking of the concept of literary genre and the ways that genres are defined can liberate genre criticism from such unproductive and unsolvable controversy.

## Outline

Part I of this study deals with theoretical matters, largely connected with the issue of definition. Chapter 1 gives an overview of the various definitions that have been prominent in the bildungsroman debate. The subchapter “Understanding the Controversy” tries to explain why people disagree so violently. I then point out some serious difficulties with existing



definitions, and the subsequent subchapter, “Non-essentialist definition and classification,” presents alternative approaches to definition that avoid these difficulties. These two subchapters will also serve to place my own research in relation to the existing debate.

Chapter 2, “The Bildungsroman Index,” is both my definition of the bildungsroman and the result of a detailed comparison of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* and three British bildungsromans from the mid-nineteenth century. The point of this comparison was to ascertain that the British novels actually resemble *Wilhelm Meister* sufficiently to warrant classifying them as belonging to the same genre. The comparison resulted in a list of 96 features shared by at least three of the novels. This list has then been worked into an index, which can be used to measure the extent to which other novels resemble these four classic examples of the bildungsroman. As a working definition of the genre, the Bildungsroman Index (BRI) is radically different from common definitions of literary genres. The BRI takes the form of a list of 96 characteristics that novels *may* have, but these features are not mandatory; rather, they are used for polythetic classification. Each feature is given points from 1 to 3, and books may score from zero to 148 points. The aim of the BRI is to provide a description of some prototypical examples of the genre, which can then be used as a yardstick for the study of other bildungsroman-like novels. The index is flexible enough to include historical and cultural change, but not so wide that it fits any novel (a Germanist criticism often leveled at English definitions and uses of the term). The index is a tool for studying English-language novels that resemble (classic German or English) bildungsromans. It takes for granted that the bildungsroman is not an exclusively German genre. It will, however, not necessarily be applicable to other national genres without modification.

Rather than distinguish categorically between bildungsromans and non-bildungsromans, the index classifies novels on a scale: At one end are books that clearly belong to the genre, at the other end are those that clearly do not belong. Between these extremes are novels that resemble bildungsromans to various degrees. For the twenty works I have used the BRI on so far (11 of which are treated in this project), the tendency is that most novels usually seen as bildungsromans get high scores, while others have only low or medium scores. This model has many advantages over existing definitions: First, it regards literary genres more as works sharing family resemblances in Wittgenstein’s<sup>3</sup> sense than as totally distinct, mutually exclusive categories. Second, since it lacks a clear cut-off point, it is more likely to inspire detailed study than arguments over whether works “really are”

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<sup>3</sup> This concept is explained in Chapter 1, in the section “Non-essentialist definition and classification.”

bildungsromans or not. Third, the index analyzes novels on the basis of specific features, many of which are concrete and empirical, and it is immediately apparent why particular novels “fit” the pattern or not. It therefore encourages discussion of textual detail and specifics, at a low level of abstraction. Literary study should not be content to do only that, but generalizations about entire genres or periods can only be valid when based on well-founded, specific descriptions of individual texts. It is my hope that the Bildungsroman Index, as a definition that does not see literary genres as totally distinct and mutually exclusive categories, may help redirect the focus of discussion away from the unproductive problem of definition and onto the literature in question. Because the BRI is eclectic and includes so many different features, it can bring together results from different branches of bildungsroman criticism, and does not limit itself to a small set of necessary elements that fit a narrow definition. This study therefore refers to research done by scholars with quite different views of the genre.

Part II contains BRI results and brief analyses of nine bildungsromans. There are five eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels: *Wilhelm Meister* (1796), *Jane Eyre* (1847), *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Great Expectations* (1861), and *Huckleberry Finn* (1885). The first four are the works that formed the basis of the BRI. These are treated as the core works or “prototypical examples” of the English genre. *Huckleberry Finn* is an American test case, which is compared to the other four using the index, to see to what extent it adheres to the tradition. Next follow short analyses of four twentieth-century novels, one British, two American, and one Canadian: *Of Human Bondage* (1915), *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), *The Diviners* (1974), and *The Cider House Rules* (1985).

Part III consists of detailed case studies of one British and one American work, both written after WWII: *The Magus* by John Fowles (1965/77) and *Moon Palace* by Paul Auster (1989). These are first investigated through their index results, and then the theme of identity development in each is discussed more fully.

The selection of texts in parts II and III might be criticized for having a white, male, Western bias. This is because the study was originally intended to challenge the common claim that the bildungsroman died out after the First World War. Many critics, however – on the Germanist as well as the English and Internationalist side – concede that the genre has survived among women and minority writers, and only disappeared as a “mainstream” genre. To disprove this theory, I set out to show that it has persisted in “mainstream literature” beyond female and minority fiction, even among white, heterosexual male authors in Europe and North America. Work on the project, however, made me realize that such an argument

would come at too high a price; I see no reason to exclude women and black American writers, for instance, from the general category of “American literature.” Excluding works merely due to the sex or ethnicity of the author would go against the whole idea of the project, which is that generic repertoires travel and inspire writers who encounter them, in spite of assumptions that certain cultures, such as the German Sturm-und-Drang authors and British nineteenth-century Realists,<sup>4</sup> could have nothing in common. The result is that Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* has been given its natural place among the handful of classic British bildungsromans, and Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners* stands as a lone female representative of the Post-WWII tradition. The project was already too advanced and too long to include more authors. Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* would have been natural selections, but space and the fact that these have already been extensively studied as bildungsromans, made me keep less obvious works by male authors.

Part IV brings together the results from the previous analyses and compares works across the whole time period, from *Wilhelm Meister* to *Moon Palace*. This is where the question of development – continuity and change – will be tackled. The BRI is constructed on the basis of resemblances, but variation and change within the paradigm remains a focus in all the analyses.

Its wide scope is where the greatest value of this study lies. There are other, more comprehensive, surveys of bildungsroman criticism, many books on categorization, and more detailed studies of the novels discussed here. My emphasis is on bringing these together to present a different way of defining the bildungsroman and then on showing the effect of this definition on the analysis of the novels. The perspective of the present study is more psychological and novelistic than sociological or ideological, although these aspects are also approached in the discussions in Part 4. The bildungsroman – in some of its definitions and delimitations – has been extensively studied from a Marxist perspective: Lukács has interpreted it as a manifestation of dialectics, while Moretti and Jameson have focused on modernization and systems of production. A return to more psychological and literary concerns thus seems warranted at this time. Until very recently – important exceptions are Susan Gohlman’s and Thomas Jeffers’ studies – bildungsroman criticism has also been concerned with differences, with excluding books and drawing borderlines between this genre and others. It is now time to focus on resemblances – influences and trends travelling across historical and national borders, creating what is now a long-lived, cosmopolitan genre.

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<sup>4</sup> I mark the difference between the two meanings of “realist” by referring to the Realist period of literary history with a capital, while “realist” without a capital will be more or less equivalent to “verisimilar.”

This study aims to show that there are alternatives to the traditional ways of defining genres. A more pluralistic approach is better able to bring out resemblances between works and can highlight many aspects of the genre that have not received much attention so far. Ideas of family resemblance, prototype theory and polythetic definition can bring genre definitions more in line with what “everybody” knows about genre, but literary studies, for some reason, has failed to practice. After presenting a genre definition based on the above theories, I analyze a number of works, ranging in time from the late eighteenth century to the late twentieth. For the early works, the analysis emphasizes features (family resemblances) that unite *Wilhelm Meister* and three nineteenth-century English novels and justify seeing these as one genre. Twentieth-century works are then studied with a focus on both continuity and innovation in relation to the older novels. The analyses thereby provide a very brief overview of the historical development of the English genre through detailed study of particular texts.

This project combines theoretical rigor with detailed study of a relatively large number of texts. Many of the findings contradict earlier studies on both sides of the bildungsroman controversy: First, the numerous resemblances between *Wilhelm Meister* and the three British classics contradicts the Germanist Purist proposition that Goethe’s novel is the progenitor of a particularly German genre that is virtually unrelated to literature from other countries. Second, the comparison of novels written before and after 1900 contradicts much recent criticism on English-language bildungsromans, which deals with novels quite remote from the tradition defined by the BRI. Gender roles and gender relations in the older books are, furthermore, found to be much more equal than post-1970s feminist criticism tends to claim: The older novels have a large number of strong, active, independent women, while male heroes are more likely to be weak, passive victims of circumstance.

Many features that recent criticism claims are modern or contemporary subversions of the genre are also found in the classics. And in my view, identity and identity formation are not presented in fundamentally different ways in the older works and the “postmodern” ones written after WWII. This last point is important for two reasons. First, the many (particularly Germanist) theorists who think the bildungsroman went extinct around the First World War do so on the assumption that the world changed so dramatically that *Bildung* was no longer possible. I replace the hotly disputed concept of *Bildung* with concepts from psychology and find very strong parallels between the identity formation processes in the older and newer books. Secondly, postmodernists and others have more recently claimed that the postmodern world has seen dramatic changes to conceptions of identity, if not the breakdown of individual

identity in the West, and that the “unified” or “humanistic” identity conception of the older books is no longer feasible. Such claims are also contradicted by my material. In both the classic and late-twentieth-century bildungsromans, the construction of viable individual identities succeeds, in spite of hardship, losses and regrets.

Many scholars have seen the balance between society and the individual as a prime concern of the bildungsroman. Others regard it as a vehicle for developing a particular form of subjective individuality in the West, particularly in the nineteenth century. I develop the idea that the genre in fact creates its own peculiar blend of individualism and communalism, emphasizing the need to create one’s own identity, but that this can only be done in close interaction with others.

## Clarifications

This study is concerned with the bildungsroman as a tradition within English-language literature. Literature from Britain, America, and Canada is thus regarded as one tradition. The bildungsroman is regarded as a multi-national genre, although I acknowledge that it may look somewhat different in different places, and that national bildungsroman traditions might develop away from their origins.

Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* is a point of reference because it is generally recognized as the founding work of the genre and a major inspiration for the early writers of bildungsromans in Britain.<sup>5</sup> Otherwise, there will be no treatment of the German genre as such or the French or other national traditions. The critical literature referred to will likewise be primarily from within English studies and from the English-speaking world, but to some extent German literature is also used because it has been important for the English genre. In discussing early German criticism I rely on secondary sources, since there are now a number of good overviews of this critical tradition.

The word “bildungsroman” will be spelled without a capital in order to de-Germanize it and emphasize that it is used outside a purely German context. As for the plural, both “bildungsromane” and “bildungsromans” sound awkward in English. I have tried to avoid the plural, but where that is not possible I have chosen the English plural in –s. Occasionally, the

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Carlyle’s translation of *Wilhelm Meister* appeared in 1824. Early British bildungsromans include Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Pelham* (1821), Benjamin Disraeli’s *Contarini Fleming* (1832), *Godolphin* (1833), and *Ernest Maltravers* (1837).

German spelling with initial capital and plural –e will be used as a synonym for “the German bildungsroman.”

### CHAPTER 1. DEFINING THE BILDUNGSROMAN

[T]here is virtually no agreement on either what constitutes a Bildungsroman or which novels belong to this tradition. (Gohlman 1990, 228).

What a Bildungsroman actually is ... and how many of them there are in German literature or in world literature at large, are questions still under discussion and probably unsolvable. (Thomas P. Saine 1991, 119)

#### The controversy

At least since publication of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* in 1796 there has been a literary genre for which *Wilhelm Meister* is seen as the prototype and supreme example. According to Martin Swales, the genre became established after the publication of Wieland's *Agathon* in 1767 and Blanckenburg's *Versuch über den Roman* [Essay on the novel]<sup>6</sup> in 1774, a study that grew out of its author's enthusiasm for *Agathon* (Swales 1991, 49). The *term* bildungsroman did not become current in German until the early twentieth century, but the *genre* was well-known and much discussed in Germany from about the turn of the eighteenth century. But even when there were no more than a handful of examples, literary scholars still disagreed about the distinguishing features of the genre and which books belonged to it (Steinecke 1991).

Today, there is disagreement concerning the historical period the bildungsroman belonged to, whether it is a living tradition or not, in what countries it was/is found, and the criteria to be used for defining it. And, maybe surprisingly for all the writers of books and articles on the contemporary bildungsroman, most of the *theoretical* writing on the genre

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<sup>6</sup> Titles of works published in translation are given in parentheses and in italics or quotation marks, while my own translation of the meaning of the title in cases where the work has not been translated is given in square brackets.

claims that there is no such thing: Both on the Germanist and Internationalist side of the debate, many theorists think the bildungsroman came to an end as a mainstream genre around the First World War, if not before (Moretti 1987, 228; 2000). There is, then, a wide gulf between the understanding of the bildungsroman that is expressed through practical criticism – which testifies to a large corpus of texts from many periods and places – and the more theoretical writing which is much more restrictive in the works it includes. Dictionaries and literary encyclopedias often try to mediate between the two positions and clear up some of the confusion by stating that the term bildungsroman has two different meanings. The French *Dictionnaire International des Termes Littéraires*, for instance, says the first, and narrow, meaning is “a category of the German novel from Goethe’s period,” and the second, wider, sense is “any novel describing the passage of an adolescent into adulthood” (Grève, my translation). Such an approach might solve some of the disagreement, but judging by the number of articles that continue to discuss the question of definition, it is far from satisfying.

Much of the disagreement concerns the status of the classic German bildungsroman (approx. 1767-1830), and, broadly speaking, there are two major factions: Germanists and non-Germanists. In *Germanistik*, the dominant definition used to be that presented by Wilhelm Dilthey in *Experience and Poetry (Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, published 1906), which states that bildungsromans

all portray a young man of their time: how he enters life in a happy state of naïveté seeking kindred souls, finds friendship and love, how he comes into conflict with the hard realities of the world, how he grows to maturity through diverse life-experiences, finds himself, and attains certainty about his purpose in the world. (qtd in Swales 1991, 98)

According to James Hardin, Dilthey first mentioned the genre in *Leben Schleiermachers* [Life of Schleiermacher] (1870) calling it the “*Wilhelm Meister* school” (1991, xiv), thereby giving Goethe’s novel a special status as prime example. His definition stresses not only the development of the main character, but the fruition of that development in the hero’s self-awareness and choice of profession.

After *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, two ideas about the bildungsroman gained general acceptance in Germany. Firstly, the bildungsroman came to be seen as the most important novelistic genre in the country, one that both expressed the essence of German-ness



and was seen to represent the finest artistic manifestation of the German spirit.<sup>7</sup> The bildungsroman became an important factor in German nation building. It represented particularly German ideas and ideals, and provided Germany with a unique cultural heritage. Secondly, the main defining feature of the bildungsroman came to be that it “portrays the harmonic cultivation of the individual” (Steinecke 1991, 93). Michael Beddow sums up both points by saying Dilthey created the widespread notion that the bildungsroman shows “a concern with the portrayal of an individual’s ‘Bildung,’ where Bildung denotes a distinctively German pursuit of harmonious self-development, generally conducted at some remove from the domain of public experience” (1982, 2). For ideological and nationalistic reasons, it was thus important in the early twentieth century to show that the bildungsroman existed only in Germany and that it was very different from the rest of European fiction. The Nazi appropriation of the genre made this attitude suspect after WWII, but the idea that the bildungsroman is distinctly German is still prevalent among Germanists (both in Germany and beyond).

The 1960s saw the beginning of a “general tendency by scholars of German literature to depopulate the Bildungsroman canon,” i.e. to exclude more and more novels, so that in the end even the status of *Wilhelm Meister* was questioned (Boes 2006, 233). Thomas P. Saine says *Wilhelm Meister* “is not a Bildungsroman in the sense in which the term has come to be used” (Saine 1991, 139), and American Germanist Jeffrey L. Sammons goes even further. In “The Mystery of the Missing *Bildungsroman*” (1981), Sammons claims that the bildungsroman was a very minor literary genre in Germany with an extremely brief existence. The idea that the Bildungsroman constitutes the best and most persistent literary tradition in Germany is one Sammons sees as an early-twentieth-century invention, started by Dilthey and propagated by Thomas Mann. Mann called the genre “typically German, legitimately national,” and claimed the “predominance of this novel type in Germany” (qtd. in Sammons 1981, 240). According to Sammons, the canon formation process of the early twentieth century falsified history and turned a non-existent, “phantom genre” into the dominant genre in nineteenth-century Germany. “There is no nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* genre because no major writer after Goethe could envision a social context for *Bildung*,” Sammons claims (1981, 241-242).

Martin Swales’ important book on the German bildungsroman (1978) goes against some of the old established views as well as more recent ones. On the one hand, the study of

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<sup>7</sup> See for instance Selbmann (1984, 18-33); Kontje (1993, chapter 2); and Steinecke (1991, 92-94). Sammons (1981) argues that this view was deliberately constructed for nationalist and nation-building purposes.

six important German novels (by Wieland, Goethe, Stifter, Keller, Mann, and Hesse) is intended to counter the growing suspicion in the 1960s that the bildungsroman had not been such an important genre in Germany after all. His study ends with a reaffirmation that the bildungsroman is an historical German genre, which distinguishes itself from the English tradition by its relative absence of political and social concerns. On the other hand, Swales' book also disputes a view that had become one of the staples of German bildungsroman criticism, namely Dilthey's claim that the bildungsroman presents the harmonious development of the hero up to fulfillment. Swales does not think a novel has to have a positive or "harmonious" ending in order to be regarded as a bildungsroman.

Thomas P. Saine goes even further in his claim that Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* fails to achieve the ideal of harmony as envisioned by "the classical ideology of *Humanität*" (1991, 120). Although the book had come to be interpreted more and more in this light, Saine thinks Wilhelm's happy ending is not a result of gradual *Bildung*: Too many people die miserably in the book, and "the future of the hero is still quite undetermined" at the end of the novel (120-122).

In *The Fiction of Humanity* (1982), Michael Beddow presents yet another definition of the (German) bildungsroman. He does not see the development of the hero as the genre's defining feature, but rather as merely "a means to a further aim" (2). By means of a highly self-conscious narrative, bildungsromans create an additional level at which they conduct an inquiry into the essential nature of man that can only be conveyed through fiction. They share a concern with "what it is that makes men and women human" (285). Beddow's argument has won few followers and prompted little discussion.

In a 1991 article, Jeffrey L. Sammons develops an alternative definition of the genre and restricts it to three short periods in German history: "[T]he German Bildungsroman emerges in the late eighteenth century, flourishes briefly in the age of Goethe and Romanticism, ... and then reemerges in the modernist neo-Romantic revival in our own century" (32). He thus rejects the common assumption that the German Bildungsroman was an unbroken tradition that had lasted over 200 years. Like several other Germanist definitions, Sammons' hinges on ideology and the bourgeois concept of selfhood, which he claims were only found in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He nevertheless includes Romantic and Modernist novels that give an ironic turn to humanist ideals. One main feature of the genre is that it depicts *Bildung*, understood as "the early bourgeois, humanistic concept of the shaping of the individual from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience to the threshold of maturity" (42). Secondly, Sammons stresses individualism and

“evolutionary change within the self” (42). Sammons’ history of the German bildungsroman is radically different from Dilthey’s and Swales’, but his definition is not. Again, it is the ideology of Goethe’s period that provides the key.

François Jost was a Swiss-born, French-educated professor of comparative literature based in America, whose 1969 and 1983 articles on the genre present views that are largely in line with the Germanist position. The 1969 article “La Tradition du Bildungsroman” starts by defining a genre in which the world shapes the protagonist: “[T]he confrontation of the hero with his environment, that is the Goethean *Bildungsprinzip*” (99; all translations from this article are mine, ATI). The bildungsroman is a kind of pre-novel, or “préambule” (99), because it only recounts the start of a person’s life until he is “armed for existence, ready to live his novel” (99). To Jost, “the Germans seem to have a monopoly of the Bildungsroman” (102), but he nevertheless includes a handful of British and American novels in the genre.

While Jost’s 1969 article devotes much attention to arguing that France has no bildungsroman tradition and explaining why, the principal aim of his 1983 article seems to be to exclude all British novels, including those recognized as such in his earlier article. Going through a list of basic, essential features of the genre, Jost explains how each feature is missing in the English novels. For instance, the protagonist’s family should foster a positive attitude to society in the hero by providing a good moral upbringing and basic education. Another example is the particular Enlightenment attitude to education and *Bildung* that had become so important in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century, and which was then, after 1789, coupled with a fear of revolution. Finally, there should not be too much “hardship” in a bildungsroman (Jost 1983, 128). Jost then enumerates other qualities characteristic of the “true” bildungsroman. All in all, his definition of the true or “classic Bildungsroman” (126) is very close to the standard view in German studies. He regrets that the label “bildungsroman” has come to be used in English of what he thinks should be called the *Erziehungsroman* or “novel of elementary education,” using a word that should refer to a limited, usually German, subgenre for a much wider genre of novels of development. To Jost, the classic Bildungsroman was written in Germany during a particular historical period; and later developments of the novel of development should be called something else.

We see that within German studies, the bildungsroman has been defined in several different ways since 1906. Critics have disagreed as regards the defining features, whether bildungsromans have to end with maturity and integration into society, how dominant the genre has been in Germany, and which works should be seen as belonging to the genre. The major points of contention have been the place of the genre in German literary history and

whether Bildungsromane must have positive resolutions. Among the scholars discussed above, there is nevertheless a striking consensus on one point: The bildungsroman is an historical German genre expressing bourgeois ideals of learning and development that were current in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Beyond *Germanistik*, there are several different definition trends. Some scholars have tried to create definitions appropriate for non-German literature, while recognizing the genre's German origins. In women's studies and the study of minority literatures, definitions have emphasized how the female, African-American, Asian-American, lesbian, etc. bildungsroman subverts the conventions of the "traditional" bildungsroman. And many critics are simply unconcerned about theoretical issues, merely providing a brief working definition before going on to textual analysis.

The first monograph on the British bildungsroman was Susanne Howe's *Wilhelm Meister and His English Kinsmen* (1930), which describes a number of Victorian bildungsromans that were influenced by German and continental ideas about formation. Howe defines the genre on the basis of what she calls the "Apprenticeship pattern":

The adolescent hero of the typical 'apprentice' novel sets out on his way through the world, meets with reverses usually due to his own temperament, falls in with various guides and counsellors, makes many false starts in choosing his friends, his wife, and his life work, and finally adjusts himself in some way to the demands of his time and environment by finding a sphere of action in which he may work effectively. (Howe 1930, 4)

Howe finds this basic plot pattern in both German and English novels, but she also mentions some differences between the two.

Jerome Buckley, in his 1974 study *Seasons of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, weakens the German connection even more than Howe. One of very few critics to note the difference between *typical* or common features and *obligatory* defining features, Buckley reacts against the idea that deliberate pursuit of self-culture is an obligatory aspect of the genre. His "definition" is a description of typical elements rather than a list of necessary features. Admitting that the genre cannot be defined precisely, he acquaints the reader with a typical bildungsroman plot, deduced from a number of unnamed British novels: A young provincial protagonist moves to a more stimulating and tolerant environment in a large city, where "his real 'education' begins" (1974, 17). He finds a career, experiences

urban life, and learns to love. In the end he achieves wisdom and accommodation to society (1974, 17-18). The main character's development seems to be the only obligatory element in the description, and indeed, "[n]o single novel, of course, precisely follows this pattern. But none that ignores more than two or three of its principal elements ... answers the requirements of the Bildungsroman as I am here seeking to describe and define it" (18).

By removing the deliberate pursuit of self-culture and emphasizing typical features of the plot, the protagonist, and the function of secondary characters, Buckley has basically cut the bonds with Germany, Goethe and German Romanticism. He is therefore able to talk about an English bildungsroman that lasts into the 1960s. Buckley has, however, been strongly criticized by both sides in the controversy. Germanists fault him for ignoring the historical dimension, and Sammons cites Buckley as an example of the "uncontrollable arbitrariness" and "[i]nsouciance" that is so often found in the usage of the term bildungsroman (Sammons 1991, 36-37). Outside *Germanistik*, Marianne Hirsch complained of the lack of "a rigorous generic definition of a European Bildungsroman genre" (1979, 295, footnote 4), criticizing Buckley for the dominant role of "thematic categories" in his definition and for putting too much emphasis on the autobiographical element (295, footnote 4). Buckley's view is closest to my own, although I suggest a more extensive, systematic approach to definition.

Marianne Hirsch's own definition aims to remedy the lack of rigor referred to above. Her second aim is to demonstrate the "significant formal and thematic links" (Hirsch 1979, 293) between German Bildungsromans and French and British novels. These links have, according to Hirsch, been obscured by theorists – starting with Dilthey – who have seen an "extra-literary" (239) gulf between a German emphasis on inwardness and a general European interest in politics and social criticism (293-294). She sets out to "define a set of categories, thematic and formal, which make it possible to speak of the Bildungsroman as a European, rather than a purely German genre" (1979, 294). She calls her genre "novel of formation" and locates it in Germany, Britain, and France.

The novel of formation is defined by a list of features found in "actual" (but unnamed) novels, which constitutes what she calls "a central norm" (1979, 296). Warning that classification must be done "cautiously," she admits that "some works defy rigid classification," while others might occupy intermediate positions between genres (299). Her emphasis on rigor, nevertheless, lends a degree of absoluteness to her list of characteristics. There are seven numbered points, relating to the protagonist, the plot – particularly growth and development – and a social element. She says that "the development of selfhood ... is the primary concern of the novel of formation," and that "[I]ts projected resolution is an

*accommodation to the existing society*” [emphasis in original]. Further, the genre is marked by irony, has minor characters with fixed functions, and is didactic in aim (1979, 296-298).

Marianne Hirsch’s article helped establish the bildungsroman, or novel of formation, as a genre that exists outside Germany and as an important genre in nineteenth-century France and Britain. Her definition has been very successful in that it has been used in much analysis of the English-language bildungsroman.

In 1990 Susan Gohlman. published a study of the “Contemporary Bildungsroman,” most of which was originally written in the early 1970s. Finding “very little agreement ... on what the term Bildungsroman meant” (ix), Gohlman outlines two distinct historical uses of the term; one is based on Goethe’s ideas of *Bildung*, while the other only applies to nineteenth-century German novels. The major divisions in bildungsroman criticism “revolve around the basic question of whether or not the Bildungsroman must, by definition, be informed by a set of absolute social and moral values which serve as the groundwork for the hero’s development” (11). Gohlman thinks not, and defines the genre on the basis of Goethe’s view of *Bildung*: “[A]t the heart of it lies the notion of the individual in contact with a world whose meaning must be actively shaped and reshaped from within up to the point when the hero is in a position to say, ‘I think I can live with it now’” (25). Gohlman’s achievement lies in forging a link between German and international literature and between the *Goethezeit* (the Age of Goethe) and the post-WWII period. She finds in the novels she studies a tendency to take protagonists through two apprenticeships: The first makes them internalize the values of their society; while the second consists of alienation followed by a personal solution and accommodation.

Franco Moretti’s *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (1987) covers Germany, France, and Britain. Like Hirsch, Moretti sees the genre as European, with a different strain in each of the three countries. The book’s shifts from Germany, to France, and then to Britain correspond to a process of development through different temporal stages. Moretti interprets the bildungsroman as a “symbolic form” whereby Europe rethinks the advent of modernity (5).<sup>8</sup> The need to give meaning to change made youth “the most meaningful part of life” (3). Youth was a necessary period of exploration, due to rapidly changing social conditions and increased mobility, but it also entailed voluntary exploration.

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<sup>8</sup> Moretti uses the word “modernity” as it is usually used in social and historical sciences, and I will use it the same way. It refers to the kind of society that started evolving in the West in the mid-eighteenth century and could be seen as dominant by the early nineteenth century. “Modernity” or “modern society” contrasts with “traditional society,” and is marked by industrialization, political centralization, democratization, and social mobility, and the decline of the importance of family, religion, and traditional (that is pre-modern and pre-capitalist) values.

Increased hopes led to a new interiority (4), that is, more focus on the individual's thoughts, feelings, and aspirations. Moretti explains the central conflict of the genre with the aid of Lotman's two plot types: Those dominated by the principle of *classification* and those dominated by the principle of *transformation*. Classification values maturity, happiness, stable identity, stability and order, and rejects modernity. Transformation, on the other hand, values youth, freedom, change and process, and is fascinated by modernity. Moretti thinks the bildungsroman needs both poles.

According to Moretti, each historical and national phase has its own particular relationship between personal development and social demands. The pre-industrial phase of the classic German bildungsroman is characterized by the absence of conflict between self-development and the demands of society. The second phase – the “Restoration Bildungsroman” exemplified by Stendhal and Pushkin – on the other hand, sees a pronounced conflict between the main character and the social world. Individual autonomy and social integration are incompatible. Balzac constitutes the third of Moretti's phases, and in his capitalist world, social mobility and success have become the primary good, and morality has disappeared. Balzac shows a world in which individual autonomy has become an unrealistic dream.

The English bildungsroman, which constitutes the fourth phase of the development, is seen by Moretti as radically different from its Continental forerunners. He mentions *Tom Jones* (1749), *David Copperfield*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Great Expectations* as examples, but in my view, his generalizations are based on an idealized English bildungsroman which does not coincide with any of his examples. Moretti claims that the Continental Bildungsroman privileges youth, while the English one devalues it and privileges childhood. He sees no opposition between the main character and society in these novels, and both protagonist and society are stable. Therefore, Moretti claims, the plot has to be generated by the intrusion of a villain. The villain's aim is social mobility, while the principal character's project is a return to normality. The English plot is based on the violation and subsequent restoration of order. Youth in the English Bildungsroman is a negative phase to be endured, and the aim for the protagonist is to come through it unchanged (204). At the end of these books, order is restored, identities and wills are discovered, and the hero gets what was rightfully his from the start. He then also gets an identity (205). For Moretti, both German and English bildungsromans are governed by the *classification* principle and the values of maturity, happiness, and stability. The French version, on the other hand, is governed by the *transformation* principle, which values youth, change, and modernity. The German and

English novels thus have stable resolutions, with the protagonist finding a place in society, while the French version shows stability to be a chimera and change the only constant.

Moretti is here claiming the opposite of Jost, who thought one of the reasons English novels of development are not real bildungsromans is that they end with stability and happiness, rather than the openness and new beginnings that characterize the German original.

*The Voyage in: Fictions of Female Development* (Abel, Hirsch and Langland, eds., 1983) took the existence of an English bildungsroman for granted. The aim of this collection of scholarly essays was to alert readers to the existence of a “female novel of development” (vii), and the study proved seminal in opening up bildungsroman studies in English to novels written by women. In the English-speaking world, at least, there could no longer be any question that the bildungsroman was a prolific genre among women authors. And, just as importantly, this female version of the genre was still very much alive: “[T]his anthology is perhaps the first major scholarly work on the *Bildungsroman* to privilege the twentieth century over the nineteenth century,” Tobias Boes states (2006, 234). *The Voyage in* was followed by other studies of British and American women’s development stories, studies of minority writers, and later women writers from a host of different areas and countries, both in the West and in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

There now seems to be a broad consensus that the female bildungsroman has been and is widespread. Outside Germany and German studies, it is also common to regard the genre as international and to recognize its existence among minority and postcolonial writers. In his 2006 overview of the state of bildungsroman criticism, Tobias Boes says:

During the past few years, attention within twentieth-century Bildungsroman studies has increasingly shifted towards post-colonial and minority writing. As a result, it has become obvious that the critical commonplace of a decline of the genre during the modernist period is a myopic illusion. In reality, the novel of formation continues to thrive in post-colonial, minority, multi-cultural, and immigrant literatures worldwide. (2006, 239).<sup>9</sup>

The main difference between many Germanists and scholars outside Germany and/or in other fields is that Germanists tend to see the genre as exclusively German, while others do not. In English literary studies the most important issue has naturally been to define the genre so that

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<sup>9</sup> This article provides an excellent, brief overview of bildungsroman criticism.



it comprises English works. Tobias Boes says a restrictive usage is typical of the German position, whereas a “generally free-floating use” is common in the English-speaking world (Boes 2006, 232). He contrasts the “inductive, thematic, and taxonomic approach” of Buckley’s study with the German approach, in which generic classification is carried out “according to deductive principles, and texts are subsumed under the label if and only if they represent a specific aesthetic ideology” (2006, 232). In addition to aesthetic ideology, the role of society has been much used in German criticism to distinguish between the German and British traditions, and to exclude British novels such as *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*. In spite of these profound differences, there is also a striking parallel between these scholars: they all seem to be (consciously or subconsciously) looking for the essence of the bildungsroman, an issue that will be discussed in the next section.

## Understanding the Controversy

The controversy surrounding the definition of the bildungsroman is a thick rope made out of many strands of smaller disputes. The following is an attempt to separate some of these strands and point out some specific disagreements. To some extent, the disagreements result from more fundamental differences concerning ontology, truth, and knowledge, particularly as they relate to definition and categorization.

### Definition and essentialism

The intense disagreements over how the bildungsroman should be defined are to a large extent the result of an essentialist view of definition. The concept of *essentialism* originated with Karl Popper, and is the topic of several recent books and articles by linguist Karol Janicki.<sup>10</sup> Janicki uses the term for a set of related ideas going back to Aristotle and Plato. Very briefly, essentialism denotes the belief that words refer to concepts, that concepts have an essence, and that this essence can be grasped intuitively through the right definition.

In *The Poverty of Historicism* (1986; first published 1957), Popper used the term *essentialism* to describe one of two opposing views on what science is and what methods it should use. He calls the two schools *methodological essentialism* and *methodological*

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<sup>10</sup> Essentialism is a major topic in Janicki (1989, 1990, 1999, and 2006).

*nominalism*. These schools go back to the dispute over universals, which is usually seen as a metaphysical controversy over the status of universal terms. According to Popper, methodological essentialists believe that “scientific research must penetrate to the essence of things in order to explain them” (Popper 1986, 28). Every object, every idea or concept has an essence, a secret core, that can be discovered, and the aim of research is to find it. Aristotle represented this view, and for him the triumph of science would be “the compilation of an encyclopedia containing the intuitive definitions of all essences,” (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2, 1995, 12). Essentialists place great emphasis on definitions and take them very seriously, but cannot avoid the obvious problem that people disagree about how words should be defined. If you ask a hundred randomly chosen people to define “chair” you will get many different definitions. And it is maybe unlikely that any of the hundred people asked will manage to find a definition that fits kitchen chairs, rocking chairs, dentists’ chairs and wheelchairs. Popper opposes essentialists to methodological nominalists, who

hold that the task of science is only to describe how things behave, and suggest that this is to be done by freely introducing new terms whenever necessary, or by re-defining old terms wherever convenient while cheerfully neglecting their original meaning. For they regard words merely as useful instruments of description. (Popper 1986, 29)

*Objective Knowledge* (1979) summarizes what Popper means by essentialism: “[T]he view that science must seek ultimate explanations in terms of essences” (1979, 194). He rejects ultimate explanations, because there are no explanations that cannot be explained further, and the idea of everything having “an essence, an inherent nature or principle ... which necessarily causes it to be what it is” (1979, 195). According to Popper, explanations should also be sought in relations *between* things.

Popper’s main reason for opposing essentialism is its belief in universal or inherent properties. Janicki takes his point of departure from this essentialism as a “philosophical view” (2006, ix), but changes the focus. As a linguist, he is primarily interested in how essentialist thinking influences how people view and use language. Linguistic essentialism is at the basis of many misconceptions about language and the meaning of words, he claims. One of these is “the common belief that words have or should have one meaning” (2006, 19). Insisting that the “meanings of words are fuzzy and imprecise” (2006, ix), Janicki claims it is therefore impossible to define words precisely so that everybody agrees on the definitions. An

essentialist view of definitions is that they simultaneously explain what a word means and what its essence is. Definitions as explanations of terms Janicki has no problems with. What he objects to is the essentialist “belief in the power of definitions, that is, the belief that the definitions give us ultimate information about the essence of the things that the words refer to” (2006, 24).

Essentialism can be expressed overtly or covertly. One of the overt markers of an essentialist position is what Popper calls *what-is questions* (Popper 1979, 195); these are questions such as “what is life?,” “what is literature?,” or “what is a bildungsroman?” “What-is” questions might also be just a stylistic device; that is, someone might use such a question, knowing full well that it cannot be answered. Essentialism is present when the speaker or writer thinks the “what-is” question can be answered and has one correct, definitive answer. Covert essentialism is found in arguments that have implicit essentialist premises, and in claims that we do *not yet* know what something is or how something should be defined. Janicki sees another example of covert essentialism in research that is primarily taxonomic and has no goal beyond the taxonomy itself. The taxonomy can then be seen as an attempt to capture the essence of the thing through the ultimate correct classification. But if we accept that words are imprecise, fuzzy, and overlapping, no single correct taxonomy is possible, just as there can be no single correct definition. Excessive emphasis on defining words can lead to what Popper called an “infinite regression of definitions” (1995, 16), that is, that the definition uses words that must be defined in their turn, which must then be defined, and so on. Popper and Janicki both think that, rather than trying to find exact or precise definitions, we should just accept that this is impossible, and be satisfied with approximate working definitions. “What-is” questions are unanswerable and should not be asked.

Popper explains the difference between essentialist and non-essentialist thinking in terms of “right-to-left” and “left-to-right” definitions. A typical definition looks like this:

A puppy is a young dog

A left-to-right (essentialist or Aristotelian) view of definitions regards “young dog” as the definition and essence of the word “puppy.” A right-to-left or non-essentialist view of definitions is that the term on the right, “young dog” can be called by the term on the left, “puppy,” for simplicity’s sake. The definition is not the ultimate truth or essence of the defined term but only what someone chooses to call it; rather than using the terms “young

dog” we can use the shorter name “puppy.” So instead of saying what a puppy “is,” the non-essentialist might say:

A young dog is called a puppy

Or

I will use the word “puppy” to refer to a young dog

It is not the placement of words to the left or right that is important here, but whether defining something is seen as finding a practical way of talking about something or as giving the ultimate truth about what something “is.”

According to Popper, modern (so-called “hard”) sciences use nominalist definitions, “that is to say, shorthand symbols or labels are introduced in order to cut a long story short” (Popper 1995, Vol. 2, 14). The *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* defines the bildungsroman as “a novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main character (“Bildungsroman” 2009). This is the style of all dictionary entries, and we cannot say if it is intended as an essentialist or non-essentialist definition. If we want to make sure we are not taken to be essentialists, we could say “a novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main character is called a bildungsroman.” We are then cutting a long story short by using one word “bildungsroman” instead of a string of twelve words. This working definition also makes things a little clearer. You can start an article by saying that “in this article ‘bildungsroman’ will refer to novels of the *Wilhelm-Meister* type written in Germany between 1800 and 1840.” Or you can say: “I will call novels of development written by Indian authors after independence bildungsromans.” Both working definitions are “correct” to the extent that they are helpful for your intended purpose. The reader knows a fair bit about what is meant by the term bildungsroman in each case, although neither definition is precise. An essentialist, however, might start arguing that one of these definitions is wrong because the word bildungsroman has one particular correct meaning, one ultimate, precise definition.

I agree with Janicki that as far as possible, philosophical commitments should be made explicit in research (1999, 15). Unfortunately, this is seldom done, and it is therefore up to the readers of bildungsroman criticism, for instance, to find out where people really disagree, whether it is the properties or interpretations of novels that are the issue, or rather the deeper philosophical commitments of the critic. I hope it is now relatively clear that what I will call essentialism is the belief that

- certain words have or should have one correct meaning

- things have an essence
- true definitions exist
- “definitions give us ultimate information about the essence of the things that the words refer to” (Janicki 2006, 24)
- one definition is better than another regardless of context or research purpose
- boundaries between the meanings of words are clear and absolute

For clarity’s sake I have above distinguished rather categorically between essentialism and non-essentialism, but the two positions should be seen more as tendencies than as clear-cut oppositions that can always be distinguished clearly from one another. This goes for the following overview of bildungsroman criticism as well; my emphasis is on explaining clearly what the differences between the various positions are, but critics may be essentialist to various degrees and in different ways.

### **The meaning of the word “bildungsroman”**

On one thing both sides agreed: there is one and only one ‘proper’ use of the relevant terms – their usage – and their opponents were misusing these terms in an especially pernicious way. The dispute continues undiminished to the present. According to the parties to this feud, anyone who does not acknowledge that terms have proper uses that must be adhered to does not understand language, and anyone who does not see that the usage which the speaker prefers is the one true usage is bigoted, blind, or both. (Hull 1988, 141).

Hull’s ironic description of the conflict between two branches of biological classification – cladistics and phenetics – could easily have been about bildungsroman criticism. And the bildungsroman controversy is to some extent a dispute over the use of words, since many scholars demonstrate essentialist views of language, in particular, an essentialist attitude to the word “bildungsroman.” Like Hull’s taxonomists, they seem to hold the view that (at least some) words have only one correct meaning and that people who use them in other ways are simply wrong. As mentioned earlier, the word “bildungsroman” has been borrowed into English with a wider meaning than the original German one. Such borrowing is quite normal, and words often change their meaning when they travel from one language to another. As

regards the word “bildungsroman,” however, many people seem unable to accept this, and see the English usage as wrong.

Several of the (mainly Germanist) contributors to Hardin’s *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman* seem to hold this view. James Hardin, for instance, says in his introduction that “hardly any other term is applied more frequently to a novelistic form and scarcely any is used more imprecisely” (x). Indeed, one of the main purposes of this large essay collection is to remedy the “serious problem” or “malady” of the “imprecise use of the word” (x). Hardin can ridicule the ways some scholars use the word “bildungsroman” in English because it is so obvious to him that their usages are wrong, while his own is right. To Hardin, the word is often used imprecisely in English because people have removed the term from its “historical context,” and forgotten the German meaning of *Bildung* (Hardin 1991, xi).

Jeffrey L. Sammons, in the same collection, complains that if the term bildungsroman “is to be applicable to the whole universe of discourse of general literature” the genre is no longer German (Sammons 1991, 34). He suggests reserving it for literature that has “something to do with *Bildung*,” giving a precise definition of that term and emphasizing its German historical context (Sammons 1991, 41-42). This view sounds less essentialist than Hardin’s, because Sammons does distinguish between the word and its use. He does not claim that there *is* only one meaning, but talks about what people mean when they use the word. Nevertheless, he comes down very hard on critics who use the word in a way that differs from his own preference.

Fritz Martini also criticizes what he sees as incorrect uses of the word, including that of Morgenstern who originally coined the term “bildungsroman” in the 1820s (1991). Even in one of Morgenstern’s lectures, Martini sees “the difficulties of defining the Bildungsroman as a genre ... Scholars have not yet found a solution to this problem” (1991, 24). As Janicki has pointed out, the presence of the word *yet* in sentences such as this one is an indication that the writer thinks the problem of definition can be solved given enough time and effort.

It is not hard to find more examples such as these, especially in Germanist bildungsroman criticism. In the English-speaking world, the term “bildungsroman” has been used more widely and with many different meanings. The non-Germanist scholars discussed in the section “The Controversy” seem to have a less dogmatic attitude toward the term. They discuss its origin and different connotations, and evaluate advantages and disadvantages of various terms. Buckley finds the term “bildungsroman” better than other options, while Hirsch chooses “novel of formation” as the most convenient. Neither assumes that that these words have one correct meaning, although Hirsch likes the clarification that has taken place in

Germany in distinguishing between *Bildungsroman*, *Erziehungsroman*, and *Entwicklungsroman*.

Germanists and non-Germanists thus often disagree about the term *bildungsroman* because they have different underlying assumptions about language and words. Germanists often express a belief that the correct meaning of the words “*Bildung*” and “*bildungsroman*” are old German ones. This is known as the “etymological fallacy,” described in *The Columbia Guide to Standard American English* (1992) as “a much-practiced folly that insists that what a word ‘really means’ is whatever it once meant long ago, perhaps even in another language.” It is a fact that the word “*bildungsroman*” is used in many different ways in several languages, and to insist on a particular old meaning is to fight a battle that has already been lost. All that can be done is to say how one wants to use the word in a particular context and for a particular reason. This said, even non-essentialists might find it impractical that the same word is used in so many different ways, especially within one field, and particularly if it is not made clear which meaning is intended. For *bildungsroman* criticism, it might be practical if scholars could agree on the usage of the most central terms.

### **The essence of the *bildungsroman***

Many fields have since their inception been concerned with finding the essence of the thing under study, that is, “the one essential feature (or substance) without which something would not be what it is” (McCutcheon, 2005, 3). This tendency is also found within *bildungsroman* criticism. Scholars have offered new definitions in opposition to earlier ones with seeming assurance that they have finally found the one thing that makes a book a *bildungsroman* and distinguishes it from all other genres. Michael Beddow, for instance, criticizes Dilthey’s definition and its emphasis on *Bildung* as the essential feature. According to Beddow, *Bildung* is not the prime distinguishing feature, merely “a means to a further aim” (2):

The expression and recommendation of a particular understanding of the nature of humanity through the more or less overtly fictitious narrative of the central character’s development is, in my view, the most important feature which gives the novels on which this study concentrates their peculiar generic identity. (Beddow 1982, 5-6)

Beddow’s study gives the impression that he alone has found the real essence of the *bildungsroman*: It is a concern with “what it is that makes men and women human” (285).

Marianne Hirsch sounds much less categorical than Beddow, but since she does not discuss how the seven points that make up her “central norm” relate to actual novels, her list of characteristics also appears as an attempt to capture the genre’s essence. Her list resembles Plato’s Ideas in that it presents an ideal bildungsroman, while only mentioning in passing that actual novels do not perfectly fit the idea. Large parts of her essay then appear to discuss an ideal image rather than actual, concrete books.

Franco Moretti might not have an essentialist attitude to words or definitions, but his study does seem to continue the tradition of hunting for hidden essences. While other critics see the genre’s essence as a particular plot or the development of the main character, Moretti finds it in ideology. His overarching research hypothesis is that genres are “symbolic forms” for easing tensions in a culture, and that each genre is defined by the tensions it eases and its particular ideological message. For Moretti, the bildungsroman is a symbolic form that Europe used to rethink and give meaning to the advent of modernity (5).

The search for the essence of the bildungsroman was common in the past and is still going on. A related issue is the Aristotelian view of categorization.

### **Aristotelian categorization**

Aristotelian categorization is at the root of several other strands of the bildungsroman dispute. “Categorization” refers to the act of differentiating between concepts and assigning them to various categories. The cognitive sciences now consider categorization fundamental to both thought and language.<sup>11</sup> “Classification” is a related activity, namely conscious and systematic categorization for specific purposes. The Linnaean system for classifying animals and plants is an example of a classification system. Classification is based on logic, while human categorization takes several different forms. Aristotelian categorization does not distinguish between categorization and classification, treating both as logical and categories/classes as naturally or objectively given. Aristotle saw *categories* or classes as made up of items (physical or abstract things, ideas, etc.) that share certain *qualities*. These qualities are both *sufficient* to distinguish the items in the class from items belonging to other classes, and *necessary*, i.e. if an item lacks one quality it does not belong to the class. Classes are thus mutually exclusive. All items belong to one class only. This can be illustrated in the following way:

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<sup>11</sup> See for instance George Lakoff’s *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (1987).



Table 1. Example of Aristotelian classification

Properties	Class I	Class II
A	X	
B	X	
C	X	
D	X	
E	X	
F	X	
G		X
H		X
I		X
J		X
K		X
L		X

All items in Class I have the properties A-F, while all the items in Class II have the properties G-L. That literary genres such as the picaresque and the bildungsroman are not classes in this sense can be illustrated by the following table:

Table 2. Classification of bildungsroman and picaresque

Properties	Picaresque	Bildungsroman
Young hero	X	X
Hero rootless and without family	X	X
Hero travels about without creating bonds to other people and without being emotionally or intellectually affected by his experiences	X	
Hero develops and changes		X
Novel consists of a string of loosely related episodes	X	X
Novel forms a pattern at the end		X
Main theme is the development of the hero		X
Main theme is the description and critique of society	X	
The plot concerns the search for one's place in society and a viable philosophy of life.		X
The narrative point of view is characterized by irony	X	X
Novel ends in resolution, often the hero's integration in society.		X
The novel has more action than reflection	X	

Without being in any way scientific, this table comprises some commonly mentioned characteristics of the two genres and illustrates that many are shared. The genres can only be defined in the Aristotelian manner if many common characteristics are ignored and the differences are made necessary properties in the definitions.

### **Discrete categories and necessary qualities**

Thinking of categories as clear-cut and discrete implies that all objects belong in one category only and borderline cases are exceptions. If members of classes share all their properties, then

a member lacking one property is not a member. Almost all the definitions discussed in “The Controversy” (with the exception of Buckley’s) see the bildungsroman as a discrete category in that they include necessary qualities; thus, if a book lacks one particular element, it is not a bildungsroman.

Marianne Hirsch’s definition will serve as an example. Her “central norm” of the bildungsroman includes several necessary elements:

- it does not represent “a panorama of society”
- “[t]here is *always* a distance between the perspective of the narrator and that of the protagonist”
- the protagonist is “a representative member of society” rather than a “social outcast,” as in the picaresque, or “spiritual outsider,” as in the confessional novel (1979, 299)
- structurally, the bildungsroman presents “a progression of connected events leading up to a definite denouement” (1979, 297-299, my emphasis, ATI)

Hirsch’s list constitutes a fairly rigid classification system. She places much emphasis on how the bildungsroman can be distinguished from other genres, such as the social novel, which represents “a panorama of society,” something the novel of formation does not do (1979, 297). Generally, her criteria sound absolute, as in “the novel of formation is founded on the belief in progress and the coherence of selfhood” (1979, 299). Can a bildungsroman do without such a fundamental belief? Hirsch’s focus is on being rigorous and precise, describing the genre so that it can be clearly distinguished from other genres. Nowhere is it said that any elements can be left out. At the beginning of her article she says she wants to avoid both being too general and creating a rigid “structure to which all novels must conform if they are to be called novels of formation” (1979, 296). Hirsch nevertheless creates the impression that a number of elements are necessary while others must not be present.

Francois Jost’s 1983 article also lists elements that are obligatory or forbidden. In addition, he creates new categories with new names for novels that fail to fit the bildungsroman category, thus creating several new rigid categories. Janicki sees such taxonomic studies as essentialist because they usually try to erect absolute borders between categories and also intend the taxonomy to present the essence of the thing being categorized or of each category: “Essentialists seem to believe that only one taxonomy/classification is the

ultimately correct one, and it is usually that one taxonomy that they themselves have arrived at” (2006, 27).

If categories are seen as discrete, then a book lacking one feature will not be a bildungsroman. But authors making use of a known genre want to be original, and this often means that they consciously break with one or more of the expected generic features. Viewing genres as discrete categories therefore ignores how things are in the real world and means that differences between some novels have to be overlooked to make them fit into the same category, while others are seen as very important, genre-distinguishing differences. A continuum of similarities is rendered artificially rigid for the sake of terminological clarity. Another problem with definitions based on necessary qualities is that the essential defining qualities differ from one definition to the next, and people can get caught in definitional battles. In German bildungsroman criticism there was, for instance, a debate over whether bildungsromans *must* have positive endings that lasted for decades.

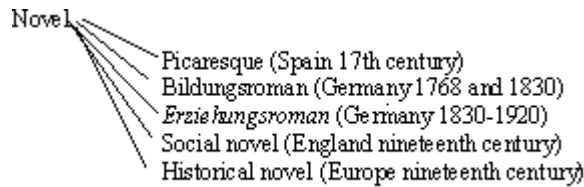
## **Literary taxonomies**

Categorization to some extent happens automatically in the brain whether we want it to or not. In classification – that is, classes and hierarchies of classes created for specific fields or specialisms – there are often several levels. Species, genus, and family are three levels of biological classification. The term “genre” comes from the Latin word *genus*, which means “origin” or “birth.”

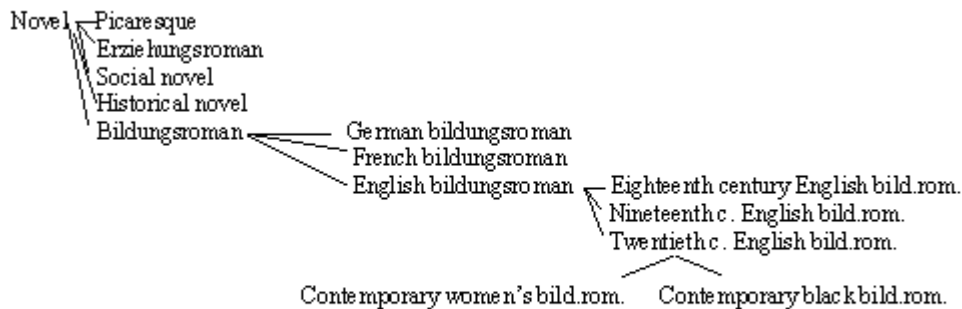
There have been many attempts to create literary taxonomies, but nothing resembling the Linnaean system for classifying animals and plants has ever developed.<sup>12</sup> The basic division into poetry, prose, and drama has survived from ancient times and is largely undisputed. Many types of poetry have also been quite clearly distinguished, largely on the basis of formal criteria. But for the novel, there is no generally accepted classification of types, genres, or subgenres. The bildungsroman dispute is partly over genre as a taxonomy or system of classification, and the problem lies in deciding where in the generic hierarchy it belongs, and what the larger hierarchy looks like. Scholars who hold the most restricted view of the bildungsroman seem to see it as part of a system with the novel at the top and various types of novel underneath:

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<sup>12</sup> See for instance the historical overview in Fowler (2002).



Scholars taking a wider view of the bildungsroman probably have a conceptual system with more levels. They may see the novel as divided into genres such as picaresque, bildungsroman, social novel, etc., and these genres again have various subtypes such as the German bildungsroman, the French bildungsroman, and the English bildungsroman. These national subgenres may then be subdivided further, depending on when they were written, whether they were written by women or men, ethnic minorities, etc.:

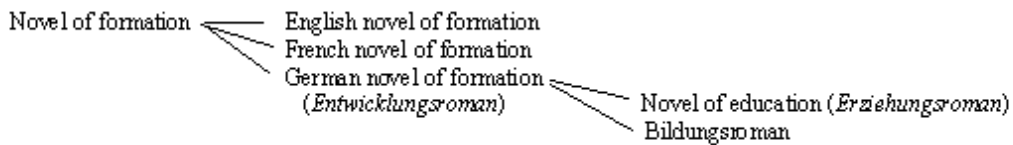


These two novelistic hierarchies are, of course, hypothetical. Since such underlying assumptions are seldom directly expressed in criticism, they can only be surmised from other clues. The point is that because there is no single, accepted classificatory system, people make their own; our brains cannot do without them. Of the critics mentioned in the section called “The Controversy,” only Marianne Hirsch refers explicitly to her own classifying system. She says the term

“Bildungsroman” is limited to those novels that actually illustrate Goethe’s concept of *Bildung*; “Erziehungsroman,” or novel of education, describes works that deal specifically with problems of schooling or education (...), rather than more generally with growth and development; “Entwicklungsroman,” an umbrella term more broadly applicable within the German tradition, includes those representatives of the genre that, though conscious of Goethe, depart from specific Goethean norms (...) and

incorporates as well the more specific Bildungsromans (*Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*, *Der Nachsommer*). (294-295)

Her classification system thus looks like this:



The fact that such implicit classification systems are rarely expressed may lead to misunderstandings. Since disagreements about different issues become merged, people may be unaware about what exactly they disagree about. Scholars holding a wide view probably do not think that there is no late-eighteenth-century German bildungsroman, or that that subgenre is identical to the twentieth-century African-American bildungsroman. Holders of the narrow view, however, might think that what others call “the twentieth-century African-American bildungsroman” is so different from the late-eighteenth-century bildungsroman that it belongs to another genre. Furthermore, the lack of consensus about a literary taxonomy means that the word *genre* is used about several different things or hierarchical levels.

We have now seen that the controversy over the definition of the bildungsroman has much to do with essentialist views of definition and categorization. Luckily, there are ways out of the impasse.

## Non-essentialist definition and classification

We are at present at an important turning point in the history of the study of the mind. It is vital that the mistaken views about the mind that have been with us for two thousand years be corrected. (Lakoff 1987, xvi)

The development of thought since Aristotle could, I think, be summed up by saying that every discipline, as long as it used the Aristotelian method of definition, has remained arrested in

a state of empty verbiage and barren scholasticism, and that the degree to which the various sciences have been able to make any progress depended on the degree to which they have been able to get rid of this essentialist method. (Popper 1995, vol. 2, 9)

It is only after WWII that alternatives to Aristotelian definition and classification have been taken seriously, although some were proposed much earlier. An example from botany is Michel Adanson who rejected the Linnaean system in 1763, suggesting that members of plant classes need not share all the defining characteristics (Needham 1975, 353). In linguistics, Karol Janicki sees an early example in the general semantics of Korzybski and Hayakawa, who claimed that concepts have no essence. According to general semantics, useful definitions of terms could only be made by avoiding the abstract and relying on experience, that is, on what is observable in the physical world (Janicki 1990, 14).

One of the first influential thinkers to find a way out of the essentialist impasse was the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, and many of the reactions against Aristotelian definition that we have seen in the last 50 years go back to his theory of family resemblance. In a famous and much-quoted passage from the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein examined the concept of “games” and rejected the Aristotelian view that all things that are called games have certain qualities in common. What do “board-games, card-games, ball games, Olympic games,” and so on have in common? (1992, §66), Wittgenstein asks. And the answer is “no one thing” (ibid. §65):

For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to them all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. ... I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’, for the various resemblances among members of the same family: Build, features, color of eyes, walk, temperament, etc. overlap and crisscross in the same way. And I shall say, ‘Games form a family.’ (Wittgenstein, 1992, §§ 66-67)

So games are not a category or concept because the members of the category share certain qualities, or an essence, but because they are related to one another and resemble one another in various ways. As some members of a family might have red hair and others not, some

games are competitive, others not. There will be a whole list of characteristics that run in the family, but no one member will exhibit them all.

A second influential alternative is that of polythetic classification, whose invention is usually attributed to biologist Morton Beckner (who called it polytypic classification) (Needham 1975, 353). Such classification implies that members of a class share many, but not all, features. Table 3 is the same one used to exemplify Aristotelian classification. Here, Class I and Class II are both monothetic (the opposite of polythetic) classes, which means that the members of each class share all their qualities..

*Table 3. Monothetic classes*

Properties	Class I	Class II
A	X	
B	X	
C	X	
D	X	
E	X	
F	X	
G		X
H		X
I		X
J		X
K		X

A polythetic class, on the other hand, would consist of members that have a large number of properties in common, but none of them have all the properties. In the Table below, A-K denote properties, 1-5 individual members of the class.

*Table 4. Polythetic classes*

Properties	1	2	3	4	5
A	X		X	X	X
B	X	X		X	X
C	X	X	X		X
D	X	X		X	X
E	X		X	X	X
F	X	X	X		X
G		X	X	X	X
H	X	X	X	X	
I		X	X	X	X
J	X	X	X	X	
K	X		X	X	X

In this table, there is a list of features defining the class as a whole. All the members have at least 9 out of the 12 features, but no one feature is obligatory.

Polythetic classification has now largely been replaced by other methods in biology and botany (because of developments in phylogenetics), but it is used in other fields. In psychology, for instance, personality disorders are diagnosed on the basis of polythetic sets of diagnostic criteria. This implies that for a particular diagnosis, patients must fulfill a certain number of criteria, but not all of those used, and no one criterion is obligatory. Polythetic classification is also used in computer science and information retrieval, and to some extent in the social sciences. I have not come across it in literary studies, although Alastair Fowler seems to have discovered the principle without being familiar with the term.

Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance differs from polythetic classification not so much in its principles as in purpose. Wittgenstein's aim was to explain how certain concepts, that is, mental categories of things, can be created in the mind and understood when they are not based on Aristotle's principles of necessary and sufficient features. Polythetic classification, on the other hand, is a classification tool, intended for dividing up the world for particular purposes. Carl Linnaeus's system of animal and plant classification, for instance, does not reflect preexisting mental categories, but is a classification system invented to systematize certain relationships between animals and plants.

Prototype theory is a third major alternative to Aristotelian definition and classification. It starts where Wittgenstein started, namely with the idea that concepts are not, as Aristotle thought, made up of shared characteristics and with clear borders between them. Eleanor Rosch argues that if Aristotle was right and all members of a class or concept share the same defining features, then no one member could be a better example of the class than any other. But that is not the case. In a series of experiments in the 1970s, she found, for instance, that people think a robin is a better example of the class "bird" than an ostrich. This contradicts the necessary-and-sufficient theory of class, and Rosch reasoned that (at least some) conceptual categories are not formed on the basis of abstract descriptions, but rather on familiar examples or "prototypes." Lakoff finds "[t]he experimental contributions of Rosch and her associates" to have been groundbreaking and they "are generally and justly recognized by cognitive psychologists as having revolutionized the study of categorization within experimental psychology" (1987, 39).

The cognitive sciences have now proved Aristotle wrong on many counts. Categories are constructed in a number of different ways, and they are not absolute. Some categories are exclusive (man and woman, for instance) but many, such as short and tall, are always graded and relative. Colors blend into one another so that some shades are clearly blue or green, while others will be labeled blue by some people, green by others, and in-between by some.



Untypical examples and borderline cases are just as normal and frequent as the typical, clear-cut cases. Rosch has also established that there are several levels of categories, and that these are learned at different ages and with varying degrees of success. The basic category is the middle level in the hierarchy, so that while everyone knows the term “bird” (middle level), not everyone is familiar with all the species of birds (sparrow, eider, robin, etc.) or the higher level of vertebrates (I, for instance, had to look up the latter). Lakoff has elaborated on the findings of Rosch and others to create the theory of Idealized Cognitive Models. A basic starting point for Lakoff is that concepts are grounded in experience and depend on imagination.

Since WWII, many critical voices have spoken out against Aristotelian definition and classification, and various alternatives have been suggested. This is also true for the study of literary genres. However, no alternative way of defining and classifying genres has met with much approval. Literary genre study is still in need of *kinds* of definition that reflect the new, non-Aristotelian view of genres and categorization in general.

### **Non-Aristotelian, non-essentialist conceptions of genre**

I hope not to have given the impression that all scholars writing on literary genre and genres hold the view that they are rigid classes, as this is not the case. Many have in fact described them in ways that resemble Wittgenstein’s idea of family resemblances. E.D. Hirsch, Jr., for instance, gave the following description in his 1976 book *Validity in Interpretation*:

Classifications of texts ... correspond to no distinct essences... They refer instead to vague family groupings which overlap one another within the vast continuum of recorded speech. No matter how narrow the class becomes ... the borderlines between the groupings remain fuzzy. (Hirsch 1976, vii)

Hirsch here emphasizes two main arguments against seeing genres as classes, namely that they have no essence and that they form a continuum rather than watertight boxes.

John Frow’s *Genre* (2006) is the Critical Idiom Series’ attempt to both give an introduction to literary genre study and describe the state of the art. Replacing a 1982 book of the same title, it illustrates the extensive changes that have taken place in the interval. Frow approaches genre from a number of different perspectives, includes many other genres besides the literary, and starts from the premise that genres are organized along formal, rhetorical and

thematic dimensions. Generic conventions have a shaping force that helps determine the meaning and content of what is said. But Frow warns against the traditional view of genre as a “rigid trans-historical class expressing control over the texts which it generates” (23). Texts or other expressions are not “members of previously defined classes which have causal priority over them. This, I want to argue, is at once the traditional and still prevalent view of genre” (23). What Frow calls “the prevalent view of genre” is perhaps hard to pin down because it seems to be profoundly contradictory. While new insights have made their way into theoretical conceptions of genre, practical analysis finds itself having to choose between basically essentialist Aristotelian definitions or nothing, since there are no new ways of defining literary genres that manage to stick to the fluid, overlapping family-grouping conception of genre.

Alastair Fowler (1982) is one of few literary genre theorists to suggest a concrete, specific alternative to traditional classification and definition. His attempt to clarify matters and point the way forward starts with the realization that the word “genre” has been used about some very different things:

1. Poetry, drama, and narrative (or lyric, dramatic, and epic) are frequently called genres. Fowler proposes the term “representational aspect” instead.
2. Another common use of the term “genre” is to designate what Fowler calls “historical kind” (and I call “genre”). It refers to “a type of literary work of a definite size, marked by a complex of substantive and formal features that always include a distinctive (though not usually unique) external structure” (Fowler 2002, 74). This complex of features that is typical of a “historical kind” Fowler refers to as the kind’s “repertoire.” It always contains a number of different features relating to both form and content. Sonnet, ode, elegy, ballad, haiku, tragedy, comedy, picaresque, gothic novel, and fantasy novel are examples of historical kinds.
3. The third use of the word “genre” has referred to what Fowler calls “mode.” Modes differ from historical kinds in having a repertoire lacking a distinctive external form. While a historical kind such as the romance has a typical length, chapters, and includes descriptions, summaries, scenes, and dialogue, a mode such as pastoral is not limited to one form. It may be a song, or a play, or an epic. Modes can also be

recognized by the fact that they are usually referred to in adjectival form, such as “tragic,” “satirical,” “allegorical,” “epic,” and “pastoral.”

4. “Genre” has also been used about what Fowler calls “sub-genres.” Most historical kinds can be divided into subgenres, which share the external form of their “historical kind.” Subgenres are usually distinguished on the basis of subject matter, theme and motifs. Fowler says that “the category of subgenre helps resolve the old problem of whether genre is governed by subject or form” (112). For while historical kinds are governed by form, as well as subject matter, style and other things, subgenres are governed primarily by subject matter. As an example, Fowler uses a subgenre of the sonnet, the Elizabethan love sonnet, which he divides into liminal sonnet, psychomachie, *blason*, and others (112). Subgenres of detective fiction would include, for instance, police procedurals, serial killer novels, anti-hero detectives, and romantic suspense.

In addition, the word “genre” is sometimes used to designate national or historically restricted types of writing, just as the Realist novel, French poetry, and Restoration drama are often thought of as genres. In this study, I seek to distinguish between all these meanings, basically retaining Fowler’s definitions above, but using the term “genre” for what Fowler calls “historical kind.”

Fowler’s importance lies in his recognition that historical kinds or genres are characterized by many different features and that any one work may not have them all. Fowler thus rejects the idea of an essential nature for each genre, and also the common attempt to create genre systems based on one particular dimension or aspect. He gives precedence instead to the messiness of reality (existing genres/historical kinds) over the theorist’s desire for system and order.

When we assign a work to a generic type, we do not suppose that all its characteristic traits need be shared by every other embodiment of the type. In particular, new works in the genre may contribute additional characteristics. In this way a literary genre changes with time, so that its boundaries cannot be defined by any single set of characteristics such as would determine a class. ... genres have to do with identifying and communicating rather than with defining and classifying. We identify the genre to interpret the exemplar. (Fowler 2002, 38)

To Fowler, genre is an aid to communication, and it is in interpretation that genre study finds its purpose. It makes a difference whether we read a work as a bildungsroman or a farce; its meaning will be interpreted differently. That is why “genres have to do with identifying and communicating rather than with defining and classifying.” In Fowler’s view, a modified version of Wittgenstein’s family resemblance approach offers “the best hope to the genre critic” (42). He defines his “historical kinds” on the basis of what he calls the “generic repertoire,” a long list of potentially shared features that particular works can “choose” from. Every genre can select characteristics from its own repertoire, but the features are not necessarily exclusive to one genre.

I only discovered Fowler’s book after I had worked out the basics of my own Bildungsroman Index, but it has been useful in supplementing and clarifying my own ideas. The BRI can be regarded as a description of the repertoire of the bildungsroman. We now turn from the theoretical background and problems of defining genres to my proposed solution: The idea of describing a particular genre on the basis of common or typical (but not obligatory) characteristics.

## CHAPTER 2. THE BILDUNGSROMAN INDEX<sup>13</sup>

The Bildungsroman Index (BRI) represents an attempt not so much to define the bildungsroman as to pinpoint and describe typical features of novels that are generally recognized as bildungsromans. It has much in common with Alastair Fowler's conception of genre and is influenced by some of the recent developments in non-essentialist definition and classification, particularly polythetic classification. Its external form is modeled on psychological tests designed to diagnose particular illnesses. These tests typically contain a range of symptoms or questions, and the diagnosis rests on the combined score, not the presence of any obligatory element or elements; it is the combination of several typical characteristics that determines whether the condition is present or not. A patient may thus be classified as having anti-social personality disorder even though one or two very typical indicators are absent.

The BRI takes the form of a list of features that such novels *may* have, and awards points for each feature. Novels are not classified categorically as bildungsromans or not. Rather, once a particular novel has been tested against the index, it will have a score that places it on a continuum ranging from what is definitely a bildungsroman to what is definitely not. This implies that some novels will come out as clear examples of the genre, some will just as clearly not belong, while yet others will be found somewhere between the two poles. The score gives an indication of the extent to which a novel resembles classical bildungsromans. Scores are not to be taken as exact, and a high-scoring novel lacking a number of features will usually not be any less "typical" than one with a top score. It is the big picture that counts, not minute numerical differences. In addition to typicality, knowing which features a specific novel has or does not have is also a good starting point for comparison, discussion and analysis. Resemblances and differences will be easily observable, and if a novel should break with a particularly well-established feature, the hole in the index will stand out clearly. Some might desire a cut-off point or border that makes it clear what belongs to the genre and what does not, but such boundaries will always be artificial, and I prefer not to have one.

The content and features of the index resemble Alastair Fowler's idea of the generic repertoire (2002, chapter 4). Fowler's topic is genres in general, in all their historical variety

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<sup>13</sup> An earlier version of the Bildungsroman Index has been presented in Iversen, 2007.

and complexity, and he does not discuss the bildungsroman itself. Indeed, most of his examples are taken from poetry written before 1800, and the book contains very little on the novel. Fowler defines a genre's repertoire as "the whole range of potential points of resemblance that a genre may exhibit. ... Every genre has a unique repertoire, from which its representatives select characteristics" (2002, 55). According to Fowler, "the survey of the repertoire needs to cover as many literary constituents as possible" (57). The major differences between Fowler's ideas and existing definitions of the bildungsroman are, firstly, the concept of family resemblance – the idea that literary works of the same genre share many features and resemble one another in a number of ways, but all representatives of the genre will not have all the features. Secondly, the repertoire contains a much wider array of types of features than other definitions. I agree with Fowler that it is the overall impression, created by a large number of features, that makes a reader identify a book as belonging to a particular genre.

In Germany, a lot of the controversy surrounding the bildungsroman has concerned the question of ending. Many critics have maintained that a true bildungsroman must have a positive, harmonious ending, and that books that do not, cannot be bildungsromans. One problem is that critics often do not agree about whether particular books have "harmonious" endings or not. Furthermore, readers often decide on a work's generic identity before the end. Genre is a tool that guides the reading experience, and it kicks in right from the start. Deciding on generic belonging is an integral part of reading competence, and readers start looking for generic clues as soon as they start reading. Another point is that readers who feel they are reading a bildungsroman might be forced to revise their assumptions along the way. They may also be disappointed or even angry if the novel does not end as they expect. They then become involved in interpreting and assessing the work in relation to their pre-conceived notions of genre. This is a fundamental aspect of genre and the use of genre in reading and writing. I think it is a misunderstanding to use it to exclude a work from a genre it otherwise solidly belongs to. The BRI avoids this problem, because the ending can be typical without being obligatory. The index then shows that bildungsromans often have this type of ending, but does not automatically exclude books that do not have it.

My aim in creating the BRI has been to find the features that are typical of the bildungsroman. I have read specific works and tried to see what they have in common. A basic starting point is Fowler's contention that "almost any feature, however minor, however elusive, may become genre-linked" (2002, 73). I have tried to remain open and look for similarities in all aspects: structure, plot, action and events, characters and characterization,

setting, style, mode, themes and sub-themes. While German definitions have tended to foreground theme and ideology, the English language tradition has put more emphasis on plot and the main character in addition to theme. The index differs from both these approaches in looking at a much wider range of features.

The index has been assembled on the basis of three types of information: Features found in actual novels, features emphasized in criticism (and confirmed by the novels), and generic markers (these will be explained below). The first two types are found using a method resembling that of some cognitive psychological experiments: Firstly, some prototypical examples (works) of the genre (category) are selected (on the basis of extensive agreement within the German and English bildungsroman literatures respectively). Then, typical features of these texts are identified (on the basis of criticism and close reading of texts). These features then constitute the definition/description. My “prototypical examples” are Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, and Dickens’s *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, which will henceforth be called “the Four Classics.” I have chosen these four because their status as bildungsromans seems to me undisputed, and a large number of critics describe them as bildungsromans.<sup>14</sup>

*Wilhelm Meister* must be included because “[e]veryone says that *Wilhelm Meister* is the prototypical Bildungsroman” (Jeffers 2005, 49). It is universally seen as the founding work of the genre (sometimes along with Wieland’s *Agathon*), and there is no doubt that it influenced nineteenth-century English bildungsroman authors. Brontë and Dickens have had a similarly strong position within the British tradition. According to Jeffers, “*Copperfield* is clearly the irreplaceable English example of the Bildungsroman, the one we have to read before we proceed to any others” (Jeffers 2005, 55). *Jane Eyre*, *Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations* are still widely read, for instance, in schools and universities, and they have had a strong influence on English-language bildungsromans. The features have been selected on the basis of my reading of the novels. I had, however, already read theoretical work on the bildungsroman genre before I started (re)reading the novels, so that certain features probably leapt at me because they were familiar from definitions and other criticism.

The index thus contains many features emphasized by current definitions of the genre. Most of these will be characteristics that several critics agree are important, but sometimes single critics have hit upon elements that are clearly typical and important, but that have gone

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<sup>14</sup> This consensus does not include German studies. As Boes says, “[p]recisely those novels that Anglophone scholars ... tend to invoke as paradigmatic examples of the genre (*Great Expectations* or *David Copperfield*, for instance) are ... in the German view antithetical to the organizing principles of the Bildungsroman” (2006, 232).

unnoticed. One such feature is inheritance, which is a major focus of Michael Minden's 1997 book *The German Bildungsroman: Incest and Inheritance*. I had noticed that the main characters of the Four Classics get an inheritance toward the end of the novel or else fail to get an expected inheritance. But Minden points out that inheritance is in fact a major, though neglected, theme in the German bildungsroman. However, Minden's other focus, incest, I find hard to understand or recognize in actual novels. It might also be absent in the British tradition, and is thus not included in the index.

Finally, I have looked for what Fowler calls "generic signals" (Fowler 2002, chapter 6), features whose main purpose is to make readers identify a work as belonging to a particular genre. Such markers tend to

cluster at the beginning of a work [and] have a strategic role in guiding the reader.

They help to establish, as soon as possible, an appropriate mental 'set' that allows the work's generic codes to be read. One might call them the key words of the code....(Fowler 2002, 88)

For older German and English bildungsromans (and two of the Four Classics), titles serve as generic signals: Such titles consist of the name of the main character, often with the addition of "history of", "life of", or the like. In novels written well after the Four Classics, allusions to them have become such a key feature of generic recognition. Naturally, the founding works of a genre cannot have this feature, although they can and do allude to other works that have influenced them. Another feature that has become a generic signal in the English tradition, probably on the model of the English classics, is that the protagonist is an orphan. I have, however, chosen not to place it in the "generic signals" section because it is such a central characteristic of the protagonist.

## **The Bildungsroman Index and comments**

The BRI has 96 features. Most give one point, while some, which I see as particularly significant, score two or three points. These features are either: 1) very pervasive, and found in virtually all bildungsromans, or 2) emphasized by a large number of critics, or 3) central for the reader's recognition of the work's generic identity. Some features, such as being an orphan and being fatherless, exclude one another. The total number of points is therefore



higher than the number of features, but lower than the sum of the points for all the features. Theoretically, novels can score between zero and 146 points, but in reality almost any novel will get about 15 points. This is because most relatively recent novels will get points for Features 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, and 10. Many will also have chronological plots (Feature 63), and an important defeat or failure (Feature 69). Death and grief are also common (Feature 92).

The BRI does not have cut-off points that distinguish a score that definitely indicates a bildungsroman, or the highest score that can be considered definitely not a bildungsroman. Index scores can be used for comparison without such limits. The danger with limits is that they easily cause controversy and distract attention from the real point, which is seeing whether or not books resemble the classical bildungsromans and each other.

Features are grouped in order to highlight similarities between them and point out which aspects of the novel they relate to. I have sought to avoid specialist terms and concepts that are used only within particular schools of criticism. The aim is to make the index easy to use without extensive explanation. Many of the index features are therefore well-known concepts of literary criticism. Others are either my own or are less well known, and the list below therefore includes brief explanations of points that may be obscure. The features will be treated in the order in which they occur in the index. As I discuss the various features I use words like “usually,” “often,” “normally,” and “many bildungsromans,” to remind myself and the reader that the features are common, but not obligatory, and not always present. I will, however, also make statements like “the bildungsroman consists of episodes,” without reservations about frequency in order to avoid some repetition.

Originally, this study included a long appendix explaining why each individual feature is included in the index and discussing various problems of selection. This has been cut to reduce the length.

The first group of features, Section 1, largely refers to narration and focalization:

Table 5. BRI Section 1

Features	Section 1 Narrative perspective and mode	Max. Points
1	Focalization shifts between narrator and protagonist (whether 1 <sup>st</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> person)	3
2	Access to protagonist's consciousness	2
3	Retrospective narrative (1st person or omniscient)	2
4	Narrator understands more than young protagonist	2
5	Ironic attitude to young protagonist	2
6	Plot combines action and reflection	2
7	Verisimilar novel: Portrays existing world realistically	2
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>15</b>

*Feature 1.* Narration may be in the first or third person, but focalization is split between narrator and main character and shifts between the two. In order to score points here, the novel must distinguish between the perspectives of the narrator and the protagonist, although one type of focalization may be dominant for long stretches of the narrative.

*Feature 3.* By “Retrospective narrative” I mean that the narrator (whether a character or not) is extradiegetic, that is, situated outside the story, and thus also after the events.

*Feature 6.* This feature concerns the balance between action and the physical world on the one hand and the inner life of the main character on the other. Older literature such as fairy tales, myths, and the picaresque emphasized outward action more than the interior life of the characters. During modernism, many authors aimed for the other extreme, reducing the action to focus almost exclusively on thoughts and emotions. The bildungsroman usually strikes a balance between these two, having a plot that includes outer action, while giving readers extensive access to the consciousness of the main character. Jeffers makes this a necessary feature of the genre: “[T]he writer of the *Bildungsroman*, exploiting the confessional vein opened up by Rousseau, Byron, and Goethe’s own *Werther*, has made us privy to his hero’s thoughts and feelings. ... a focus on his inner life is ... essential” (Jeffers 2005, 50).

*Feature 7.* “Verisimilar novel” implies that the novel belongs to the general category of psychological or realistic fiction, rather than to older genres such as the romance, or more recent ones like fantasy and science fiction. The world portrayed is the one we know, rather than the made-up worlds of fairy tale, fantasy, or science fiction, and characters think and behave like people in the real world. The plot should be seen as possible and plausible.

Section 2 has to do with the characterization of the protagonist:

Table 6, BRI Section 2

Features	Section 2 Characterization: Protagonist	Max. points
8	One main character	1
9	Protagonist is a round character, not flat	1
10	Protagonist is dynamic; changes in the course of the novel	2
11	Protagonist is an only child	1
12	Protagonist is an orphan or	2
13	Fatherless or	or 2
14	Parent dies in the course of the novel	or 2
15	Only one or no (known) living relatives	1
16	Of middle-class background	2
17	Ordinary (not particularly talented or untalented)	2
18	Protagonist is basically good and willing to help others	2
19	Male protagonist: Relatively passive, uncertain about goals, leaves decisions to chance or other people	1
20	Female protagonist: Relatively active, has strong goals, makes decisions easily	or 1
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>15</b>

Some of the features of the BRI are regarded as variants of the same one. Features 12-14 and 19 and 20 are such variations. Novels can only get points for one of these (although several can sometimes be present), and only one is part of the section total. That is why the section total is lower than the sum of the figures in the table.

In Feature 9, “round” and “flat” are used in the customary way, to distinguish between complex, multi-faceted characters and one-dimensional and stereotyped characters. Although there are arguments against these terms, they are useful as shorthand for a basic difference in character types.

In Feature 17, “ordinary” implies that the main character is not chosen because of any particular achievement, talent, or position. While the subjects of biographies and autobiographies are typically well-known because they have held an important position in politics or public life, or have achieved fame in sports or the arts, the subjects of bildungsromans are usually interesting for their representative ordinariness, not because they stand out in any way.

Features 19 and 20 refer to the fact that protagonists tend not to be typical representatives of their sex. They often behave in ways considered suitable for the other sex, but not their own, by the society they live in. Particularly striking is the passivity of the male heroes – a quality that was formerly (and often still is) seen as positive in women but not in men – and conversely, how active and independent the women are. The index specifies three such untypical qualities for each sex, but there may be others

These two features are intended to capture what is commonly called “psychological androgyny” in psychology. The concept is developed by Sandra Bem in a 1974 article entitled “The Measurement of Psychological Androgyny.” The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) rates people’s masculine and feminine qualities (as regarded by their society) and the combination of the two constitutes their androgyny score. The protagonists of the Four Classics are clearly more androgynous (that is, have both male and female qualities) than markedly “sex typed” that is, “someone who has internalized society’s sex-typed standards of desirable behavior for men and women” (Bem 1974, 155). When psychological androgyny is not an index feature in itself but is represented by two features describing aspects of male and female androgyny, it is in order to make the index more intuitive and less difficult to use and understand. I have generally tried to avoid making knowledge of particular theories or critical schools a prerequisite for using the index.

Section 3 turns to the characterization and function of secondary characters:

*Table 7. BRI Section 3*

Features	Section 3 Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	Max. points
21	Other character(s) essential in making protagonist change and grow	3
22	Other characters more important in their relationship to protagonist than in their own right	1
23	Important educator(s)	3
24	Important companion(s)	2
25	Important lover(s)	3
26	Other characters’ love relationships as exemplary or as contrast to protagonist’s	1
27	Other characters’ marriage as exemplary or as contrast	1
28	At least one important character from lower, middle, and higher social classes	3
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>17</b>

Feature 21, “Other character(s) essential in making protagonist change and grow,” emphasizes that these heroes do not pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. If a novel is to score here, the main character should develop in necessary interaction with other people rather than through solitary meditation.

Feature 22 is related to the previous one, but points out that the development of the main character is the primary concern of these novels, and that other characters are there to serve that purpose.

Feature 23, “Important educator(s),” denotes a function vis-à-vis the protagonist rather than a job. An educator does not have to be a teacher, just someone who undertakes to teach the main character something.

“Important companion(s),” Feature 24, should be friends and peers who are in positions of relative equality with the protagonist.

“Important” in features 22 through 28 means that the characters have more than a walk-on part as a for instance a cab-driver. The character must have a relationship with the hero or heroine, but it need not last for a long time.

The next section gives points for a number of typical events or actions that primarily concern the main character:

*Table 8. BRI Section 4*

Features	Section 4 Topical story elements: Affecting protagonist	Max. points
29	Experiences poverty	2
30	Experiences hunger	2
31	Goes to boarding school	1
32	Moves to big city or	2
33	Moves away from home or	or 2
34	Leaves home to go on journey	or 2
35	Introduced to new social groups, classes, and professions	1
36	Learns skills	1
37	Tries on particular role or roles	1
38	Falls in love	2
39	Has money problems	1
40	Is wounded or sick	1
41	Nursed back to health by parent substitute or loyal friend	1
42	Nurses other sick person	1
43	Adopted parent dies	2
44	Death of close relative or friend	2
45	Repents immoral or insensitive action	1
46	Rescued from emergency or cliffhanger	1
47	Gets inheritance at the end or	2
48	Loses prospective inheritance at the end	or 2
49	Gets engaged or married	1
50	Has children	1
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>26</b>

As in the section above, novels can only receive points for one of the alternative features: Either 32, 33, or 34; either 47 or 48. Feature 36, “Learns skills,” refers particularly to anything practical or theoretical that might provide a future profession for the main character, but also to less “useful” skills.

Feature 37, “Tries on particular role or roles,” may be a profession, but can also be a social role or sex role.

Feature 45, “Repents immoral or insensitive action,” is intended to cover the protagonists’ realization that they have done wrong in the past and have subsequently decided to mend their ways. It should be more than a momentary pang of conscience.

Section 5 lists some common events or actions that concern minor characters more than the protagonist:

*Table 9. BRI Section 5*

Features	Section 5 Topical story elements: Affecting secondary characters	Max. points
51	Serious crime such as murder	1
52	Dangerous or disastrous fire	1
53	Character seriously ill	1
54	Character becomes an invalid	1
55	Character ruined financially	1
56	Character dies (not close relative or close friend)	1
57	Funeral	1
58	Identity or family relationship outside protagonist’s family revealed	1
59	Family secret of other family revealed	1
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>9</b>

The events in this section may be directly witnessed, but may also be presented in conversation, stories, or letters. Again, the event must be of some importance. The qualification in 56 is there to ensure that events in Section 5 are not scored twice.

*Table 10. BRI Section 6*

Features	Section 6 Setting	Max. points
60	Setting for childhood scenes is countryside or provincial town	2
61	English-language novels: Setting after school-leaving age is capital or large city	3
62	German-language novels: Setting after school-leaving age is one or more large houses (other than family home)	or 3
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>5</b>

For this section, German- and English-language novels can get points only for either Feature 62 *or* Feature 61, respectively.

Table 11. BRI Section 7

Features	Section 7 Plot and Structure	Max. points
63	Plot is primarily chronological	2
64	Main part of plot about period when protagonist is between 18 and 23 years old	3
65	Story goes from childhood to adulthood (early 20s)	2
66	Inserted letter(s)	1
67	Inserted narrative: Other character's life story (brief)	1
68	Inserted narrative: Other character's life story (long)	2
69	Turning point, reversal: Protagonist experiences important defeat or failure	3
70	Journey toward end of book	1
71	Returns to childhood home after many years	1
72	Protagonist develops from self-centeredness to compassion and desire to be of use	2
73	Protagonist discovers tie to his or her family toward end	2
74	Protagonist learns to "see" at end	3
75	Episodic structure that nevertheless forms a pattern at end	1
76	Epigrammatic utterance by protagonist at end or just before	2
77	Projected ending: Protagonist finds a place in society (but expectation may not be met)	2
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>28</b>

Feature 63 emphasizes that the organization is *primarily* chronological, but shorter flashbacks and flash-forward's, and various short disruptions of the chronology will not disqualify a novel from scoring here.

In Feature 64, "Main part of plot" means more than half of the novel's pages.

The point of Feature 65, "Plot goes from childhood to adulthood (early 20s)," is to emphasize both *transition* from one life period to another and a certain *duration*. For a novel to score here, the temporal duration must be longer than a few decisive days (as for instance in *The Catcher in the Rye*), or say, the decisive summer when the protagonist was 17. Childhood and adulthood are understood simply in physical terms: There should be something on childhood, understood as age 13 and below, and the main character should be an adult, meaning at least 20 years old, at the end of the story.

"Inserted" in features 66-68 is meant to convey passages or parts that Mieke Bal calls "embedded texts" or "secondary texts" (Bal 2007, 43-77). There is usually a change in narrator and/or focalizer, and the embedded material might be a story told to the principal character, or written material such as letters or manuscripts. A life story must cover a prolonged period of a person's life, not just one event.

Feature 69 refers to a dramatic change for the worse in the protagonist's fortunes. The main character feels something has gone seriously wrong, or that he or she has had the wrong hopes and aspirations. The protagonist is left with a strong feeling of loss and failure, that

might lead to temporary resignation and a decision to give up on something that had been important. In the long run, the change will probably turn out to have been beneficial, but at first it is experienced as a crushing of dreams and ideals.

The family ties discovered in Feature 73 do not have to be new or unknown. This feature refers to an emphasis, in the book and by the main character, on family at the end. It usually implies that protagonists start their own family, and at the same time come to appreciate connections with generations before and after their own.

Feature 74, “Learns to ‘see’,” refers to an epiphany or moment of insight when a main character realizes that he or she had formerly not understood things properly, or had not even been able to see them properly. The word “see” is often used both literally and metaphorically a number of times, culminating in a moment of insight.

Feature 75, “Episodic structure that nevertheless forms a pattern at the end,” refers to an organizational characteristic of the genre: The plot is a series of chronological, loosely-linked episodes that may not seem important at the time. At the end, however, both reader and protagonist realize that the various episodes have contributed to the development of the hero. But the plot is not a tight structure of events or actions that are directly causally linked, or that are a result of the protagonist’s or other character’s unilinear pursuit of a particular goal.

Feature 76, “Epigrammatic utterance,” is Jack Hendriksen’s (1993 ) term for a statement that is formulated (aloud or in thought) by the protagonist towards the end of the book and which summarizes his or her learning and worldview. Hendriksen’s example is from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise*, which ends with the hero exclaiming: “I know myself ... but that is all.”

The concept of “projected ending” in Feature 77 comes from Marianne Hirsch’s seminal article, and means that the novel creates an expectation and wish in the reader to see the main character find his or her place. The novel moves in this direction, but the ending may nevertheless be different, even unhappy or disastrous.

Section 8 seeks to cover some of the features that serve explicitly to indicate the work’s genre. Many more features could have been included, but I have chosen instead to put them in the section where they logically fit best:



Table 12. BRI Section 8

Features	Section 8 Generic signals	Max. points
78	Book title includes the name of the protagonist	1
79	Book title includes the words “years,” “life,” “adventures,” or “history”	1
80	Allusions to bildungsromans, typically <i>Jane Eyre</i> , <i>David Copperfield</i> , or <i>Great Expectations</i>	1
81	Indications from early on that this will be a life story	1
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>4</b>

Feature 81 is intended to cover several ways in which a novel can signal that it will be a life story. A first-person narrator may of course state this explicitly, also explaining the circumstances of the writing. Beginning with birth or the family of the protagonist also often gives a narrative this impression:

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o’clock at night.

These opening words of *David Copperfield* leave little doubt as to what kind of novel they introduce. The words “my (own) life” are used no less than three times in the first two sentences. The narrator will tell the story of his life, and starting at the beginning, with his birth. The first chapter is also called “I Am Born.” The same effect can, of course, be achieved with a third-person narrator.

The final section of the BRI, “Theme, subject matter and motifs,” is perhaps the most important one in the sense that it comprises what is normally the main theme of the genre, and a number of other primary concerns, including many that have been extensively discussed in bildungsroman criticism.

I have tried to formulate these features so simply that they can be grasped without extensive explanation. In scoring a novel, it is enough to check whether the themes, subject matters, and motifs are present or not. The features do not have to be the most important themes for points to be given, nor does the novel have to present a particular view or ideology. But the features can, of course, also be used in analysis.

Table 13. BRI Section 9

Features	Section 9 Theme, subject matter and motifs	Max. points
82	The psychological and moral development of the protagonist from youth to adulthood (main theme)	3
83	Protagonist strives for liberation from the people he/she depends upon in childhood, their values, and their plans for his/her future	2
84	Search for new commitments to people and ideas	2
85	Tension/conflict/discrepancy between inner and outer worlds	2
86	Development from false self-perception to self-knowledge	2
87	False idealism gives way to acceptance of reality	1
88	Learning through pain and loss	1
89	Fate and chance	1
90	Free will	1
91	Death and grief	3
92	Love, relationships, and marriage	3
93	Portrayal of society	2
94	Social criticism	2
95	Protagonist confronted with at least one philosophy or philosophical system	2
96	Family becomes at theme at the end	2
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>29</b>

Feature 82, “The psychological and moral development of the protagonist from youth to adulthood (main theme),” is formulated so as to express two different aspects: The first is development, the second, that this development is of a particular kind – from youth to adulthood. “Youth” and “adulthood” are here psychological rather than strictly physical concepts, referring to immaturity and maturity, respectively. But immaturity is of the kind characteristic of adolescence, maturity of the kind characteristic of adulthood. It is impossible to be mature in this sense at age 12, for instance.

For a book to score here, the development has to involve the whole inner person – what might be called “psychological and moral development,” or, to use a technical term, “identity formation,” which is discussed in the next chapter (Erikson 1994, 17; Kimmel and Weiner 1985, 386). It is possible to describe a person’s development into for instance an artist or politician without covering these other, more personal, aspects. Secondly, the development in question occurs on the border between youth and adulthood, at the age Marcia and Kroger refer to as “late adolescence,” that is, from 18 to 23 (Kroger 2007, chapter 4). If a novel ends before the main character reaches this age, it will not score points for this feature. The same applies to novels whose protagonists are more than 23 at the start. If the character is the right age at the beginning but is older than 23 by the book’s end, it is necessary to evaluate whether the main theme might still be the development from youth to adulthood.

The type of development undergone by bildungsroman heroes has long been a point of contention between Germanist and English bildungsroman criticism. German definitions often insist that *Bildung* be understood as the concept was used by Goethe and his contemporaries: It should affect many sides of the personality (“mind, body, and spirit”), and be “balanced” rather than specialization in a particular profession or art. It should also demonstrate the ideology of the age of Goethe. In Britain, France, and America, however, it is common to emphasize change and growth, while saying that the process may also stop before completion or even end in failure. The formulation in the index is intended to reconcile the two views, without being so general that all forms of change qualify. And if this development is present, it does not matter if the protagonist then dies or experiences a reversal of fate.

Feature 85, “Tension/conflict/discrepancy between inner and outer worlds,” refers to the relationship between individuals and their community, society, or world in general. It might be a conflict between unrealistic dreams and reality, or more specifically social, as when a person from a particular class (or other group) aspires to a kind of life that is restricted to another.

Features 86 and 87 imply that protagonists achieve a clarity about themselves and the world, so that they get a more realistic perception of both. It should be remembered that “insight” has to be evaluated within the world of the book, and within the time-period of the novel’s creation. It would be unfair to discard what is presented as insight because it fails to live up to our ideals today. There has, for instance, been a tendency in recent literary criticism to favor outsiders, rebels, and the socially disadvantaged over characters of higher social position and those who choose to conform to their societies.

Features 93-95 are meant to cover the social and philosophical bent ascribed to the English and German bildungsroman, respectively. Actually, both *Wilhelm Meister* and the British novels have both aspects. “Portrayal of society” is meant to cover an interest in society, and a feeling that the novel is set in a social world, rather than in a realm apart, such as a ship.

## **Weighting, scoring, and interpretation of scores**

Here I want to raise the question of the relative weight given to sections and features. While the number of features and their particulars are determined by actual resemblances between the Four Classics, their relative weights have been adjusted in specific ways. Not giving all

features the same number of points is a way of balancing the recognition that genres have a large number of “family resemblances” with the idea that some features are more important than others in making readers recognize that a work of literature belongs to a particular genre. In addition, I wanted to emphasize features that have most consistently been seen as important by other critics.

Types of features and sections have been weighted relative to one another by adjusting the number of points given for individual features. I have sought to ensure that the “topical story elements” of Sections 4 and 5 do not receive too much weight by giving most of them 1 point. Exceptions are leaving home, falling in love, death, and inheritance, which are thematic and quite important as well as being very typical. I have also balanced the different sections against one another.

It might be seen as unfortunate or confusing that a number of the index features are shared by many novels that are not bildungsromans, and indeed, some features are common to virtually all novels of the last 150 years. Dropping these would make it easier to “rule out” some novels and ensure that novels with none of the important characteristics show this by getting zero points, instead of 15 or 20. When I have chosen to keep them in, it is because features common to several genres are part of the “generic repertoire” (Fowler 2002). That genres overlap and share features is a fact that should not be ignored.

Scoring will always be subjective to some extent, since some features are matters of objective description, while others involve more interpretation. It is sometimes difficult to decide whether a novel has a particular feature or not. We may see that a novel has been or may be interpreted in two or more ways, or that some feature of it both resembles an index feature and differs from it in some way. It may for instance be difficult to decide whether the protagonist is an orphan if he grows up as one and then discovers as an adult that his father is in fact still alive (Auster’s *Moon Palace*). And does the book contain the “Death of close relative or friend” if the character was merely believed to be dead and shows up alive at the end (Fowles’ *The Magus*, Irving’s *The Cider House Rules*)? Such doubt is unavoidable and quite logical given what I have said earlier about fuzzy borders and non-discrete categories. The index could “solve” this problem in three ways: 1) by leaving it entirely up to each user of the index; 2) doubtful features could be either systematically given points or not; or 3) the doubt could be explicitly expressed when a book is scored.

I first thought the third solution was the best one, since it best follows my ideal of non-essentialism. I decided whenever it proves difficult to decide whether to give points or not, a question mark should be entered instead. When all the points are added up, the points that

could have been awarded instead of question marks should be added in parentheses, so that the novel gets a score that shows the lowest and highest possibilities. Rather than scoring, for instance, 111 or 128 (the highest and lowest possibilities for a hypothetical novel), the book could be awarded 111-128 or 111 with 128 in parentheses behind it. Having tried out this method, however, I decided that it was too difficult to keep track of scores and compare books. I have instead decided to accept that there will always be room for such disagreements, and try to balance the score of each book by giving and not giving points for disputable points about half the time. This will be approximate, but the index cannot be more than that, and literary study can never be an exact science anyway.

The scoring problem illustrates a larger difficulty with the whole index, which is the obvious one that it might give the impression of converting something fluid and fuzzy (literature and its interpretation) into an exact science. Awarding points or not for a feature such as “Protagonist develops from self-centeredness to compassion and desire to be of use” may seem like assigning a novel to a rigid generic class. There is, however, a huge difference: While the second activity is an all-or-nothing choice, giving points for feature 72 can only make a difference of two points out of 148. The big picture is not much affected by one or two individual features. While it is possible to start a controversy over whether “Family becomes a theme at the end” of a particular book, the outcome will not decide whether the book is finally regarded as belonging to the tradition of the bildungsroman or not. As with the statistics used in, e.g. political polls, the BRI must be treated with caution and it needs to be borne in mind that the results are approximate. But it can still be very useful as an indicator of trends.



### CHAPTER 3. THEMES AND IDENTITY FORMATION

Although I have criticized existing definitions of the bildungsroman for being based on only a small number of characteristic features, there is also a good reason for defining it this way. This chapter acknowledges that although the BRI shows a large number of features that are shared by many bildungsromans, not all are equally important or interesting. Themes hold a special place in definitions of the bildungsroman as well as in scholarly studies of it, and the overall interpretation of a novel rests to a large degree on its treatment of important themes. The main theme of the bildungsroman, and the one most frequently discussed in relation to the classic bildungsroman, is the development of the protagonist: The hero's search for identity and a working philosophy of life, for love and connections, and the question of finding a place in society. In the index, this feature appears as just one among many. Here it will be treated more in line with the attention it deserves.

My main motivation for developing the BRI has been to find a definition of the genre that avoids earlier weaknesses, such as necessary elements. Nevertheless, when scholars have insisted on certain characteristics being necessary for a book to qualify as a bildungsroman, it attests to the fact that these characteristics are felt to be particularly important or salient in the genre. A possible explanation might be that novelistic genres constitute a taxonomic level between genres and subgenres, or between "historical kinds" and "subgenres" in Fowler's terminology. Fowler says the repertoires of "historical kinds" include a variety of formal and non-formal characteristics, while the repertoires of "subgenres" may consist of little more than subject matter. A sonnet, for instance, will be characterized by a number of features such as stanza length, meter, rhyme pattern, subject matter, tone, style, etc. A love sonnet, on the other hand, shares most of its repertoire with the sonnet as a whole, but is distinguished by its subject matter: love.

If we compare the genre/sub genre relationship between sonnet and love sonnet with that between novel and fantasy novel, several differences emerge. Fantasy usually comes in series of at least three books rather than single books, and are often longer than the average novel. The subject matter is the struggle between good and evil, often in the form of warfare or battle. The characters are clearly either good or bad, and the novel sides with the good guys. The setting is a world reminiscent of the European Middle Ages, but with fairy-tale elements such as imaginary beings and supernatural powers. Unlike science fiction, beings in

this world do not have access to sophisticated modern technology. The style of fantasy novels is often slightly archaic and the relationships between characters hierarchical. As with the definition of the sonnet, this definition includes a number of different features, formal and non-formal, indicating that fantasy is a “historical kind.” But subject matter alone will probably go a long way toward identifying a novel as belonging to the fantasy genre, a sign that it is a subgenre. If novelistic genres are regarded as occupying a middle position between genres (“historical kinds”) and subgenres, this would explain why readers and critics place particular weight on subject matter as a distinguishing feature, and therefore also on themes.

It is possible that theme and subject matter are so salient in readers’ experience of genre that they ought to hold a special place in a definition. For reasons discussed in Chapter 1, however, such definitions are in practice unfeasible. For at least a hundred years, scholars have tried to define a number of genres on the basis of subject matter, either alone or in combination with a few other features, and the results are not very encouraging. It might be possible to combine salience with the principles of polythetic definition, for instance by weighting thematic features much more heavily than others. But in order to find out how actual readers and critics determine genre, real people would have to be interviewed or given questionnaires, and such a project is unfeasible as part of this book. I therefore settle for the index as it is now: Even though this may not be a true reflection of how readers identify a bildungsroman, it is a better reflection than other available definitions, and it also does a better job of identifying bildungsromans than the alternatives. In practice, the BRI is probably more likely to be used on novels that have the development of the protagonist from youth to adulthood as a theme than on novels that lack this theme. And if it should be used on novels of the latter kind, my contention – until I am proven wrong – is that such novels will receive low index scores.

The analyses of particular bildungsromans in Chapters 4-8 have two parts: The first part analyzes each novel on the basis of the sections and features of the BRI minus the thematic section. The second part of each analysis deals with the theme of development. To the extent that it is relevant, the other thematic features of the index will be discussed there, taking up again many issues discussed in connection with particular index features, but within the context of the development of the main character. This two-part structure is intended to compensate for the fact that thematic issues only account for 29 out of 1478 possible index points.

The point of departure for the thematic analyses is developmental psychology, particularly the psychosocial approach to identity practiced by James Marcia, Jane Kroger and



others and inspired by Erik Erikson.<sup>15</sup> This approach constitutes a valuable point of departure for looking at development in the bildungsroman because it regards identity as the result of the interplay between psychological, biological, and social factors.

## Development of the protagonist as identity formation

Most definitions of the bildungsroman have seen development in some form – psychological, moral, or both – as the main theme of the genre. In this section I will try to make *development* more concrete and specific by introducing some of the ideas of developmental psychologists Erik Erikson and James Marcia. The concepts and models of identity development presented here will supplement the BRI in the textual studies in Parts II and III.

Bringing developmental psychology into the study of the bildungsroman is partly an attempt to free the genre from the German concept of *Bildung*, while retaining the idea that the genre deals with a *particular* kind of development. It may sound impertinent to want to divorce the genre from its notional and etymological roots. Germanists may protest that *Bildung* is precisely what the genre is about, and that novels about other types of development should be called *Entwicklungsromane*, “novels of development.” However, the critical history of the Bildungsroman shows that the meaning of *Bildung* is by no means clear, even among German-speakers or German-speaking Germanists. A lot of the controversy about the definition and delimitation of the genre goes back to the interpretation of the word *Bildung*. I believe there is good reason to distinguish between *Bildung* and *Entwicklung* [development] and between bildungsromans and novels about other types of development. If all types of development are included, the bildungsroman comes to encompass most of the novels ever written. I also think most critics working with the genre accept that the bildungsroman has to do with a rather special form of development, and calling all novels in which the protagonist develops “bildungsromans” obfuscates that fact. Philosophical, historical, and etymological studies of *Bildung* have failed to reach consensus on the special form of development depicted in the Bildungsroman. Maybe the specialized field of psychology concerned with development from youth to adulthood can provide a more fruitful approach.

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<sup>15</sup> James Marcia elaborates: “Psychosocial developmental theory ... is an extension of ego psychoanalytic theory ..., which was itself an extension of classical Freudian psychoanalytic theory” (Marcia 1994, 29 fn).

Identity<sup>16</sup> and its formation have been viewed differently within different academic fields, and conceptions have changed over time. Jane Kroger, a psychologist specializing in identity development, sees approaches to identity formation as falling into two broad categories which she calls *linear* (also “non-stage” or “non-developmental”) and *developmental* (also “non-linear” or “stage” view) (2004). Linear views of identity see change as quantitative in nature: “[s]omething which exists early in life becomes merely bigger or more pronounced through time” (Kroger 2004, 8). Linear models tend to divide people into various types. Examples of such models are the ancient Greek idea of the four temperaments and the more recent conception of character dispositions such as introvert and extrovert. Developmental models, on the other hand, see identity formation as a series of different stages, each one different from, yet building on, the previous one. The stages are basically the same for all human beings, and the sequence is also invariable. In psychology, developmental views of identity are found in the theories of Erik Erikson, Peter Blos, Lawrence Kohlberg, Jane Loevinger, and Robert Kegan, among others (Kroger 2004).

I will use the term identity as it is defined within developmental psychology. According to Erik Erikson, who, as Kroger points out, “has generally been credited with first focusing both popular and scientific attention on the meaning of identity” (Kroger 2007, 7), identity denotes a person’s sense of who he or she is, based on their own assessments and responses from others. For Erikson, “this sense of identity provides the ability to experience one’s self as something that has continuity and sameness, and to act accordingly” (1973, 37). Identity includes such aspects as personal values and beliefs, sex role identification, how one communicates with and feels close to others, decisions about what profession to pursue, sexual orientation, and whether one wants to marry and start a family and with whom (Kroger 2007, 64-73).

The university textbook *Adolescence: A Developmental Transition* (Kimmel and Weiner 1985) places identity development as “the final phase of adolescent personality development” (386) and emphasizes making commitments as a key aspect of the process: “Achieving a clear sense of one’s identity is usually the last step in the several-year transition from childhood to adulthood. ... A sense of identity consists of being reasonably sure of what kind of person you are, what you believe in, and what you want to do with your life” (386).

Today it is well known that identity is an important but difficult issue in adolescence. Adolescents might have identity problems, even crises, and they might dress strangely and

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<sup>16</sup> “Identity” and “self” are often used interchangeably, but many scholars in various fields distinguish between the two. I will largely avoid the word “self” so as not to confuse the issue.

behave in ways we do not like as they try out roles and identities. Yet it was in fact only with Erik Erikson’s work in the 1950s and 60s that the close relation between identity and adolescence was studied scientifically, and both identity and adolescence became research areas in their own right. In several ground-breaking studies,<sup>17</sup> Erikson continued the work on human development in childhood begun by Freud. Erikson found human development to take place throughout the lifecourse. *Identity formation* he described as the main developmental *task* of adolescence (Kroger 2003, 207).

Building on Freud’s psycho-sexual stages, Erikson created his own expanded model of human development. According to Erikson, identity development is the result of the interplay between biology, psychology, and the social world, “within an historical context” (Kroger 2003, 206). Development throughout the lifecourse consists of eight *psychosocial* stages that typically occur at particular ages:

Table 14. Erikson’s psychosocial stages. Adapted from Erikson (1980, 28-29 ; 1973, 261-265).

maturity								Ego-integrity vs. despair
adulthood							Generativity vs. self-absorption	
Young adulthood						intimacy vs. isolation		
Adolescence (12-22)				identity vs. identity diffusion				
school age (7-12)				industry vs. inferiority				
play age (3-6)			initiative vs. guilt					
early childhood (1-3)		autonomy vs. doubt, shame						
infancy (1 <sup>st</sup> year)	basic trust vs. basic mistrust							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

<sup>17</sup> *Childhood and Society*, originally published 1950; *Identity and the Life Cycle*, first published 1959; and *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, first published 1968.

Erikson's model "envisages childhood as a *gradual unfolding of the personality through phase-specific psychosocial crises*" (Erikson 1980, 128). Crisis here means "turning point," a period of both vulnerability and potential for growth (Erikson 1994, 96). Each crisis is marked by an internal conflict in the individual between the two terms in the box, one negative and one positive, and the diagonal shows the sequence in which these crises normally occur. For the development to be favorable, the positive criterion must consistently outweigh the negative in each box, although both aspects must be integrated in the personality. In Erikson's view, "[t]he sequence of stages thus represents a successive development of the component parts of the psychosocial personality" (1980, 128-129).

*Identity formation* is the fifth stage in Erikson's model, and as the chart shows, the main conflict is between identity and identity diffusion (or role confusion, as it is sometimes called). Adolescence is divided into early adolescence (12-14), middle adolescence (15-18), and late adolescence (18-22), and Erikson sees late adolescence as the most critical period for identity development:

Adolescence can be regarded as a psychosocial moratorium during which the individual through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society, a niche which is firmly defined and yet seems to be uniquely made for him. In finding it the young adult gains an assured sense of inner continuity and social sameness which will bridge what he was as a child, and what he is about to become, and will reconcile his conception of himself and his community's recognition of him. (Erikson 1980, 120)

Erikson's view of the life-cycle and human development thus belongs to the view of identity that Kroger calls non-linear or developmental (2004, 8-9): Human development consists of qualitatively different stages that follow each other in a particular order, each building on the preceding stage.

James Marcia has operationalized<sup>18</sup> Erikson's model of identity development in his "Identity Status Paradigm," which classifies people into four "identity statuses," or levels of development (Marcia 1966, 1967, and 1976). The statuses are identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement. Diffusion is considered the lowest status and achievement the highest. As Marcia puts it: "These identity statuses are four ways in which

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<sup>18</sup> That is, he defined the concept so that it can be measured or expressed quantitatively.

any late adolescent ... might be expected to be resolving Identity–Identity Diffusion,” (1994 “The Empirical Study,” 72). The statuses are simultaneously the optimal course of ego development and possible end-points of the process, since individuals may stop at any level, or regress from a higher to a lower level. Identity status is measured by means of the Identity Status Interview, which contains “questions in the domains of occupational or vocational choice; ideology, consisting of religious and political beliefs; and interpersonal values such as sex role attitudes and sexuality” (73). Within each of these “domains” or life areas the interviewer aims to ascertain the presence or absence of two key factors: exploration and commitment. “Exploration” means genuinely trying to figure out what you think about a problem area and experimenting with roles, while “commitment” implies having settled the question and decided how you feel about it; once a commitment has been made it is changed only with difficulty.

Table 15. Identity development from Erikson to Marcia

		Explo- ration	Comm- mitment
identity vs. identity diffusion	4	Identity achievement	→* +
	3	Moratorium	+ -
	2	Foreclosure	- +
	1	Identity diffusion	- -

Erikson

Marcia

\*The arrow indicates that exploration has been undertaken and is now in the past.

Identity diffusion marks a state of neither commitment nor exploration of identity issues. People at this stage are basically uninterested in identity issues. They either avoid situations in which they have to make an identity choice or make choices based on a whim, and they are likely to change their minds easily. They are immature in all the areas covered by the identity status interview, and are “interpersonally shallow” (76): “Identity Diffusions<sup>19</sup> have the most difficulty thinking under stress, conform the most to external demands, are the most susceptible to self-esteem manipulation, and have the lowest levels of development of moral thought” (76). They often have difficult relationships with their parents and siblings, and their “interpersonal relationships are either sparse or extraordinarily shallow” (77).

Foreclosure entails commitment without exploration. Foreclosures “have retained, virtually unquestioned, the values and occupational directions of their childhood. Hence,

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<sup>19</sup> Marcia uses the statuses as nouns to refer to people typically employing the strategies of the status. For example, “Diffusions are undecided,” refers to people classified as belonging to that status. I follow this usage.

having interviewed a Foreclosure, one knows as much about the important figures in the Foreclosure's childhood as one does about the Foreclosure" (73). The status is a result of strong identification with older people who are in a position of authority, usually parents. Foreclosure is the most widespread of the statuses, according to Marcia, "and also the one that is usually developmentally prior to the more advanced statuses" (74). Foreclosure is identity formation as it usually happens in traditional societies where identity is still socially prescribed rather than a result of individual exploration and choice (Coté and Levine 2002). Nevertheless, foreclosure is common in contemporary Western societies as well, both as a phase and as the final identity. Foreclosures tend to live with or close to their parents, follow in their parents' footsteps in their choice of career, and retain their parents' religious and political beliefs. They feel close to their families, but "their close relationships lack psychological depth. As long as a Foreclosure remains within the context foreclosed upon," Marcia says, "this form of resolution of the identity issue is adaptive. It ceases to be adaptive when the context changes" (74).

Moratorium<sup>20</sup> is a status involving exploration but not commitment. In its original meaning, the term indicates a delay,<sup>21</sup> such as a suspension of an ongoing or planned activity, and Erikson used the term to refer to a pause usually given to adolescents in our time and culture before they have to take on the responsibilities of adulthood. In Marcia's identity status paradigm, this is a genuine "identity crisis," and thus not a state that anybody can bear to be in for a very long period of time. Most people move on to the stage of achievement afterwards, although a negative outcome resulting in diffusion is also possible. In interview situations people of this status strike Marcia as "highly morally sensitive" but also "anxious." They "vacillate between rebellion and conformity" and their family relationships "are marked by ambivalence" (75). They have close and intense personal relationships, but because they are searching and change during this process, their friendships and love relationships tend to be relatively brief.

Identity achievement is the highest of the statuses and here the person has made commitments after a period of thorough exploration. People at this level have "resolved successfully the psychosocial task of Identity–Identity Diffusion" (75). They have decided on a career, and are either educating themselves towards that goal, or have already started working in their chosen field. They are also politically and religiously committed, and are likely to find themselves in a long-term relationship. They appear calm and settled, at ease

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<sup>20</sup> Erikson calls the moratorium, "a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood" (Erikson 1973, 254).

<sup>21</sup> From Latin *morari*, to delay.

with what and who they are: “[T]hey perform well under stress, reason at high levels of moral development, are relatively resistant to self-esteem manipulation, and ... seem to be the most developed in terms of the next psychosocial stage in Erikson’s model, that of Intimacy–Isolation” (76).<sup>22</sup>

Marcia’s model is most easily understood if we see people as being in one or another of his statuses: Identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, or achievement. In real life, however, the various identity domains or life areas may not develop concurrently. According to Archer and Waterman, “[p]eople may use different processes in different domains, and research has shown that almost everyone employs more than one status” (1990, 98). It is thus possible to be identity achieved in the domain of vocational choice (having found one’s “place” in a profession), in foreclosure in the ideology domain (simply having taken over parents’ religious beliefs), and in moratorium in the interpersonal domain (discovering the high-school sweetheart is not *the one*, nor the right kind of relationship), for example. People can also go through some stages several times. Early identity achievement, for instance, will often lead to later periods of moratorium and achievement, and “the initial identity configuration is expected to change at least with every succeeding psychosocial stage resolution, and perhaps even more frequently, as life crises arise” (Marcia 1994a, 76).

Convinced that psychoanalysis cannot offer “scientific truths” that “stand up to experimental trial and have predictive value” (2005, 53), Thomas Jeffers dismisses its usefulness for the study of the bildungsroman. Marcia’s research is clearly scientific within the field of experimental psychology, but the main reason I use the concepts of identity development and identity statuses is their ability to illuminate aspects of the literature in question. Jeffers believes that “the ability to recognize a story of *Bildung* depends not merely on literary training..., but on the story’s imitation of patterns of development endemic to the race itself, the psychic round the ego must pass through” (2005, 54). And this development pattern is precisely what developmental psychology seeks to describe and explain.

Marcia’s four statuses can be taken to imply that identity achievement involves conformity to the lifestyle and world view that are considered “normal” in contemporary Western societies: getting an education and a job, living in a long-term relationship, having children, etc. To some extent this is correct, but if young people merely take over other people’s views of how to live life, what is achieved is only the status of foreclosure. There has

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<sup>22</sup> Marcia’s empirical work with the identity statuses began in the mid-1960s, and his model has been extremely productive, resulting in more than 500 articles by himself and many others. Documentation of the research findings that produced the above descriptions of the four identity statuses are found in Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer and Orlofsky 1993. Descriptions of the statuses are found in the same work, but also in Marcia 1976 and Kroger 2003.

to be a certain amount of struggle and conflict in the process leading toward achievement, and the choices have to be one's own. It is thus perfectly possible to have achieved an identity and still live an unconventional life. In the textual analyses I will provide more detail and explanation when necessary.



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## Part II: Analyses and Comparisons

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In this part I analyze and compare a number of classic and post-WWI novels, including the Four Classics that form the basis of the Bildungsroman Index. In all, nine novels will be discussed in this part, while Part III analyzes a further two novels as case studies. The relatively large number of novels is necessitated by the approach: genre has to do with relations between text, and therefore requires a larger sample. The Four Classics constitute the backdrop against which the later works stand out in clearer relief, in their similarities to and departures from the prototypes.

All the analyses in Parts II and III are structured in the same way: They first use the BRI as a point of departure and then turn to developmental psychology for a closer study of the theme of development. The index-analysis sections treat features and sections in the order in which they appear in the index, but there is no systematic discussion of all features. It is hardly feasible to discuss almost one hundred aspects of eleven novels, and such point-by-point comparison would quickly become monotonous. The discussion concentrates on aspects that have important thematic implications.

Particular emphasis is placed on features that have not previously been regarded as typical of the bildungsroman, and findings that contradict widely shared assumptions about the genre or particular works. In Section 1, “Narrative perspective and mode,” the relation between narration and focalization is discussed at length because it is an aspect that has generally not received much attention. Here, it is found to be one of the most persistent characteristics of the genre. Irony and other forms of narrative distance serve interesting purposes, but are better known in the literature.

A number of features are typical of the genre and useful in recognizing a novel as a bildungsroman, but less useful in analysis. The “topical story elements” belong to this group; since there are so many of these, and many of them add less to the analysis than other features, most will largely be ignored in the index analysis. They will be discussed where they contribute to the analysis of other aspects of the novels, particularly the main theme.

The section scores and combined scores for all the novels discussed in Parts Two and Three can be seen in Table 16 below.

*Table 16. Section results for 5 eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels*

Section		Max. points	<i>Wilhelm Meister</i>	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	<i>David Copperfield</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>	<i>Huck Finn</i>
1	Narrative perspective and mode	15	15	15	15	15	8
2	Characterization: Protagonist	15	14	15	15	15	10
3	Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	17	17	17	17	17	8
4	Topical story elements: Protagonist	26	19	26	26	24	8
5	Topical story elements: Secondary characters	9	9	9	8	9	4
6	Setting	5	5	2	5	5	2
7	Plot and Structure	28	28	26	28	26	2
8	Generic signals	4	3	2	3	1	1
9	Theme, subject matter and motifs	29	29	27	27	25	10
	<b>Total score</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>53</b>

Table 17. Index results for 6 twentieth-century novels

Section		Max-points	<i>Of Human Bondage</i>	<i>Catcher in the Rye</i>	<i>The Magus</i>	<i>The Diviners</i>	<i>Cider House</i>	<i>Moon Palace</i>
1	Narrative perspective and mode	15	15	8	15	10	13	13
2	Characterization: Protagonist	15	14	9	13	11	12	15
3	Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	17	17	4	16	17	16	16
4	Topical story elements: Protagonist	26	25	6	13	25	18	24
5	Topical story elements: Secondary characters	9	5	0	4	8	7	8
6	Setting	5	5	3	0	5	2	3
7	Plot and Structure	28	26	12	20	18	26	27
8	Generic signals	4	2	1	2	2	2	2
9	Theme, subject matter and motifs	29	29	14	23	27	27	23
	<b>Total score</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>131</b>

## CHAPTER 4. NOVELS WRITTEN BEFORE 1900

This chapter is primarily a discussion of *Wilhelm Meister*, *Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, the Four Classics that form the basis of my Bildungsroman Index. The chapter is thus an elaboration on the idea that these four can serve as generic prototypes for the first or classic phase of the bildungsroman tradition in English. In prototype theory, items are ideals or models for their category simply because we think of them as typical, not because they share a set of necessary defining features. Prototypes of the same category can thus be different and typical at the same time – as chess, *boules*, and party quizzes are all typical of the category “games” even though they are different. Something that resembles one particular prototypical example can easily be assigned to the same category, whereas something that does not resemble any of the familiar prototypes will be harder to categorize. Following this reasoning, novels that resemble one or more of the Four Classics can easily be assigned to the same generic category. The index is thus an attempt to make the concept of “resemblance” more concrete and specific by detailing features of the novels.

A second aim of the chapter, in addition to the descriptive one just mentioned, is to analyze these four novels as *bildungsromans*: That is, as novels about the development of the protagonist from youth to adulthood. The analyses emphasize aspects of the novels that are typical of the genre and might therefore ignore issues that are commonly addressed by critics with a different perspective. Since the analyses in this chapter aim to establish a pattern or tradition that will then form the basis for the analyses of the twentieth-century novels that follow, there will be little discussion of criticism on each of the Four Classics.

In the last subsection of the chapter, entitled “Anatomy of the Classical Bildungsroman,” I summarize the major findings of the analyses and place them within a historical context.<sup>23</sup>

The chapter is followed by a brief discussion of Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* (1885), which was published within a few decades of the three British classics. This novel has often been compared with *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*,<sup>24</sup> and it is included because it is commonly regarded as one, if not *the*, classic American bildungsroman. I find

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<sup>23</sup> For plots and character names see the summaries in Appendix 3.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Allingham (1992) and Wirth-Nesher (1986).

that the book has some resemblances with the Four Classics, but also differs from them quite radically.

## The Four Classics and the Bildungsroman Index

All Four Classics get high scores, as is to be expected given that the BRI is constructed on the basis of these texts. I have, however, included features that are found in three of the four, so that all novels will not have all the features. *Great Expectations* receives the lowest score of 137 out of 148, then come *Wilhelm Meister* and *Jane Eyre* with 139, and finally *David Copperfield* with 144. What is most significant about the scores for the Four Classics is how similar they are. Apart from the specific scores, the BRI pinpoints 87 features that are shared by all four novels. There are thus 87 points of resemblance between *Wilhelm Meister* and the three British classics.

Table 18. Section scores for the Four Classics

Section		Max. points	<i>Wilhelm Meister</i>	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	<i>David Copperfield</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>
1	Narrative perspective and mode	15	15	15	15	15
2	Characterization: Protagonist	15	14	15	15	15
3	Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	17	17	17	17	17
4	Topical story elements: Protagonist	26	19	26	26	24
5	Topical story elements: Secondary characters	9	9	9	8	9
6	Setting	5	5	2	5	5
7	Plot and Structure	28	28	26	28	26
8	Generic signals	4	3	2	3	1
9	Theme, subject matter and motifs	29	29	27	27	25
	<b>Total score</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>137</b>

All four novels get the full 15 points in the “Narrative perspective and mode” section. In “Characterization: Protagonist,” the English novels receive the full score of 15, while *Wilhelm Meister* scores one less. In the “Secondary characters” sections, all four again get full scores. The “Topical story elements: Protagonist” section is where the differences are the greatest. *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre* have full scores for the main character, while *Great Expectations* scores two less (24), and Goethe’s novel only 19. For “Topical story elements: Secondary characters,” *David Copperfield* has 8 points, while the others score 9. In the “Setting” section, all except *Jane Eyre* get the full score. “Plot and structure” is the section

with the second highest possible score (28); *Wilhelm Meister* and *David Copperfield* get full scores while the other two score two less. None of the books get the full score for “Generic signals.” This may seem odd but is due to the fact that I have here included one signal that has been added after these four were written, that is, allusions to the Four Classics. In the “Themes” section, Goethe’s novel is awarded the full score of 29, while *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* score 27, and *Great Expectations* gets 25. These results will now be discussed in further detail.

## Section 1: “Narrative perspective and mode”

The features in this section differ also in importance; Features 1 to 5 combine to make up a type of narration and focalization that is highly characteristic of the bildungsroman, while Features 6 and 7 are shared by most “mainstream” novels of the last 200 years. While irony is frequently discussed in bildungsroman criticism, the fact that the genre has its own particular “point of view” is not. I will therefore take some time to explain how it works.

Table 19. *The Four Classics, section 1*

Features	Section 1 Narrative perspective and mode	Max. Points	<i>Wilhelm Meister 1796</i>	<i>Jane Eyre 1847</i>	<i>David Copperfield 1849-50</i>	<i>Great Expectations 1861</i>
1	Focalization shifts between narrator and protagonist (whether 1 <sup>st</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> person)	3	3	3	3	3
2	Access to protagonist’s consciousness	2	2	2	2	2
3	Retrospective narrative (1st person or omniscient)	2	2	2	2	2
4	Narrator understands more than young protagonist	2	2	2	2	2
5	Ironic attitude to young protagonist	2	2	2	2	2
6	Plot combines action and reflection	2	2	2	2	2
7	Verisimilar novel: Portrays existing world realistically	2	2	2	2	2
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>

Dorrit Cohn’s typology of the representation of consciousness in fiction is a useful starting point for disentangling the intricacies of the narrator’s position in relation to the main character in these novels (Cohn 1978). Her typology can be schematically presented as follows:

Table 20. Ways of representing consciousness in fiction

	3 <sup>rd</sup> person narratives	1 <sup>st</sup> person narratives (retrospective narration)
Indirect presentation	Psycho-narration	Self-narration
Mixed presentation	Narrated monologue	Self-narrated monologue
Direct presentation	Quoted monologue	Self-quoted monologue

In spite of obvious differences between first- and third-person narration (caused primarily by the possibility of omniscience in third-person narratives), Cohn insists that there are also close parallels. In both cases, narrators can choose to reveal characters' thoughts and feelings or limit themselves to action and external description. Furthermore, they can place themselves somewhere between these two extremes, or shift between the two. In both first- and third-person narration, narrators can sympathize with the protagonist, ironize, or distance themselves from the main character in various ways. The table shows that both third- and first-person narration have indirect, mixed, and direct presentation options.

*Indirect* presentation – psycho-narration and self-narration – presents consciousness through the voice of the narrator: “He sat down, thought about this strange concatenation of circumstances, and even felt that he might see her again soon” (Goethe 187). With an omniscient narrator such as the one in *Wilhelm Meister*, access to characters' minds is in principle unlimited. First-person narrators, however, are restricted by what is possible in real life: They cannot enter the minds or emotions of others, nor can they know their own feelings at the moment of birth, and few people have very concrete memories of the period before the age of three. It is in indirect presentation that the difference between first- and third-person narration is the greatest: while a first-person narrator can only tell what “I” am aware of, the third-person narrator can give readers access to a character's unvocalized, subconscious thoughts and feelings. When a first-person narrator is talking about herself in the past, however, she can point out differences in understanding and awareness between the two points in time.

In *direct* presentation of (self-)quoted monologue, the exact words that went through the person's mind are rendered, along with some term of cognizance, such as “he thought” or “I often wondered:” ““How nonsensical it was for you to revile a nation just for being a nation,’ I would say to myself time after time” (Goethe 157).

*Mixed* presentation is, as the name indicates, a combination of the other two forms: As with direct presentation, the character's own words and idiom are used, but there are no quotation marks. Narrated monologue changes the tense from present to past and the person from first to third, but otherwise preserves the temporal markers and idiom of direct

quotation: “And then their handwriting – how similar that was!” (Goethe 142). Here direct quoted monologue would read: “Wilhelm thought: ‘And then their handwriting – how similar that *is!*’”

Feature 1 of the BRI does not distinguish between first and third person, although the fact that *Wilhelm Meister* is told in the third person by an omniscient narrator while the British novels are in the first person is, of course, significant. It may be that this difference – also found *within* the German and British traditions – has partly obscured other similarities in focalization and narration; for in spite of the obvious differences, *Wilhelm Meister* and the British Classics share the same shifting between character focalization and the perspective of the narrator. There is a gap between main character and narrator as regards temporal perspective, knowledge, and maturity. Situated after the events, the narrators know the whole story, but although they keep commenting on the young protagonists’ mistakes and shortcomings, they reveal important information only as the principal characters get it. They therefore leave readers in suspense about how everything will turn out, while constantly reminding us that the youthful perspective is a partial one. In both first- and third-person narration, the narrators’ maturity means that they have a cognitive advantage which enables them to view the protagonists with ironic distance. This dual perspective is very typical of the genre, and is therefore emphasized, while first- or third-person narration seems to be of little generic significance.<sup>25</sup>

*Wilhelm Meister* has an omniscient narrator of a type that was typical in the pre-Realist period: He is overt, frequently refers to himself, involves the reader directly, and uses the gnomic present tense to convey timeless truths: “Self-love makes us exaggerate our faults as much as our virtues” (143), he explains during one of Wilhelm’s introspective bouts. And revealing that “Philine set her sights on our prim and proper hero,” the narrator adds: “Let us hope that his guardian angel may look out for him” (124). Although the narrator is omniscient, the focalization is usually with Wilhelm. There are examples of information being given that Wilhelm does not have, and of the narrator revealing what other people are thinking, but these are rare. The first two pages of the novel are told from Old Barbara’s point of view, and provide background to Mariane’s relationship with Wilhelm and Norberg that Wilhelm himself does not have, but this is an exception. The narrator usually presents the world from Wilhelm’s perspective, and then complements this picture with his own summaries and commentaries. The reader is sufficiently close to Wilhelm to understand his

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<sup>25</sup> I have chosen to let the BRI reflect the similarities between *Wilhelm Meister* and the British Classics rather than the difference between first- and third-person narrator. See Appendix 2 for a discussion of this choice.

point of view and sympathize with him, but is also given additional information by the narrator, which offers a corrective when Wilhelm is mistaken or has a limited understanding of events.

The British novels have a similar shifting between the perspective of the young protagonist and a narrator who knows and understands more. They are all narrated in the first person by the principal character from the vantage point of middle age, maturity, and ironic hindsight. Margaret Laurence gives an illuminating description of the technique she developed for her autobiographical short story cycle *A Bird in the House*, which is told by the protagonist Vanessa MacLeod:

The narrative voice is, of course, that of Vanessa herself, but an older Vanessa, herself grown up, remembering how it was when she was ten. ... This particular narrative device was a tricky one. ... What I tried to do was definitely not to tell the story as though it were being narrated by a child. That would have meant denying the story one of its dimensions, a time-dimension, the viewing from a distance of events which had happened in childhood. The narrative voice had to be that of an older Vanessa, but at the same time the narration had to be done in such a way that the ten-year-old would be conveyed. The narrative voice, therefore, had to speak as though from two points in time, simultaneously. (Qtd. in Morley 1981, 109-110)

This is an apt description of the narration in the three British Classics as well. The narrating voice is that of the adult narrator, but the thoughts and feelings are largely those of the young protagonist, sometimes accompanied by the later evaluations or explanations of the narrator.

The first page of *Great Expectations* illustrates the technique:

As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. The shape of the letters on my father's, gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, '*Also Georgiana Wife of the Above,*' I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. (7)



The narrator here is a grown-up Pip situated many years after the events. The voice is obviously that of an adult, but the focalization shifts between the young protagonist and older narrator, and all three of Cohn's types of presentation of consciousness are used. The thoughts of the child are filtered through the mind of the adult narrator who explains ("their days were long before the days of photographs") and evaluates ("unreasonably," "odd idea"). A little later, Dickens switches from summary narration clearly marked by the adult consciousness to a scene that conveys the child Pip's thoughts and perceptions at the time:

My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things, seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for certain, that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried; ... and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip. (8)

In this self-narration the distance between the narrator and the character has virtually disappeared, and the child's perceptions and feelings are extremely vivid in spite of the adult language. Pip links his personal perception with what he has learned or read on the tombstone, and understands that the word "churchyard" refers to the place he experiences as "this bleak place overgrown with nettles," and the inscriptions on the tombstone refer to his parents, and they are "dead and buried." Pip's perception of himself as a "small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry" captures his feelings succinctly. The contrast in these two extracts, between the perspective of the older Pip, who is the narrator, and the young boy who experiences, persists throughout the book.

Cohn's typology is of the presentation of *consciousness* in fiction, and the relationship between narrator and focalizer that has been discussed above is only possible when the reader is given access to characters' consciousness (Feature 2). According to Cohn, thoughts were not regularly presented in fiction until the early nineteenth century. Before this time, it was more common to reveal thought through conversation, as Goethe often does. *Wilhelm Meister* nevertheless stands at the beginning of that change in the novel which has been called "the inward turn." In comparison to earlier fiction, such as the picaresque novel, the inner life of the characters is very important, although Goethe has fewer strategies for revealing consciousness than later writers. Thoughts are usually presented in psycho-narration, that is,

through the narrator's words: The narrator tells the reader what the characters think, without quoting the words of their silent thoughts either directly or indirectly. Book 4, Chapter 12 largely consists of Wilhelm's reflections, mediated by the narrator's omniscient knowledge:

[H]e was thrown back on his own company. As he thought over the past, one thing became ever more distasteful and intolerable, the more he pondered and reflected on it. His own disastrous leadership in battle, the very remembrance of which filled him with dismay. For although, on the evening of that fateful day, he had made a pretty good show of talking himself out of any responsibility, he could not persuade himself that this was justified. He even had moments of depression in which he blamed himself for everything that had happened. (143)

This is "summary psycho-narration" (Cohn 1978, 33-43), explaining the development of Wilhelm's thoughts over a period of time. The extract brings out the temporal omniscience of the narrator, and thus the distance between protagonist and narrator. One obvious advantage of such narration over the direct quotation of the character's thoughts is that the narrator can reveal and explain what the character himself is not aware of. This happens frequently in *Wilhelm Meister*, and the realization that people might not know everything about themselves is a step toward the distinction between conscious and unconscious that becomes important in the nineteenth century.

Reflection is thus important in *Wilhelm Meister*, although, compared to the British Classics, Goethe is quite reticent about revealing thought. In Chapter 15 of Book 5, for instance, Goethe's narrator decides not to render the "extraordinary conversation" between Wilhelm and the Harper, so as to "not torment our readers with scattered thoughts and anxious feelings" (203). When Wilhelm's thoughts are revealed, it is much more often in conversations with others than as thoughts. He has long monologues, and also speaks aloud to himself, a narrative practice that became increasingly rare in the nineteenth century.

The difference between speech and thought is, of course, that speech represents the public persona and might not be a truthful reflection of silent thought. The British Classics make much of the difference between public and private, frequently pointing out how characters' speech and actions are designed not to reveal what they are thinking. In the case of the main characters, it is mainly weakness, hurt, and uncertainty that they attempt to hide. With secondary characters, the private selves are often altogether more sinister: Dickens's plots are to a large extent built around the discrepancy between public and private selves.

Most of the bad things that happen in *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield* stem from the fact that people fail to recognize who others really are, since their public personas are deliberately created in order to deceive. Pip's delusion that it is Miss. Havisham rather than Magwitch who is his benefactor is due to the way they present themselves to him. Miss. Havisham is a lady and therefore by definition trustworthy, while Magwitch looks and sounds like a murderous criminal. In *David Copperfield* a number of people are taken in by the false fronts. Steerforth's charm, Uriah Heep's "humility," and the Christianity of the Murdstones are all created to deceive.

The distance between protagonist and narrator described by Features 3-5 operate slightly differently in *Wilhelm Meister* and the British books, although there are also many common traits. Goethe's narrator is generally more ironic in his treatment of the main character than the other narrators. *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* are particularly ironic in their treatment of cruel people or social practices and institutions. Pip is first biting ironic about the social environment of his village and the nearby town. Later, his irony turns more on his young self as he realizes his mistakes. Goethe's narrator utilizes the advantage his omniscience gives him over Wilhelm to point out weaknesses in Wilhelm and mistakes he makes. Michael Beddow sees Wilhelm's development as consisting of three phases, "distinguished from one another by different qualities of awareness in Wilhelm and differences in the attitude which the narrative adopts toward the hero" (Beddow 1982, 85). The first phase is Book 1, in which Wilhelm is totally self-confident, while the narrative insists that this is unfounded. In Books 2 to 5 (phase 2) he is more confused and in doubt. But in this part a pattern is revealed that is as yet invisible to the protagonist himself. In the first phase, irony is used to show Wilhelm is wrong, and in the second phase the irony reveals to the reader things Wilhelm himself is unaware of. In Books 7 and 8, where there is movement toward fulfillment, the irony is used to point out that Wilhelm's understanding is incomplete, not wrong, as in the beginning (Beddow 1982, 85-86).

The temporal distance is more noticeable in the British novels than the German one. Hughes-Hallett explains that at the beginning of *Jane Eyre* "the voices of the child and the adult narrator are clearly distinguished. At the end the two Janes come together and the mature woman speaks directly of her achieved self" (xvii). At the end, the two temporal levels – the narrated time and the time of narration – have converged, and thus the other forms of distance also disappear. The protagonist has merged with the narrator and their perspectives are the same.

Feature 6 concerns the balance between action and thought in the plot and helps distinguish this genre from older narratives focusing exclusively on plot, and popular genres such as thrillers and fantasy novels that often do the same. Action and reflection and the relationship between them are much discussed in German bildungsroman criticism, maybe because of a statement by Jarno in *Wilhelm Meister*: “There are few who at once have Thought and the capacity of Action. Thought expands, but lames; Action animates, but narrows” (Goethe 1917, Part VIII chapter 5).<sup>26</sup> In *Wilhelm Meister*, both qualities are regarded as important for a harmonious person, and part of Wilhelm’s apprenticeship consists in learning to act as well as reflect, which he has always liked to do. Wieland’s *Agathon* is regarded as one of Goethe’s inspirations, but Jeffers finds that *Meister* “does advance well beyond the *Agathon* model of exclusive inwardness” (2005, 15). The British Classics bear the marks of their time and the fact that they were first published as serials; they contain numerous exciting incidents, crimes and suspense designed to keep the audience reading. Reflection is nevertheless very important, characterizing the main characters and making the reader sympathize with them. Reflection is most important for the plot in the last of the four, *Great Expectations*: While Wilhelm’s only decisive decision is thwarted by external circumstances, Pip’s moral reasoning and the choices he makes have serious consequences.

I have given all Four Classics points for Feature 7, “Verisimilar novel,” since they are part of the mainstream novelistic tradition in the West that aims to be truthful to the existing world. Naturally, the methods for achieving the illusion of reality have varied greatly between different historical periods, and texts that were once seen as genuinely life-like and realistic are often found artificial and contrived by later readers. Erik Blackall, translator of the 1989 Princeton edition of *Wilhelm Meister*, for instance, sees Goethe’s novel as part realist novel, part novel of ideas (1995, 381-382), while Jeffers finds it “an unusual joining of realism and symbolism” (Jeffers 2005, 11). That does not detract from what Feature 7 is meant to capture, namely that the bildungsroman belongs to that tradition in fiction which deals with the real world rather than imaginary or mythical realms, and whose characters are life-like people rather than imaginary beings, gods, or giants.

That said, however, it is clearly open to discussion whether these novels are faithful to the “real world,” particularly as regards the laws of probability, since they are full of coincidences. *Wilhelm Meister*, for instance, has a whole string of them towards the end,

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<sup>26</sup> I use Carlyle’s original translation here because it is closer to the German original than Blackall’s translation. “Es sind nur wenige, die den Sinn haben und zugleich zur Tat fähig sind. Der Sinn erweitert, aber lähmt; die Tat belebt, aber beschränkt.” (Goethe 1717, Buch 8, Kapittel 5).

when Wilhelm discovers that the Countess is Lothario's sister, the boy Felix turns out to be Wilhelm's son, the beautiful Amazon is revealed as another sister of Lothario's, and the strange background of Mignon is also revealed. In *Jane Eyre*, the people who happen to save Jane turn out to be her cousins, and in *Great Expectations* Pip discovers that Compyson was the man who led Magwitch astray, as well as Estella's father and the "future husband" who abandoned Miss. Havisham. In *David Copperfield* Ham dies trying to rescue an unknown sailor, who turns out to be none other than Steerforth, the man who ruined his sister's life.

All these coincidences either reveal someone's true identity or the fact that people are related without having been aware of it. They accumulate towards the end of the novel, which is perhaps a left-over from older, less verisimilar types of fiction. But in the Four Classics the surprising connections and identities do more than tie everything together – as in, for instance, a classic comedy: The way things are tied up emphasizes important thematic concerns of the genre. Firstly, the focus on relations and family bonds forms a pattern towards the end of these novels, so that family emerges as a major value in life and one of the endpoints for the plot. Secondly, a parallel can be seen between the search for identity and arrival at self-knowledge at the end, and the plot's movement toward a revelation of who people really are; true identity is discovered in both cases. Thirdly, tying things up is a metaphor for the way all the experiences of the hero or heroine are shown to form a meaningful pattern resulting in maturity.

I now hope to have shown that there are substantial differences in the presentation of thoughts and emotions between Goethe and the British works, and that we can see an historical development toward more interiority and more emphasis on the difference between private and public selves. Still, all four novels have a dual perspective that is the hallmark of the genre: Most of the action is seen through the eyes of the young protagonist, who is presented with sympathy and understanding. But there is also distance between the narrator and the main character that is used to point out the latter's immaturity. By the end of the story there is a feeling that progress has been made from youth to adulthood, and that although the youthful perspective is understandable and perhaps necessary, adulthood is preferable and the adult point of view more advanced both psychologically and morally. The genre thus comes to value youth and emphasize its importance in the development of the individual, even as adulthood is seen as the goal and desired outcome.

## Section 2: “Characterization: Protagonist”

That the bildungsroman has one principal character who is round and changes in the course of the novel may seem a commonplace in a work of fiction that is called a novel, but in historical terms, this is one of the great achievements of the genre. These historical considerations will, however, have to wait until the last part of this chapter, “The Birth of the Individual.”

Table 21. *The Four Classics, section 2*

Features	Section 2: Characterization: Protagonist	Max. points	<i>Meister</i>	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	<i>Copperfield</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>
8	One main character	1	1	1	1	1
9	Protagonist is a round character, not flat	1	1	1	1	1
10	Protagonist is dynamic; changes in the course of the novel	2	2	2	2	2
11	Protagonist is an only child	1	1	1	1	1
12	Protagonist is an orphan or	2	0	2	2	2
13	Fatherless or	or 2	0	0	0	0
14	Parent dies in the course of the novel	or 2	2	0	0	0
15	Only one or no (known) living relatives	1	0	1	1	1
16	Of middle-class background	2	2	2	2	2
17	Ordinary (not particularly talented or untalented)	2	2	2	2	2
18	Protagonist is basically good and willing to help others	2	2	2	2	2
19	Male protagonist: Relatively passive, uncertain about goals, leaves decisions to chance or other people	1	1	*	1	1
20	Female protagonist: Relatively active, has strong goals, makes decisions easily	or 1		1		
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>

\*Whenever a feature does not apply to a particular novel, the corresponding cell will be left empty.

Bildungsroman main characters are often said to be representative or typical of their historical period, but Features 11-15 reveal that in one respect they are highly unusual: They are almost without family. Eve Tavor Bannet claims eighteenth-century female authors “orphaned and expatriated” their heroines (1991, 201) in order to give them more freedom “and relations of equality with men” (1991, 199). Her first point is also valid for male bildungsroman protagonists. In the Four Classics as well, orphanhood provides “freedom of choice and action” (Bannet 1991, 194).

Wilhelm Meister, of course, is not an orphan. He achieves freedom to develop his own identity by leaving his home town and the direct influence and control of his family. Historically, Wilhelm’s world is a transitional one, located between the safety and constraints

of premodern societies and the freedom and uncertainty of modernity,<sup>27</sup> and he can choose to belong or not. Jane Eyre, Pip, and David Copperfield have no such choice: They lose their parents at a young age, Jane Eyre and Pip even before the opening of their books. Maybe this difference, the existence of a family in Goethe's book but not in the British ones, is a symbolic indication of the changes that had taken place from Germany in the 1790s to mid-nineteenth-century Britain? The British protagonists thus appear on the page already "free," already modern individuals in the sense that their identities are not given by parents, communities, church, village or any other context they happen to be born into. This also means they are deprived of Wilhelm's stable background and have to start from scratch. It is perhaps because it is such a powerful metaphor that orphanhood has become the principal generic marker of the bildungsroman in English. I return to this issue in the final section of this chapter.

The stories of the three British protagonists start with situations that seem to make identity formation very difficult: David Copperfield loses his family, is strictly controlled and abused by evil foster parents, and finally exiled from his home. Jane is first introduced to the reader in the company of her abusive foster family who seem to be intent on crushing her personality and spirit. Pip's story starts in the graveyard scene in which he finds his identity to be little more than a feeling of fear and his very life is in danger. Although formulated in different terms, our four classic protagonists thus start their journey toward maturity and identity with a liberation which cuts them off from both positive formative influences and negative restrictions.

Features 19 and 20 describe bildungsroman protagonists as untypical of their sex: The young men tend to be passive, weak, and indecisive, the women active, robust, and strong-willed. The protagonists of the four classics are clearly more androgynous (that is, have both male and female qualities) than markedly "sex typed," that is, "someone who has internalized society's sex-typed standards of desirable behavior for men and women" (Bem 1974, 155). Androgyny is not something I have seen mentioned as generic, although many studies see the main character of a particular novel as untypical in this respect. Minor characters are also often untypical, especially women in books by men. Had I been aware of this interesting point when I selected the texts, I would have included more books by women. With only two female authors and heroines, there is limited scope for generalization about women main characters. The material does, however, provide substantial evidence that the male heroes are

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<sup>27</sup> Both concepts are here used in the sociological sense. See footnote 9 and Chapter 8.

depicted as un-masculine and un-heroic, a fact that has been widely discussed. In the preface to the first English edition of *Wilhelm Meister* from (1824), for instance, Thomas Carlyle describes the hero of the work he has translated as “a milksop, whom ... it takes an effort to avoid despising” (Carlyle 1917). This statement continues the German reaction to “Wilhelm Meister’s notorious passivity” (Sammons 1981, 244, footnote 7), and it is often mentioned as a problem or flaw in the novel. Hirsch even includes passivity in her list of features characterizing the novel of formation: “[T]he protagonist is an essentially *passive* character, a plaything of circumstance” (Hirsch 1979, 296-297).

Hirsch is correct in saying that passivity is typical of bildungsroman heroes, but it does not seem to be typical of the heroines. Jane Eyre is nowhere near as passive as the protagonists of the other three Classics. In some respects, she is a victim of circumstance, but many of the dramatic, important events in the novel happen because Jane makes an active choice. It is interesting that when she is found to be constantly offensive and intolerable by her aunt and cousins as a child, it is partly because of her un-girlish looks and behavior. She lacks a “sociable and childlike disposition” (1), and speaking her mind to an adult is not acceptable behavior for any child, particularly not a girl. David Copperfield, on the other hand, has many feminine characteristics, and his friend Steerforth even calls him Daisy. Sam Gilpin sees “the fact that so many people are able to rechristen” David as itself an indication of “his own weakness and pliability” (Gilpin 1260).

A further indication that being un-masculine is typical of bildungsroman heroes is the fact that other male protagonists in Goethe and Dickens seem to be more conventional in this respect. These authors’ other novels are often criticized for being sexist, and sometimes what is believed to be the author’s opinion, as deduced from other works, seems to have carried over to the reception of *Wilhelm Meister*, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*. Gilbert and Gubar, for instance, use both Goethe and Dickens in arguing that Western literature shows women as passive and in a negative light (Gilbert and Gubar 1998). They do have a point, but their judgment is unfair as regards *Wilhelm Meister* and *David Copperfield*. Feminist critics seem to have overlooked how radical these novels are in their presentation of men and women. I would hazard the contention that equality between the sexes (relative to the historical period) has been typical of the genre since Goethe’s day.



### Section 3: “Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions”

The first two features of Section 3 are related to the question of individualism in the genre. The bildungsroman is often seen as the literary form of individualism par excellence,<sup>28</sup> but as we saw in the preceding section, certain aspects of the portrayal of the (male) protagonist contradict this interpretation. Likewise, the presentation of minor characters in the Four Classics both supports and contests the view that the bildungsroman promotes individualism. On the one hand, as Jeffers notes, “[o]ther people are essential to the hero’s growth” (35). On the other hand, “these other people are plainly subordinate: their job is to water, fertilize, and prune the growing ‘plant,’ the *Bildungsheld*” [the hero] (35). Both these statements are valid for the Four Classics.

Table 22. *The Four Classics, section 3*

Features	Section 3: Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	Max. points	<i>Meister</i>	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	<i>Copperfield</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>
21	Other character(s) essential in making protagonist change and grow	3	3	3	3	3
22	Other characters more important in their relationship to protagonist than in their own right	1	1	1	1	1
23	Important educator(s)	3	3	3	3	3
24	Important companion(s)	2	2	2	2	2
25	Important lover(s)	3	3	3	3	3
26	Other characters’ love relationship as exemplary or as contrast to protagonist	1	1	1	1	1
27	Other characters’ marriage as exemplary or as contrast	1	1	1	1	1
28	At least one important character from lower, middle, and higher social classes	3	3	3	3	3
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>

Another striking characteristic of this supposed prototype of male individualism is the important role women play in it. Indeed, Wilhelm’s apprenticeship can be seen as a passage from the intimacy of one woman to that of another. The book opens with his first love, Mariane, and her old female servant, Barbara. In the first town he stops in on his travels he becomes intimate with Philine and decides to take care of young Mignon. Both serve to initiate Wilhelm into a new world of art and emotion; Philine with her spirited talk, Mignon through her mournful song. The next stage of his journey is the theater company’s stay with

<sup>28</sup> Martin Japtok, for instance, contrasts African-American and Jewish-American bildungsromans with the traditional bildungsroman, calling the latter “a form with largely individualist focus” (2005, 24).

the count, and here Wilhelm becomes close to the countess. On their way to the next town the company is attacked by robbers, and the beautiful Amazon comes to his rescue. Afterwards he is nursed by Mignon and Philine. His recovery is followed by a prolonged stay with Serlo, at whose house he develops an intimate (nonsexual) relationship with Serlo's sister Aurelie. The final important period is after he goes to Lothario's and this period is marked by Therese and later Natalie. Many of the changes we see in Wilhelm are due to his encounters with women. On the other hand, as Michael Minden notes, even Natalie has a disturbing aspect: She "is just another symbol devised by an author, and her thematic role is to serve as the key element in the self-possession of a male protagonist" (1991, 284).

While especially early critics of *Wilhelm Meister* remarked upon Wilhelm's passivity, the women in the book are generally strong and active. The Beautiful Soul is the exception, symbolizing the pole of contemplation and selflessness on the continuum from inner to outer life, from passivity to activity, that Goethe presents in the novel. Jeffers remarks that "there are prepotent femininities in *Wilhelm Meister*, *Copperfield* and *Sons and Lovers*, indeed to the point of sometimes overwhelming the masculine leads" (Jeffers 2005, 7). A case in point is that the mysterious woman who haunts Wilhelm after the robbers incident is invariably referred to as "the Amazon," which means woman soldier. The situation in which the two meet is a reversal of the old code of romance and chivalry: instead of the valiant knight rescuing the helpless maiden, it is the valiant Amazon who rescues a weak and helpless Wilhelm. And he is glad to be helped rather than ashamed to be depending on a woman. The woman Wilhelm later proposes to, Therese, may be feminine in her desires to help others and be of use, but she rides about in men's clothing and runs an estate better than any man. It is partly for her practical prowess that Wilhelm is attracted to her.

Dickens's two novels have a wide array of different women, from the passive and helpless to the active and assertive. Peggotty and Aunt Betsey Trotwood are strong women who provide the nurture and care that more natural caretakers (parents or foster parents) fail to provide for David Copperfield. They are also the only characters to have lasting roles and influence on David throughout his life. Peggotty's energy, practical prowess, and decisiveness make her the opposite of his mother, though Peggotty is also a thoroughly feminine character. Aunt Betsey and her friend Mr. Dick both look quite androgynous. Aunt Betsey drives "in a masterly manner, sitting ... like a state coachman" (324; chapter 15), and David notices that her clothes are also fairly masculine. She is firm and decisive and not afraid to send Mr. Murdstone and his "Murdering sister of a woman" packing (504; chapter 23).

By balancing the hero and the minor characters, focusing on an individual while making secondary characters indispensable, the bildungsroman promotes both individualism and its opposite. But this opposite is not collectivism, but rather an emphasis on relationships and the interdependence of individuals. I will refer to this particular combination as “relational individualism.”<sup>29</sup>

Features 23-25 concern the main character roles of the Four Classics, namely educators, friends, and lovers. They might impact the main character’s life directly – through their relationship, or indirectly – through what they represent – that is, as examples of various life choices and their consequences.

In *Wilhelm Meister* the three roles are not as clearly represented and differentiated as in the British Classics. The importance of women was mentioned above, and these appear in all three roles, sometimes simultaneously. Goethe seems to have set up the characters more as representatives of various philosophical positions, although all three roles are represented. On his travels, Wilhelm is mentored by the Stranger, the Abbé, and the whole Society of the Tower. Other people he meets on his travels influence him by sharing their life stories and philosophies with him. The companion role is first filled by Werner, but after Wilhelm’s departure, Werner increasingly takes on the role of foil. His primary function is to show Wilhelm what he does not want, rather than to provide trust and intimacy. Lothario becomes a more important friend, who also resembles a mentor because his views and attitudes greatly influence Wilhelm. Various alternatives for the lover function are filled by Mariane, Philine, the countess, Aurelie, Therese, and finally Natalie.

*David Copperfield* is an interesting case because there are positive and negative versions of each role, often arranged in pairs of opposites. David’s mother, Mr. and Miss Murdstone, and the headmaster, Mr. Creakle, are examples of bad mentors, while Peggotty, Miss. Betsey Trotwood, and Dr. Strong are good mentors who provide the kind of nurturing and stimulation their student needs. David’s mother, the Murdstones, Peggotty and Miss. Betsey are perhaps better viewed as examples of ways of carrying out the role of parent. Parenting is an important issue in *David Copperfield*, but it is not in the index because there is little focus on it in the other three Classics. The companion role is shared between the bad friend, Steerforth, and Tommy Traddles, the good and loyal friend. Good and bad lovers are found in Agnes and Dora respectively.

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<sup>29</sup> The term is used in psychology, but I employ it without reference to any specific theories.

The three main character roles are important because these personal relationships help the protagonist develop interpersonally and emotionally. The secondary characters who fill these roles also serve as conversation partners and examples of ways of life, thus helping the main characters work out various aspects of their identities, such as their philosophy of life, occupational choice, and gender role. This exemplary function is particularly important in the area of love and marriage, as indicated by Features 26 and 27. Both Wilhelm and David Copperfield come across many different types of marriages and relationships, and see how they shape the kind of lives people lead. *Meister* has a whole spectrum of characters. At one end is the example of the Beautiful Soul who decided to forego love and devote her life to spiritual matters. At the other extreme we find the people who flit from one affair to the next without settling down. Between the two are various examples of relationships and reasons people might have for marrying – passion, friendship, or material, practical concerns. Wilhelm totally rejects the practical, capitalist mentality of his friend Werner, who seems to marry primarily for the property of his bride. The examples in *David Copperfield* primarily illustrate the question of power in relationships. At one end is the dictatorial Murdstone; at the other, David's mother, who voluntarily chooses this man and then submits to his will. Steerforth and Emily have a similarly unequal relationship, while Peggotty and Barkis, and Traddles and Sophie, are friends relating on an equal footing. *David Copperfield* also has a number of untraditional households that do not consist of husband, wife, and natural children, showing that it is quite possible to have some form of love and a good life without those traditional bonds.

The kind of love relationship both Wilhelm and David come to see as most attractive is founded on love, intimacy, and equality, and Pip and Jane reach similar conclusions. It is worth noting that in spite of the social differences between *Wilhelm Meister's* world and the England of Brontë and Dickens, and in spite of Jane Eyre being a woman and the other main characters men, the four novels all present a similar vision of what an ideal relationship is like.

We have now seen that the treatment of minor characters in the Four Classics, particularly the emphasis on these characters' importance for the development of the main character, contributes to the constitution of a communal individualism.

## Section 4: “Topical story elements: Protagonist”

I can only give a quick sketch of these here. Many will be discussed in more detail in relation to identity development below. These events are relatively ordinary and all can be found in other novelistic genres as well. What is typical of the bildungsroman is therefore not any particular event type, but that a large number are found in one novel. It is quite striking that apart from three features that are only found in the three British Classics, and three that are alternatives to other features, this section contains 13 features which occur in all four Classics. While any novel of any genre will probably have two or three of these events, I cannot imagine a novel that is not a bildungsroman will have 13 or more.

These features constitute not only important, identity-shaping life experiences, but also serve to introduce the young heroes to a whole, uncensored picture of what life and the world are like. They are part of the passage from innocence to experience, from childish belief in the possibility of the ideal to acceptance of the real. Many of these experiences are negative, and failure and loss are as important as learning and mastering.

Table 23. *The Four Classics, section 4*

Features	Section 4: Topical story elements: Protagonist	Max. points	<i>Meister</i>	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	<i>Copperfield</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>
29	Experiences poverty	2	0	2	2	2
30	Experiences hunger	2	0	2	2	2
31	Goes to boarding school	1	0	1	1	1
32	Moves to big city or	2	0	0	2	2
33	Moves away from home or	or 2	0	2	0	0
34	Leaves home to go on journey	or 2	2	0	0	0
35	Introduced to new social groups, classes, and professions	1	1	1	1	1
36	Learns skills	1	1	1	1	1
37	Tries on particular role or roles	1	1	1	1	1
38	Falls in love	2	2	2	2	2
39	Has money problems	1	1	1	1	1
40	Is wounded or sick	1	1	1	1	1
41	Nursed back to health by parent substitute or loyal friend	1	1	1	1	1
42	Nurses other sick person	1	1	1	1	1
43	Adopted parent dies	2	0	2	2	2
44	Death of close relative or friend	2	2	0	2	2
45	Repents immoral or insensitive action	1	1	1	1	1
46	Rescued from emergency or cliffhanger	1	1	1	1	1
47	Gets inheritance at the end or	2	2	2	0	0
48	Loses prospective inheritance at the end	or 2	0	0	2	2
49	Gets engaged or married	1	1	1	1	0
50	Has children	1	1	1	1	0
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>

Like orphanhood, poverty and hunger can be interpreted as metaphors. The physical needs can be read as metaphors for emotional and psychological needs, such as personal identity and human connections. The plot of the bildungsroman is thus a version of the quest narrative, and what the protagonist is searching for is the social context that will enable him or her to form their identity. This hypothesis is supported by psychological research which shows that leaving home and settling in a new place often spur the onset of moratorium (Kroger and Green 1996). In addition, traveling is an old symbol of the lifecourse, signaling the start of the plot, and functioning as a metaphor for change.

Learning skills and becoming a competent person are essential – not only because mastery of one or more skills is necessary to enter a profession, but also because learning and mastery are important psychologically. Feeling competent and capable of doing things for oneself is necessary for the development of healthy self-esteem.

Being introduced to new social groups, classes, and professions constitutes a broadening of horizons, which also helps alert a young person to possibilities in the world. Pip knows only Joe's forge and Miss. Havisham's crumbling mansion when he leaves for London. But the Pockets introduce him to a new class of people and he learns about the lives and professions of the middle and upper-middle classes. Starting a business abroad is not an option he could have envisaged while living with Joe and his sister. Trying out various roles, whether social, professional or other, is an important part of the psychological process of moratorium. Seeking one's identity in the Four Classics implies testing and trying things out for oneself as well as seeing the possibilities represented by other people. Such experimentation also tests characters' self-image against others' impressions.

Falling in love is an essential part of maturation and plays such a large role in the Four Classics that it is given points in several of the sections; novels can get 3 points in the secondary characters section, 3 in this section, and 3 in the themes section, 9 in all. This topic is broadly treated in the themes section and is not discussed here.

Features 39 through 44 cover financial difficulties, illnesses and death, that is, dramatic negative experiences that show the protagonists the fragility of life, and their own vulnerability and mortality. These are then offset by positive experiences such as being rescued and helped by other people. In this way, weakness and vulnerability can lead to the positive experience of discovering the importance of others. Other people, human warmth and caring can serve to counter the cruelty of life. All four principal characters experience caring for someone who is ill, thus giving as well as receiving nurture. Loss is also seen to foster

growth, whether the loss is physical, as in the death of a family member or friend, or involves relinquishing illusions and long-held dreams or beliefs.

The final features in this section, 47-49, are related to family, marriage, and the succession of generations. The four protagonists start their development toward maturity by losing or leaving their homes and families and reach maturity at the end when they acquire their own families and are in some sense re-connected to the cycle of generations.

Wilhelm Meister has a son, a wife and an inheritance by the end, and is also reunited with his family through his brother-in-law and his grandfather's artworks. Family and continuity are emphasized at the end of *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* as well. Only Pip fails to get a family. *Great Expectations* nevertheless affirms the same values: Pip repents his failure to recognize Joe and Magwitch as, respectively, his emotional and economic fathers, and tries to make amends. He also decides to propose to the good-hearted Biddy and have children with her, but as so much in this novel, his decision comes too late: Biddy has already married Joe. In this book, it is the lack of loving relationships between husbands, wives, and children that causes the tragedies of several of the important characters. The final chapter, set 11 years later, informs us that Pip does have a family of sorts in Herbert and his wife, and there is the prospect of marriage to Estella.

## Section 5: "Topical story elements: Secondary characters"

The combined effect of the features in this section might be to provide the main characters with a large picture of what life might entail, and of the difficulties people can encounter.

Table 24. *The Four Classics, section 5*

Features	Section 5: Topical story elements: Affecting secondary characters	Max. points	<i>Meister</i>	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	<i>Copper- field</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>
51	Serious crime such as murder	1	1	1	1	1
52	Dangerous or disastrous fire	1	1	1	0	1
53	Character seriously ill (not adopted parent, close relative or close friend)	1	1	1	1	1
54	Character becomes an invalid (not adopted parent, close relative or close friend)	1	1	1	1	1
55	Character ruined financially	1	1	1	1	1
56	Character dies (not adopted parent, close relative or close friend)	1	1	1	1	1
57	Funeral	1	1	1	1	1
58	Identity or family relationship outside protagonist's family revealed	1	1	1	1	1
59	Family secret of other family revealed	1	1	1	1	1
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>

It is striking how many negative events befall minor characters in these novels. According to Jost, one of the differences between the German bildungsroman and particularly British novels that might otherwise resemble the German genre, is that the British ones have too many such events: “The whole journey should be pleasant, not only the arrival in the harbor” (Jost 1983, 128). Yet Wilhelm is also affected by the tragedies of others: The incestuous relationship that resulted in Mignon, and Mignon’s tragic life and death; the grief and death of Mariane; and Natalie’s sad story and subsequent death. Thomas P. Saine finds it “astonishing, in fact, how many people the narrator allows to die, unhappy and unfulfilled, in the course of the novel” (121). The English Classics are also full of tragedy and death: In *Great Expectations* there is the attack on Pip’s sister that makes her an invalid, her death, and Miss. Havisham’s catching fire. Then Magwitch dies, and Pip loses the fortune he has been waiting for.

Knowing the realities of life is an essential part of growing up. The events in Section 5 give the main character a variety of experiences, each serving to further his or her emotional, ideological and social development. The events in this section have a less direct effect on the protagonists, but they serve to contribute to a full picture of life and the world. Events that befall other characters, particularly deaths and dramatic, negative events, show how differently lives can turn out, and that luck and happiness are in no way guaranteed.

## Section 6: “Setting”

*Wilhelm Meister* and the British novels have similar settings in the early parts of the story, that is, the place where the protagonist grows up. Although the societies and historical periods are different, and the British distinction between capital and province was not found in Wilhelm Meister’s Germany, their home towns resemble one another in being traditional and limiting, and not offering the protagonists the kind of lives they would like.

Table 25. *The Four Classics, section 6*

Features	Section 6: Setting	Max. points	<i>Meister</i>	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	<i>Copperfield</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>
60	Setting for childhood scenes is countryside or provincial town	2	2	2	2	2
61	English-language novels: Setting after school-leaving age is capital or large city	3	0		3	3
62	German-language novels: Setting after school-leaving age is one or more large houses (other than family home)	or 3	3			
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>



For Wilhelm Meister, staying in his home town would imply going into his father's business and leading the life his father wants for him. For Pip, life in the village means being Joe's apprentice and eventually becoming a blacksmith. For Jane Eyre and David Copperfield, it is not so much the place itself that is the problem, as the people who have become their guardians after their parents' deaths. In both cases these guardians are cruel, and young Jane and David are unable to develop intellectually or emotionally as long as they stay with them.

In all four novels, the limiting world of home is contrasted with somewhere else, a place with dangers as well as new opportunities for development. Leaving home also functions as a metaphor for embarking on the journey of life and liberating oneself from childhood and the past. In addition, their homes actually disappear, so that no real return is possible. Wilhelm's home changes radically after his father dies and his brother takes over the estate, and the British main characters lose their homes on the deaths of their parents.

It is interesting that in these novels, "home" and "away" seem to have lost what might be thought of as their archetypal meanings: In the Bible, for instance, home is a sort of Eden, and having to leave a tragedy. In the Four Classics, home is still associated with childhood, and going away entails loss, but the lost childhood is far from desirable. Although Wilhelm has happy memories of being a child, now that he is a young man, home is a place of restrictions and lack of freedom. He can only find a true identity for himself by leaving. David Copperfield is the only protagonist of the British Classics to have memories of childhood innocence and happiness, and as Jeffers points out, he can therefore seek to recreate it later in life (2005, 62). But the home the British protagonists leave is already a non-home: It does not provide safety, happiness, or nurture. Even if leaving makes life tougher, it is still the only way they can move toward freedom and create proper identities for themselves. "Home" thus becomes negative, and "away" positive. Since home is associated with childhood and the past, a negative quality also attaches to these, while adulthood and the future become positive values.

## **Section 7: "Plot and Structure"**

The features in this section are quite mixed. They have to do with the relationship between plot and time, embedded texts, and plot elements that tend to cluster toward the end of the novel. They have been grouped accordingly.

Table 26. *The Four Classics, section 7*

Features	Section 7: Plot and Structure	Max. points	<i>Meister</i>	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	<i>Copperfield</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>
63	Plot is primarily chronological	2	2	2	2	2
64	Main part of plot about period when protagonist is between 18 and 23 years old	3	3	3	3	3
65	Story goes from childhood to adulthood (early 20s)	2	2	2	2	2
66	Inserted letter(s)	1	1	1	1	1
67	Inserted narrative: Other character's life story (brief)	1	1	1	1	1
68	Inserted narrative: Other character's life story (long)	2	2	2	2	0
69	Turning point, reversal: Protagonist experiences important defeat or failure	3	3	3	3	3
70	Journey toward the end of the book	1	1	1	1	1
71	Returns to childhood home after many years	1	1	1	1	1
72	Protagonist develops from self-centeredness to compassion and desire to be of use	2	2	0	2	2
73	Protagonist discovers tie to his or her family towards end	2	2	2	2	2
74	Protagonist learns to "see" at the end	3	3	3	3	3
75	Episodic structure that nevertheless forms a pattern at the end	1	1	1	1	1
76	Epigrammatic utterance by the protagonist at the end or just before	2	2	2	2	2
77	Projected ending: Protagonist finds a place in society (but expectation may not be met)	2	2	2	2	2
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>26</b>

### *Plot and time*

Features 63 through 65 concern the relationship between plot and time. That the plot of the bildungsroman is chronological is well known, but there are many misconceptions concerning the age of the protagonist and the life period portrayed, especially in relation to the English tradition. The age of the protagonist is not usually given much attention in bildungsroman criticism, but while critics treat Wilhelm Meister as a young adult, many believe the protagonists of British bildungsromans to be children.<sup>30</sup> This matter deserves a close look, since it is sometimes seen as one of the decisive dividing lines between the German and British traditions. François Jost, for instance, claims that one of the reasons "Great Britain offers only very few examples of the classical Bildungsroman" (1983, 134) is that the heroes of British novels are too young: "[O]n the whole the original bildungsroman is not the novel of infancy in which the protagonist is pushed on stage in a pram, nor is it the novel of early upbringing" (1983, 135).

<sup>30</sup> This is a central argument in Moretti 1987.

The age of all four protagonists is relatively clearly delineated, although Wilhelm Meister's age is only given for the beginning of his development: His conversation with the Stranger in Book 1 reveals that he was ten when his grandfather died twelve years ago. His travels thus start when he is 22. It is not clear how long they last, but the action might indicate a year or two. His son Felix, however, complicates matters. The child is barely conceived when Wilhelm leaves home, but is talking quite intelligently by the end of the book, which might indicate that his journey lasts up to five or six years. The book thus follows Wilhelm from age 22 to his mid-to-late twenties.

The protagonists of the British Classics are definitely younger than Wilhelm at the beginning of their stories (Jane is ten, Pip seven, and David about nine), but although their childhoods are described in much more detail than Wilhelm's, for the most part these novels are concerned with late adolescence. The first 100 pages of (my edition of) *Jane Eyre* deal with her childhood, mostly her tenth year. The remaining 496 pages concern the two years between ages 18 and 20. *David Copperfield* spends almost 500 of its 1254 pages on the period between nine and approximately sixteen, but compensates by dedicating the rest of the novel to the period from his late teens to age 22 or so. *Great Expectations* starts with Pip meeting the convict when he is nine, and then describes his development up to his early twenties. Again, the period in London, after he has been notified of his "great expectations," is much longer than the childhood part. All three of these British Classics end with the mature narrators looking back on the completion of their formation, when they were in their early twenties. There is clearly a difference in the treatment of childhood between *Wilhelm Meister* and the British Classics in that the latter devote much more space to it. Wilhelm is also older both at the start of his formative period and at its end. It is nevertheless clear that all four novels take their protagonists from youth to adulthood, and the English novels dedicate much more space to the period of transition than to childhood. There is no doubt that the formative years between late teens and early twenties are what primarily interest the narrators.

### ***Inserted texts***

The Four Classics contain a variety of inserted texts, oral and written, in which another character becomes the narrator. Letters are quoted in full in all four works. Mr. Micawber's long, flowery letters to David Copperfield are wonderfully humorous, capturing his character, language and thinking. In addition to contributing to characterization, these letters efficiently bring the reader up-to-date on events David has not witnessed himself. In the other books too, letters provide important new information. Inserted stories often serve a more important and

complex role, and are usually closely related to the theme of identity and identity formation. *Great Expectations*, for instance, has Joe tell Pip the story of his miserable childhood, creating greater sympathy and understanding between them. And the story of Miss. Havisham's aborted wedding, which young Herbert Pocket tells Pip in Chapter 22, serves to further the plot and strengthen Pip's belief that Miss. Havisham is his mysterious benefactor.

In *Jane Eyre*, a dramatic turning point comes when St. John Rivers tells Jane the story that turns out to be her own life story (186-189; chapter 33). "You must prove your identity of course," he explains (189), but after that, the story provides Jane with a past, a family, and a fortune. The story changes her identity, not only because she can stop using her assumed name of Jane Elliot, but because she acquires a past and a place in the larger story of her family and relations that she had not previously had. Stories thus have the power not only to make people aware of who they are but to make them who they are.

Since there is no space for examination of all the inserted stories in the Four Classics, some of the narratives in *Wilhelm Meister* will serve as illustration. Most of these are life stories. The longest is the story of the Beautiful Soul, which is much discussed by critics, but by the end of the book the life stories of almost all the characters have been related, either by themselves, or by someone else. Thomas Saine explains that when Goethe transformed his early *Wilhelm Meisters Teatralische Sendung* [WM's Theatrical Mission] into *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* the main changes involved writing life stories for secondary characters and expanding the life stories of others (1991, 136-137): "[I]n order for the people in the novel to understand themselves and one another, it is necessary for them to tell each other their life stories" (136). This is also the main purpose of inserted narratives in the other three Classics.

In *Wilhelm Meister*, other people's life stories serve as examples of various world views and ways of living. The issues of marriage and gender relationships are foremost in several of these. Aurelie's story, for instance, which she confides to Wilhelm in Book 4, covers her life from childhood to the present. She explains how her upbringing gave her a distorted view of men and women and the kinds of relationships that could exist between them. Her marriage was formed for practical reasons. Her husband ran Serlo's theater company, and Aurelie decided to be content to regard both her marriage and her profession as an actress as practical arrangements without great emotional benefits. After her husband's illness and death, however, she fell in love with the young nobleman Lothario, and her life changed dramatically. With him she experienced great intimacy, and Lothario "opened up his innermost self, letting me peer into the most hidden recesses of his soul" (157). As Aurelie

took over the practical and financial administration of the theater company, Lothario helped her change her view of her work, and she came to experience great fulfillment on the stage as well. The contrast Aurelie outlines between the two relationships has to do with emotions: Her relationship with Lothario “was the first time in my life that I had enjoyed a relationship that appealed to my emotions as well as my mind” (157).

Relationships between men and women are a prominent theme in both Goethe’s novel and Wilhelm’s development, and Aurelie’s story is one of several examples that help Wilhelm work out what kind of relationship he wants. Wilhelm is so moved on hearing it that he promptly swears to “withstand all fleeting attractions and to preserve the serious ones close to my heart, for no woman to whom I will not devote my whole life shall ever hear from my lips a confession of love” (167).

The story of the Beautiful Soul is interesting genre-wise, because although a life story, it is closer to earlier forms of fictional and non-fictional biography than to the bildungsroman. As in these older genres, the nameless protagonist is more “a typified person than a true individual,” and “provides a model to be emulated” (Koepke 1991, 233). This story, in the first person, illustrates the bildungsroman’s penchant for including narratives, and other kinds of texts, such as letters, to create a blend of genres.

Inserted stories in these novels not only contribute to characterization and the construction of full, changing secondary characters, but also help characters understand themselves and formulate their own philosophies of life. As Thomas Boes says, Goethe’s characters have an “almost manic impulse towards *autobiographical* writing” (2008, 269). They thus assert themselves as separate voices and points of view, refusing to be subordinated to the view of the impersonal narrator or that of Wilhelm.

### ***The end***

A dramatic turning point or defeat is something all four protagonists experience to varying degrees. These tend to occur late in the novel, after a long period of progress. For Wilhelm Meister, the principle turning point comes when he realizes that his dream of the theater was a mistake. He feels lost and fears he has wasted his time and effort: “[W]hen I think back on the time I spent with them, I seem to be peering into an unending void. Nothing about it means anything to me anymore” (257). Another important defeat is when chance and external forces thwart his carefully laid plans to marry Therese. Both of these events are followed by despondency. Giving up the theater involves giving up a year-long dream, and

Wilhelm mourns the waste. Both events make him feel small and powerless, at the mercy of forces he does not understand.

Jane Eyre's dramatic reversal is finding out that Rochester is married and therefore cannot marry her. She loses her home, her hopes for the future, and the man she loves. Jane also seems to enter a period of depression and mourning, and the change is marked by taking another name. David Copperfield's story is dramatic from the beginning. First his mother dies, then he loses his home, has to quit school, and is separated from his beloved Peggotty. A new round of important turning points, all involving loss, marks the latter part of the novel: Aunt Betsey's financial ruin means that David must quit his training and loses his prospects of a future inheritance (chapter 35). Then comes Steerforth's betrayal, David's realization that he married the wrong woman, and finally the death of his first wife, Dora. The last three events occur when David is an adult, following one another closely, and forcing him to revise many of his assumptions.

The development of the protagonists is only completed after such a reversal, which usually involves acknowledging a serious mistake, an indication that reversal and mistakes are necessary for full maturity. This is perhaps most strongly felt in *Great Expectations*, when Pip realizes that he has based his judgment of people on money and social status instead of seeing their true moral worth. This leads to a radical change in him: He stops being self-centered, and becomes a caring, responsible adult.

Features 70-77 all concern the ending. Some of these features are specific incidents such as a journey, while others are more formal or thematic. Several contribute to the impression of structural circularity characteristic of the genre. There is often a physical return to the childhood home, and characters from the past might reappear. Wilhelm Meister meets his father and Mariane in a dream, while Jane Eyre "finds" her long-lost uncle through his will. Inheritance and the focus on family and continuity through the trope of one generation following another is a form of thematic return. *Wilhelm Meister* ends with the prospect of a happy marriage and family. *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* end with an image of the protagonist in a circle of spouse and children, and Pip and Estella hope never to part again. Pip is the only one of the four not to have a family, but his business with Herbert has given him a sense of purpose and belonging.

The Four Classics all have seemingly loose plot structures, but unlike the picaresque, for instance, the ending is a result of what has preceded it. Only the false paths, diversions, and waylaying the protagonists have experienced could have brought them to the right place in the end. Goethe's novel is closest to the episodic looseness of a picaresque; the main

character travels, and as he moves from one place to the next he meets people and gets involved with projects and events that seem largely unrelated to one another. Some people and episodes seem of little consequence, such as the practical joke played on the count and the appearance of Felix and Friedrich. Nevertheless, in Book Seven, people and events from earlier parts start coming together: People who seemed unconnected turn out to be friends or relations; the innocent prank of Wilhelm dressing up as the Count much earlier is seen to have had a profound effect; Wilhelm's experiences are shown to have contributed to his *Bildung*, and the Society of the Tower tells him his apprenticeship is over. For Swales, the novel's plot is a mixture of "the episodic and the providential" (Swales 1978, 58), and while Wilhelm plods on without specific plans, "the world through which Wilhelm moves takes a very beneficent interest in regulating his life" (59).

*David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* are more tightly structured. Their plots show more cause and effect, and once the heroes have reached their late teens, the same minor characters continue to play important parts. Although these two novels contain a wealth of characters and events, and many minor plot lines in addition to the main plot of Pip's and David's development, their endings serve to draw everything together and connect the different stories.

*Jane Eyre* gives an even more coherent impression, maybe because of the unifying effect of few locations: The boarding school at Lowood, Rochester's Thornfield, and Moor-House. Nevertheless, each time Jane moves, the break with the previous location is final, and the episodes that take place in each are largely unrelated to other events. Only at the end is it clear that everything is connected and all the various incidents have prepared both the plot and the characters for a particular ending. On the one hand, it becomes practically possible for Jane and Rochester to marry, and on the other hand, everything they have been through has changed both Jane and Rochester to the extent that they are now ready for a mature, equal, loving relationship.

All four novels end with the protagonists having come to "see" something very important. They also make what I have called an "epigrammatic utterance," and they seem to have found their place in the world and in society. Seeing and blindness, and light versus darkness, appear in all these novels both as reality and as metaphors for understanding. *Jane Eyre* has a particular twist on the motif of seeing and blindness, in the fact that Rochester has gone physically blind, and Jane becomes his eyes. "Seeing" and "finding one's place" will be discussed below in relation to identity development. The epigrammatic utterance towards the end is an expression of something important that the protagonist has learned. Wilhelm

Meister's epigrammatic utterance starts with Friedrich's statement that "'You seem to me like Saul, the son of Kish, who went in search of his father's asses, and found a kingdom.' / 'I don't know about kingdoms,' said Wilhelm, 'but I do know that I have found a treasure I never deserved. And I would not exchange it for anything in the world'" (373).

*Jane Eyre* has many forceful, memorable passages towards the end, including the "Reader, I married him" that introduces the final chapter. Interestingly, and in line with many critical readings of this novel, the epigrammatic utterances point in different directions. In the penultimate chapter, Jane expresses her strength and independence in this declaration of love to Rochester: "'I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector'" (274). This is a vision of true love as a union of equally strong, and equally weak, parts. The last two chapters, however, also contain at least three epigram-like statements that seem to place all individual power in the hands of God. One is by Rochester, who thanks God for Jane's return and because "'in the midst of judgment he has remembered mercy'" (278). Jane says of the mysterious supernatural communication between her and Rochester that led to their reunion: "I kept these things then, and pondered them in my heart" (278). This statement alludes to the Bible, where in Luke 2:19 in the King James version it says that "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Brontë thus uses the divine prophecy that Jesus was the Messiah to indicate that it was also God's will that brought Jane and Rochester together. Finally, the very last words of the novel are the ones Jane imagines St. John will say as he dies: "'Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!'" Throughout the novel, St. John and Jane have appeared intensely strong and independent, but at the end they are both seen to submit to the will of God. The novel thus combines modern individuality and the traditional, Victorian idea that a good Christian should bend to God's will.

Dickens's novels have more straightforward epigrammatic statements. At the end of the second-last chapter, Pip says he had realized that "perhaps the inaptitude [which he has seen in Herbert] had never been in him at all, but had been in me" (614; chapter 58), thus expressing a major change in himself and his view of others. The novel ends with a calm expectation of future happiness: In the "broad expanse of tranquil light ... I saw no shadow of another parting from her" (619). *David Copperfield* ends on an almost elegiac note, combining a vision of death with his love for his wife: "O Agnes, O my soul, may thy face be by me when I close my life" (1254; chapter 64). Through these epigrammatic statements the Four Classics all have their protagonists express happiness and gratitude for getting what they



now realize they wanted most in life, although the ending of *Great Expectations* is more open than the others.

## Section 8: “Generic signals”

This section is the only one to break my “rule” that index features are found in at least three of the Four Classics. As I explained on introducing the BRI in Chapter 2, generic signals or markers will operate differently in early and late representatives of a genre. In the early phase represented by the Four Classics, titles were used to mark generic belonging.

Table 27. *The Four Classics, section 8*

Features	Section 8: Generic signals	Max. points	<i>Meister</i>	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	<i>Copperfield</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>
78	Book title includes the name of the protagonist	1	1	1	1	0
79	Book title includes the words “years,” “life,” “adventures,” or “history”	1	1	0	1	0
80	Allusions to bildungsromans, typically <i>Jane Eyre</i> , <i>David Copperfield</i> , or <i>Great Expectations</i>	1	0	0	0	0
81	Indications from early on that this will be a life story	1	1	1	1	1
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>

Three of the Four Classics signal their concentration on one protagonist by using his or her name in their title. Two also include the words “years,” “life,” “adventures,” or “history,” which were frequently used as generic markers until the late nineteenth century: *Wilhelm Meister’s* German title is *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, literally *Apprenticeship years*, and the title of *David Copperfield* also originally included something similar. The problem with *Copperfield* is that the title changed over the years. The first serial printing, which began in May, 1849, was entitled *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience, and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery. (Which He never meant to be Published on any Account. )* (Adams, H. 1987, 7). And the first edition in one volume (1850) had only *David Copperfield* on the cover but *The Personal History of David Copperfield* on the printed title page (Adams, H. 1987, 7). *Jane Eyre* was subtitled *An Autobiography*, which is in the same tradition, emphasizing that the book is a life story.

After the First World War the typical bildungsroman titles seem to have become less frequent, but the use of allusions has increased. Alluding to another bildungsroman or bildungsroman author, especially on the first page, has become a quick way of establishing a

connection with a tradition. Allusions are, of course, most effective when the reader knows what is alluded to, and early examples of the genre thus have a handicap when it comes to available material.

A life story can also be signaled in other ways, such as by providing a short biography at the beginning. We have already seen another quick way to establish genre in the opening of *David Copperfield* (see p. 63 above).

While the primary function of generic markers is just to guide the reader, the features of Section 9 are of much more fundamental importance to the meaning of the work.

### **Section 9: “Theme, subject matter and motifs”**

The first feature in this section is regarded as the main theme, while the others are subordinate themes or motifs. In spite of the large number of features in the BRI, Feature 82 thus holds a special place and importance. As mentioned in Chapter 3, there are good reasons for giving the main theme more points than other features, and it could even have been made obligatory. I have chosen not to, in order to stick to the basic principle of the index – namely that there is no predicting the changes that might occur in a genre, and that all features should therefore be treated in the same way, that is, as optional. As for the main theme, it has, in some form, been the most important element of most definitions of the bildungsroman. Ruth Glancy, for instance, says of *David Copperfield* that “the purpose of the plot is to delineate David’s emotional growth” (1999, 76) and: “The themes of the novel derive from the growth of David Copperfield from infancy to maturity” (81). Margaret Myers calls it “quintessentially a novel about the search for self” (Myers 2006).

Many of the other themes and motifs in this section are related to features in other sections as well, and have already been touched upon there. They are included in Section 9 in order to emphasize that they have thematic importance. They are also, in some sense, bound up with the main theme. Most will also be discussed again below, in relation to the theme of identity development. Here, I will merely point out their general importance and meaning.

Table 28. *The Four Classics, section 9*

Features	Section 9: Theme, subject matter and motifs	Max. points	<i>Meister</i>	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	<i>Copperfield</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>
82	The psychological and moral development of the protagonist from youth to adulthood (main theme)	3	3	3	3	3
83	Protagonist strives for liberation from the people he/she depends upon in childhood, their values, and their plans for his/her future	2	2	2	2	2
84	Search for new commitments to people and ideas	2	2	2	2	2
85	Tension/conflict/discrepancy between inner and outer worlds	2	2	2	2	2
86	Development from false self-perception to self-knowledge	2	2	2	2	2
87	False idealism gives way to acceptance of reality	1	1	1	1	1
88	Learning through pain and loss	1	1	1	1	1
89	Fate and chance	1	1	1	1	1
90	Free will	1	1	1	1	1
91	Death and grief	3	3	3	3	3
92	Love, relationships, and marriage	3	3	3	3	3
93	Portrayal of society	2	2	2	2	2
94	Social criticism	2	2	2	2	2
95	Protagonist confronted with at least one philosophy or philosophical system	2	2	2	0	0
96	Family becomes at theme at the end	2	2	2	2	0
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>25</b>

Feature 83, striving for liberation, takes a different form in *Wilhelm Meister* and the British Classics, since Wilhelm voluntarily leaves the influence of his father. For the British protagonists, it is the fact that their real parents are dead that prompts their desire to break free of the influence of foster parents. It is thus not parental authority or family as such that the British heroes and heroine reject, but the corrupted, illegitimate version that they grow up with. Striving for liberation is the first step on the road toward independence, identity formation, and maturity, and a prerequisite for such development to take place. In historical terms, sociologists have pointed out that it is only with the beginning of the changes collectively referred to as *modernity* that such individual identity formation became possible.<sup>31</sup>

Feature 84, “Search for new commitments,” constitutes the next step of the protagonist’s journey and the development of the individual, and this is a major concern throughout. Choosing commitments is the main work of the identity formation process once moratorium has started. Again, there is a difference between Goethe’s and the British books.

<sup>31</sup> See for instance Côté and Levine (2002) and Giddens (1991).

Wilhelm's period of searching and questioning starts as soon as he leaves home. But because the British characters are children at the beginning, they cannot start their moratoriums until later, when they are about 18 years of age. That is when Pip goes to London and Jane Eyre leaves school to become a governess. David Copperfield's transition is smoother and shifts a little between the different identity domains.

Features 85 through 89 are aspects of the identity formation process, the first three describing problems or conflicts, while 88 and 89 describe their resolutions. Tension and conflict between individual and society, or between the individual and the emotional and intellectual climate in which they exist, are common both as a prompt to moratorium and a natural part of being in moratorium. Meeting at least one "philosophical system" is the intellectual equivalent to the diverse experiences in Sections 4 and 5, and part of that necessary input or stimulus to form an independent identity. Feature 88, "Learning through pain and loss," is just one of several features in the BRI that concern death, pain, and loss. Death and loss are as common in the genre as love, and thus occur several times in the BRI.

Features 90 through 96 are persistent sub-themes of the Four Classics. Fate, chance, and free will are important issues in the characters' ideological identity formation, and obviously connected to individualism and secularization, which are usually seen as part of the modernization process. This thematic complex is perhaps most developed in Goethe's novel, in which the Society of the Tower deliberately tries to rid Wilhelm of his belief in fate. *Jane Eyre*, on the other hand, goes a long way toward condoning providence and divine intervention, while simultaneously promoting individual responsibility for directing the course of one's life. Dickens's heroes are largely free in the sense that they do not see God or fate as the controlling forces of their lives, but free will is limited by other forces, the most powerful of which are found inside the mind. Love and death are both literary themes and themes in the identity formation process. Having experienced both is seen to be a condition for becoming an adult. The same holds true for society. Main characters must come to terms with society, but authors also seem to use the genre to criticize aspects of contemporary society. Family is important on many different levels. The Four Classics approach the theme from several angles, emphasizing the difficult coexistence of two opposing attitudes: Family must to some extent be abandoned for the modern individual to be free to develop their identity. But the closeness of a family and the experience of having children are also seen to provide a sense that life is meaningful and valuable.

This short overview of themes and motifs will now be supplemented in the discussion of identity development.

## Identity development in the Four Classics

While the analysis above was structured according to the Bildungsroman Index, the identity development of the protagonists of the Four Classics will now be discussed one character at a time, so that each developmental process can be analyzed as a whole.

The four novels differ as to which “identity domains” or “life areas” are most prominent in the lives of their protagonists. Although James Marcia’s Identity Status Interview uses the domains of occupational choice, ideology (religion and politics), and interpersonal relations, other domains are possible. According to Marcia, “the domain content is [not] really important, so long as it is *important*. That is, it must be a life area that is meaningful to the individual and in which some variability of choice is permitted” (Marcia 2001, 62). In deciding which identity status a person belongs in, Marcia uses the idea of salience, that is, the importance of the domain to the person in question. A person need not have the same identity status in all areas in order to belong to that status. If you are achieved in the one or two areas most salient in life for *you*, then you are achieved. If, for instance, a politician starts wavering in her political beliefs, she will most likely be in moratorium or diffused in spite of being achieved and secure in, for instance, the interpersonal arena.

In the following analyses I will concentrate on the life areas that are most important to each protagonist, rather than follow Marcia’s categories slavishly. The interpersonal domain, and particularly love, are important in all these novels, while occupational development features particularly strongly in *Wilhelm Meister*. Religion and politics are of little concern in the Four Classics. Rather, all protagonists wonder what good and moral behavior is, they are looking for their own philosophy of life, and they are uncertain as regards the extent to which they can control their own lives, or whether all is determined by fate or chance. Gender roles are another salient domain, and one that is just as relevant for the three male heroes as for Jane Eyre.

Personal choice is a precondition for the bildungsroman, because, as Marcia argues, an identity domain can only become an issue or problem for a person if there is a degree of choice (Marcia 2001, 62). The extent to which people are free to make choices that affect their identities and the course of their lives varies according to place, historical period, socio-economic class, and sex. Historically, most people in the world have had little choice when it comes to occupation and religion, and often other aspects of identity have also been ascribed by the community. *Wilhelm Meister* stands at a watershed in Western history, when the

balance of power over the lives of middle-class individuals (at least men) tipped over from society and community towards individuals themselves. This is also the beginning of that precarious balancing act that is much discussed in bildungsroman literature: How to combine individual aspirations with social demands? Is it possible to be socialized and simultaneously develop a personal identity of one's own? The protagonists of the Four Classics live in societies in which men of the middle and upper-middle classes have a degree of choice over their own life course and identity that few people had had before.

Of the four protagonists, Wilhelm is the most fortunate, at least materially. His problem is the emblematic one for the modern capitalist world: He can choose not to follow in his father's footsteps, not to fill the slot that seems designed for him from birth. And, as Jeffers points out "[i]n Goethe's epoch, it was genuinely revolutionary ... to insist that a son might freely choose to do something different from what his father had done" (Jeffers 2005, 17). Wilhelm thus epitomizes what is new in the bildungsroman compared to older forms of literature depicting development from youth to maturity: Personal choice, and thus also personal responsibility for finding a profession based on personal desires and capabilities rather than tradition and social expectations. Precursor genres such as the German *Staatsroman*, about the moral development of a future ruler, and British novels about young women preparing to become wives are about filling roles already prescribed by society. Personal choice is not an issue, and the individual must learn to fit into the slot as best he or she can. Wilhelm Meister, on the other hand, sets out to discover his slot. The idea is that it is the individual, not society, that has responsibility for choosing a profession. When the bildungsroman is often thought of as *the* genre of individualism it is perhaps partly for this reason.

But finding a profession is not the only identity-shaping choice our four protagonists face. Marriage was becoming (for some individuals belonging to certain social strata) a matter of the heart rather than the purse, and Goethe, Brontë, and Dickens show romantic love as the main motivation for choosing a mate. Through reflection as well as trial and error, the four protagonists gradually come to an awareness of what kind of relationship they want and need – in terms of both emotions and more practical duties and responsibilities. It is striking that they all, even though three are created by men, come to want a high degree of equality and mutuality. Their own gender role identities develop in the same direction, towards convergence between genders, and a combination of masculine and feminine traits.

Unlike today, none of these protagonists are free to choose other religions than Christianity, but they live at a time when religion was declining in importance. For many,

Christianity no longer answered all the important questions about the meaning of life and how one should relate to others. People therefore started facing the task of finding their own meaning and their own moral rules. Although there is a basic Christian faith underlying these novels, the protagonists have many moral and philosophical questions to find their own answers to.

## **Wilhelm Meister**

Occupational identity and finding a profession in which to use his talents and creativity to express himself is foremost in Wilhelm's mind for most of Goethe's novel. Wilhelm does not see himself as a person with a historically wide range of options for professional development. On the contrary, he thinks of work as restrictive and envies the upper classes who have the freedom to develop as individuals without having to work for a living. His society was one in which occupational choice differed dramatically between the lower, middle, and upper classes. The lower classes had little choice. Middle-class men had more options, but we see from Wilhelm's father and his friend Werner that everyone expects Wilhelm to follow in his father's footsteps by taking over his business. The beginning of Wilhelm's troubles, and what starts his moratorium, is the realization that he does not want this. Like the aristocrats, he would like to develop his own personality, rather than have to fulfill a particular role or profession.

Joining a theater company is an attempt to find a profession in which he can express himself and develop as a human being. He has no interest in trade and his father's business, and the theater seems more in line with his interests and talents. In the long middle part of the novel, Wilhelm is an apprentice in the world of the theater. He tries his hand at many of the tasks that go into staging a performance: He writes plays, translates *Hamlet* from English, helps with organizing, financing, and selecting actors, and he takes part in rehearsals and finally acts himself. He meets a large number of people who demonstrate various desirable or undesirable ways of approaching life at the theater. He participates in long discussions with actors, his friend Serlo, and others interested in the theater, thus developing his ideas about drama and the stage: How best to rehearse, and whether artistic excellence or pleasing the audience is more important. Playing *Hamlet*, and the play's success, are final proofs that he has come a long way. Nevertheless, when Jarno tells him he has no talent for acting, Wilhelm is already on the verge of discovering for himself that the theater does not offer everything he

had hoped for. Staying with the theater will not make him the whole, accomplished person he wants to be.

The next phase in Wilhelm's occupational development, which takes place largely at Lothario's estate, has a different, much more contemplative focus. Rather than learning a profession, Wilhelm now devotes himself to his son Felix and his new friends and to becoming familiar with their ideas, ideals, and projects. This part is more focused on relationships and ideas than profession in any strict sense, but the Society of the Tower makes him realize that he can contribute to society and improve the lives of others by joining in their pursuits. Although he would to some extent be engaged in the activities of his father's company – now managed by his old friend Werner – he would also be working for ideals, not merely for material gain, which is part of what he objected to before. At the beginning of his story, Wilhelm resented the lack of freedom of the middle class compared to the aristocracy. At the end he discovers he is actually free to have a wealth of different experiences by which he grows, and the place he finds for himself at the end is not the dreary mercantile environment he had feared.

Interpersonal development takes place through Wilhelm's contacts with friends and potential lovers, the actors he works with, and finally Felix. At Lothario's estate, Wilhelm discovers the joys of responsibility and commitment when he discovers that Felix is his son. In all the time he has been away, family has not been of much interest to him; even the death of his father seemed not to affect him very deeply. But at Lothario's, his priorities begin to change: Instead of thinking primarily of how to develop and fulfill himself, he starts thinking about what he can contribute to the lives of others. His love for Felix grows, and he starts thinking in terms of generations and continuity. Seeing his grandfather's artworks again gives him a sense of past and present coming together. He has a dream in which his father, Mariane, and Felix appear, and this might indicate a reconciliation with his past.

Love is at the center of Wilhelm's attention at the beginning and end of his story. It is the traumatic break-up with his beloved Mariane that starts his moratorium and his travels, and in the course of his journey he learns a number of lessons that seem deliberately constructed to give him a broad knowledge of the existing possibilities. As discussed in the section on secondary characters, the people he meets complement each other in a system of alternatives and extremes, displaying a wide variety of relationships and life options.

In the ideological domain, Wilhelm's development primarily concerns the issue of what controls life. Randolph Shaffner argues convincingly that the first five books of *Wilhelm Meister* are about Wilhelm's liberation from a belief in fate (Shaffner 1984, 50-55). This is



seen in the way he interprets chance events as signs from fate, firstly, in discovering “proof” of Mariane’s unfaithfulness, and secondly, when he attaches himself to Laertes’s theater troupe. The Stranger warns him that he is mistaking chance for fate, but Wilhelm is convinced that he is being compelled by higher forces to pay attention. Only after he has decided to leave the theater does he understand that he has been mistaken about the existence of fate: “Is what we call ‘fate’ really only chance?” (VII.9, 302), he asks the members of the Tower as he accepts his “Certificate of Apprenticeship” (VII.9, 303).

For most of the novel, Wilhelm thinks work is the most important part of his life, and that this is where he can find fulfillment and happiness. In Book 8, however, work declines in importance, while personal relations take center stage. As Wilhelm starts dedicating himself to his son, Aurelie, and his friends in the Tower, their ideals of doing good and their relations with one another give his life meaning. His future occupation will proceed from this greater responsibility, and profession no longer seems so important in itself.

From the beginning of the novel there is a clear contrast between Wilhelm and Werner. Werner is going into business and embodies the values of the merchant class, while Wilhelm is of a poetic disposition. The difference between the two friends is partly one of professional choice, but gradually, especially after the death of Wilhelm’s father, Werner comes to stand for an ideology and attitude to life that Wilhelm rejects. Werner is a true product of his time and class. He is the up-and-coming middle-class businessman who measures everything in money and property. To Wilhelm, such a mentality is odious. People are what he values. Money is merely a means for improving people’s lives. Throughout the book, money-making and materialism, in the sense of caring more for money and status than for people, are presented as morally negative, and Wilhelm’s quest is as much a search for a viable alternative as for a profession. The end of Wilhelm Meister’s apprenticeship (long after the Society of the Tower declares it to be over) comes when he finds a balance between conflicting sides of himself: Interiority and activity, selfishness and interest in others, feelings and intellect.

In my reading, Wilhelm’s story starts with a young man who thinks he has found love but is otherwise undecided and slightly unconcerned ideologically and about finding a profession (“in diffusion” in Marcia’s terms). His breakup with Mariane throws Wilhelm into a moratorium which at first seems to be primarily in the occupational and interpersonal areas. His time in the theater and his (mostly platonic) relationships with various women entail little long-term commitment. But the experience is vital in that it enmeshes him in practical and social life and makes it necessary for him to take on many new responsibilities. The theater

trains him for practical, committed, responsible life. The ideological domain comes into full focus for Wilhelm himself when he leaves the theater and the Tower awards him his apprenticeship certificate. He then starts reflecting upon fate, the role of chance, and the extent to which he can use his free will to control his life. At the end of the novel, Wilhelm feels very strongly that he has found his rightful place, although the ending is also quite open. What has been decided, however, is his long-term commitment to Natalie, Felix, and the Society of the Tower.

When many critics have questioned whether *Wilhelm Meister* “really” is a bildungsroman, it is at least partly because of the ending. According to Michael Beddow, many scholars since the 1950s have argued that “the novel severely qualified or even undermined the notion of consciously cumulative development toward harmonious self-possession” (1982, 70-71). It is easy to agree with Hartmut Steinecke that “the harmonic ending of the penultimate chapter is contradicted in the last one” (Steinecke 1991, 72-73). In Wilhelm’s proposal to Therese, we are first given a “proper” ending of the type bildungsromans are “supposed” to have, but there follows a second ending, which is largely farce and which undermines the seriousness of the first. According to Steinecke, the novel can only be seen as a successful maturation process if Chapters 2-10 of Book 8 are ignored. If they are included, it can be claimed that Wilhelm has entered a new period of confusion before the end. He might of course still believe in the ideals he developed in Book 7, which culminated in his proposal to Therese in Chapter 1 of Book 8, but some of his own statements contradict this. The final ending is happy in the sense that Wilhelm gets his new love and a home with Natalie, Felix gets a mother, and Wilhelm can stay with his friends in the Society of the Tower. He even becomes a business partner of his old friend Werner. But for many critics, the *deus ex machina* intervention ridicules the process Wilhelm has undergone, and is not satisfying from the point of view of his internal development.

The ending is thus often seen not to illustrate successful *Bildung*. But can Wilhelm be said to be identity achieved in Marcia’s sense at the end? If he were interviewed by a psychologist just before the final, dramatic turning point in Book 8, Wilhelm would probably have come out as diffused in all life areas. This does not, however, nullify the certainty he had arrived at soon before. Development is a complicated process, and ups and downs are quite normal, as are temporary regressions. Psychologically, things do seem to go a bit too fast at the end of the novel, and external factors feature very prominently in the resolution. But there is nevertheless a sense that Wilhelm has found what he really wanted, although he had not realized quite what that was until this moment. The ending mixes realism and utopia, perhaps

reminding both Wilhelm and the reader of the precariousness of the developmental process and how easily chance events can turn everything around.

Heinz Hillmann combines some seemingly contradictory aspects of the novel by claiming that *Wilhelm Meister* consistently embraces unity, inclusion, and the combination of opposites. In his view, the novel constitutes a development away from a dualistic viewpoint that tends to find one option better than its opposite, towards the view that both extremes are partly right. The ending can thus be seen to embrace opposites and include options that seemed to have been excluded earlier in the novel (Hillmann 2000, 26). Jeffers makes a similar point, claiming that, instead of leaving everything to either fate or free will, Goethe makes everything turn on Wilhelm's ability to

create something out of the opportunities given by the lucky or unlucky agencies not of fate ... but of necessity, chance, or anything he himself might freely have effected. ... [T]his is a commonsensical middle course between a radical doctrine of free will, which would pretend ... that absolutely everything in life is a matter of choice, and a complete determinism. ... We must remind ourselves how inspiring, especially for a burgher class on the cusp of vast social upheavals, this anti-Calvinistic message was in Goethe's own era. (2005, 28)

The ending is thus a result of a number of fortunate coincidences and Wilhelm's ability to profit from these occurrences. Although he seemed depressed and identity diffused soon before the revelation that Natalie loves him, he is able to acknowledge her love, the fact that he himself returns it, and to act upon this realization. The final result is that happy state of contentment that characterizes mature identity achievement, and which Erikson calls "a sense of psycho-social well-being" (1980, 127).

## **Jane Eyre**

Jane Eyre's developmental process is very different from Wilhelm's, partly because she is a woman. Her "career" opportunities are restricted to marriage and a couple of professions, and there is little possibility of social advancement. Nevertheless, Jane faces several important choices, and although both tempted and coerced, she refuses to give up her desire for self-determination and keeps her destiny firmly in her own hands. Love and relationships, marriage, gender roles and social class, are the most salient issues for Jane.

As Jane leaves Lowood School at 18, thus making her first independent life choice and her first bid for freedom, her identity is partly diffused (undecided and uncommitted) and partly foreclosed (having adopted a ready-made identity without exploration or much reflection). Her childhood has been a truly horrible one, without the love and closeness that psychology sees as necessary for development as a healthy adult. She says her teacher Miss Temple has been both mentor and friend, but since Jane has never had the closeness or unconditional love of a mother or parent substitute, she is emotionally and interpersonally underdeveloped. Nor has she experienced love or being in love, and she has not known the intimacy of a same-sex friendship. Marriage is no option, simply because she knows no men. As regards relationships with others, she thus lacks sufficient experience to know what she wants. In the occupational domain, she has made a choice based on very few role models and few alternatives: She has first foreclosed on being a teacher, then a governess, because they are obvious choices. There is no professional moratorium accompanying or preceding this decision, and Jane takes little active part in it.

As the child of a marriage between a bourgeois woman and a poor vicar, Jane Eyre's social position is uncertain from the start. At Gateshead she refuses to accept the Reeds' class prejudice and aligns herself with the servant Bessie. This suggests, as Susan Fraiman argues in *Unbecoming Women*, the potential for a formation that disregards the social hierarchy by going "outside the master-servant paradigm" (1993, 100). At Lowood she sides with the oppressed poor against the oppressors, but at the end of her studies, the kindly Miss Temple has transformed her into an accomplished young woman who can draw and speak French. Intellectually and culturally, she has developed into a bourgeois, although in terms of social class, single women at the time could rise no higher than "governess, or at best, school mistress. From there she obtains class leverage only by marrying" (Fraiman 1993, 99). Jane is thus in an ambiguous position, with intellectual accomplishments that will only be socially and economically rewarded if she marries, in which case she might have no further use for them.

Her experiences at Thornfield are important for Jane's development for three reasons: Firstly, she becomes the governess of a young girl, Adèle, who is much like herself as a girl – a poor orphan of mixed class background. Jane enjoys Adèle's company and comes to love her, but Adèle also functions as a personification of the child Jane used to be. Nurturing her, Jane can nurture her own inner child, thus beginning to heal her emotional wounds. Secondly, Thornfield complements Jane's knowledge of the social world, adding the aristocracy to the picture she already had, which consisted of servants, the poor, and the teachers and harsh

clerics of Lowood. She learns about relations between different social stations and observes the behavior and norms of the very rich. Comparing herself to visiting upper-class women, Jane finds herself lacking in beauty and grooming, but also discovers that she is witty and smart and can play intellectual games with Rochester.

Her most important experience at Thornfield, though, is falling in love. The courtship between Jane and Rochester constitutes social and interpersonal training of a new kind for Jane Eyre, and maybe also, but in a different way, for Rochester. The two have discussions and play intellectual games that stimulate them both. They resemble each other in being proud and somewhat introverted by nature, but gradually learn to open up emotionally to one another in ways neither has done before. Although social convention puts Rochester above Jane – as an aristocrat as well as a man – the two talk quite openly with one another, deliberately breaking rules of conduct and decorum: “I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh,” Jane tells Rochester before understanding that he wants to marry her, “it is my spirit that addresses your spirit” (Vol. 2, 17-18; chapter 23). And this is important. Intimacy is not bred in the bone, but must be learned through practice and the experience of trust.

Apart from offering a long-overdue chance to relate to a man, Thornfield sees the return of the passionate Jane Eyre, who has long been absent from view. From being a rebel in childhood, Jane had learned to control her temper and conceal her emotions, both for practical reasons and to conform to social convention. But Rochester awakens feelings in her that she had hitherto been unaware of. Critics have often seen Rochester’s locked-up wife Bertha as Jane’s double, her dark self, partly because she expresses Jane’s pent-up violence and unconscious emotions: According to Lucy Hughes-Hallett, “Bertha is a terrifying counterpart for that aspect of her ‘passionate’ personality – avid, libidinous, angry – that Jane struggles to subdue” (1991, xxvi). But as Frederick Ashe points out, Jane Eyre’s deprived childhood has left her with both deep pessimism about the possibility of happiness and self-doubt that makes her feel undeserving of love (1988). She goes through a long battle with herself before she can accept that her own and Rochester’s feelings are real, and also that “to imagine such a lot befalling me is [not] a fairy tale—a daydream” (Vol. 2, 35; chapter 24). But in spite of their very real love, marriage between Jane and Rochester when they first plan it would be “all wrong” (Hughes-Hallett 1991, xxiii). Neither is mature enough to develop the kind of relationship they both want, although neither is aware of the wish at the time.

For Jane, it takes both the symbolic death and rebirth of her three homeless days, and the interpersonal development she goes through at Moor-House, before she is ready. What

Moor House shows her is, firstly, that good luck is possible. While most of her life so far has demonstrated that there was not much cause for optimism, her rescue proves the opposite: The world can be benign. She thought her life was over, and instead she was granted a period of calm and happiness. As a teacher at the village school she develops her practical and intellectual skills, discovering what it is like to live in a community and to be liked and respected. Moreover, for the first time in her life, she has intimate friendships with women her own age. She actually experiences family life, although, ironically, it takes a long time before she discovers that her three housemates are also family.

Her cousin St. John's desire to go to India as a missionary with Jane as his wife actualizes a number of identity questions and illustrates what a complex issue marriage is in this novel. Marriage concerns both the interpersonal and occupational identity domains. At this point in history, it was a way of making a living, it determined one's social identity, and for those wealthy enough not to have to work, it was also the arena in which one's talents could be developed (or not). We have seen that in *Wilhelm Meister's* world, marriage was a matter of the heart for some, while Wilhelm's friend Werner married more for property and a career in the family business. These conceptions of marriage persisted in the nineteenth century; although love was becoming the ideal, practical and economic reasons were often more important. Jane knows St. John's proposal has nothing to do with love. He is in love with a young woman called Rosamond, but he considers feelings unimportant and believes that the best marriage partner for him is the one best suited to be a missionary's wife. But Jane now knows what real love is: "I had felt what it was to be loved" (Vol. 2, 239; chapter 35), and for her, love is the only valid reason to marry. As she explains to her cousin Diana, if, as St. John has told her, she is "formed for labour – not for love," then "it follows that [she is] not formed for marriage" (Vol. 2, 235; chapter 35).

St. John uses all available means in trying to make Jane marry him, including frightening her with the flames of hell. The battle between their two strong wills is long and tortuous for Jane. In the end, she is almost persuaded that it is God's will that they should marry. But even overwhelmed by emotion, she manages to use her reason to turn him down. She understands that surrendering would be "to rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose my own" (Vol. 2, 238; chapter 35). Whether it is her will or her existence she would lose is not clear; maybe the two are much the same. Although Jane the older narrator now realizes that she had been "a fool" when she agreed to marry Rochester, she also sees that the second mistake would have been worse, and "an error of judgment" (Vol. 2, 238; chapter 35). Her cousin St. John is a very different sort of man from

Rochester and treats her very differently. St. John has great respect for religious and social rules, and little respect for Jane's opinions and feelings. He does not treat her as an equal, but tries to enforce the gender roles typical of his time and strict religious views: He puts men above women and insists that Jane conform to his will, while presenting this as the will of God. Jane's potential marriage to St. John shows how marrying could inhibit a woman's development: At the time, rigid class and gender roles would often prescribe most of a woman's identity.

The ending of *Jane Eyre* is presented both as a coming to "see" and finding one's place. In the middle of her last argument with St. John, Jane asks God to "shew me the path" (Vol. 2, 239; chapter 35). The result is that her "inward dimness of vision" is replaced by the outer darkness of the house as the last candle dies out, and by moonlight. All her senses are "forced to wake," but instead of a vision she hears Rochester's voice calling for her (Vol. 2, 240; chapter 35). And Rochester confesses to her that "of late – I began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in my doom" (Vol. 2, 276; chapter 35). Their coming together at the end is thus presented as a combination of personal epiphanies and God's will. The latter is underlined by the biblical allusion when Jane says she "kept" the knowledge of the mysterious summons "and pondered them in my heart" (Vol. 2, 278; chapter 35). The metaphor of seeing is of course continued in the fact that Rochester is now blind, and Jane is "his vision" (Vol. 2, p 282; chapter 38).

That Jane ultimately finds her place in the world is signaled at the end of the penultimate chapter, when they have decided to marry and head "homeward," although Jane has only just discovered Rochester's house. In the Conclusion, Jane describes her and Rochester's union in idealized terms, claiming "[n]o woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am" (Vol. 2, p 281; chapter 38). Having children makes their perfect marriage even happier, as does knowing that Diana and Mary are leading happy lives as well. Jane and Rochester's happy relationship is a result of the development they have both gone through since separating at Thornfield. While Rochester was then ready to turn Jane into a "child-bride" and fine lady, she later recognized that that would have meant the end of her self-determination. When they meet again, the traditional sex roles have been reversed: Rochester passively cries out for help and Jane is the active one who comes to his rescue. Before leaving Moor House, she decided "It was *my* time to assume ascendancy. My powers were in play, and in force" (Vol. 2, 241; chapter 35). Rochester on the other hand, can now only walk if "led by the hand" (Vol. 2, p 283; chapter 38).

Jane's "professional" identity development is an interesting mixture of class and gender concerns of her time, and the novel simultaneously fulfills and defeats expectations. The resolution promotes a male-female relationship in which the wife starts out as the stronger of the two. The situation they end up with, however, is one of mutuality and equality. Jane has money of her own, and can tell Rochester "I am an independent woman now" (Vol. 2, 261; chapter 37). Bringing up their children and having a good relationship with each other has become the main "occupation" of both. The ending offers a compromise in terms of social class as well: Rochester has lost his mansion, while Jane has received an inheritance. They meet in the middle, and the family becomes part of the same bourgeoisie that Jane's cousins now belong to, with their vicar and army officer husbands.

As Lucy Hughes-Hallett claims, *Jane Eyre* is simultaneously a "wish-fulfillment fantasy," a "romantic melodrama," and "a revolutionary text" (Hughes-Hallett 1991, vii). This mixture is particularly strongly felt in the ending, which ensures Jane's rights and the equality of the sexes by physically maiming Rochester. The novel is a precarious balancing act, and Charlotte Brontë was sufficiently incensed by accusations of anti-Christianity to defend herself in the preface to the second edition: "Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last" (xxxvi). The difference is clear in the contrast between St. John's unfeeling rigidity and Rochester's account of how he came to see his tragedy as the will of God, and how he eventually thanks God "that in the midst of judgment he has remembered mercy" (Vol. 2, 278; chapter 37). Indeed the whole story of how Jane leaves St. John to find Rochester opposes what is "really" God's will to St. John's strategy, which is to dress up his own will to look like God's. Jane is thus not an un-Christian rebel but a devout Christian doing what she sees to be God's will. Conventionality and self-righteousness have been dismissed, but morality and religion are upheld.

The novel's last three paragraphs, however, are paradoxical and intriguing: Why does Jane spend so much time praising a man she and the reader have learned to hate? And the very last words are what she imagines will be his dying words: St. John will welcome death, secure in the conviction that he is a good man and has lived a good life. I do not have the solution to this paradox, but numerous critics have left the book in confusion. And maybe that is the point: To leave the reader with a nagging doubt. Has Jane given up her unconventional principles at the end? Can we really trust her avowals of perfect happiness? Is she pointing out that her and Rochester's relationship is just a small oasis in a huge desert of power-mad St. Johns, ready to "trample" down the "feelings and claims of little people"? (Vol. 2, 235;



chapter 35). Indeed, after *Wilhelm Meister* and *Jane Eyre*, it is beginning to look like a generic trait that the ending should cause doubts and disagreement.

## **David Copperfield**

David Copperfield's development resembles *Jane Eyre*'s more than *Wilhelm Meister*'s in that love, marriage, and morality matter more than occupation. His profession does, however, form part of the calm happiness about being in his place that he feels at the end. David himself, however, chooses to emphasize wife and children, other people close to him, and finding balance in a number of areas: Between weakness and strength, passion and reason, aspirations and reality.

David's professional development is paradoxical. On the one hand, he goes through a fabulous rise in fortunes as he progresses from child laborer with little hope of a future, to court reporter and finally famous writer. On the other hand, this occupational development plays a very minor role in the novel. According to Irene Simon, few critics have regarded it as a *Künstlerroman* because "David tells us little about his own fiction or about his conception of art" (1992, 40). He does tell us about the indecision and unconcern he felt in his youth, and the almost random way he ends up in a profession, but David decides not to include his writing career, which constitutes his mature choice and gives him the personal sense of fulfillment that characterizes identity achievement.

On completing his education, David cannot answer the question of "What I would like to be" (402; chapter 19). Aunt Betsey makes the modern pedagogical decision that he needs a "a little breathing time" (403; chapter 19). She lets him visit the Peggottys in order to think about the matter, but in the chapter entitled "I choose a profession" David admits to Steerforth that he has forgotten to do so (500; chapter 23). David is diffused, showing little concern, and it is his aunt who suggests that he might want to be a proctor. It is Steerforth's approval, because proctors "get very comfortable fees" (502; chapter 23), that helps David decide. He makes his decision lightly, seeming more concerned about what his training will cost Aunt Betsey than about how well suited he is for the profession and whether he will like it. His aunt's financial ruin makes David feel responsible, for himself as well as his aunt, and he decides to start earning money. Joining Dr. Strong on his dictionary (chapter 36), David learns shorthand in order to work as a court reporter. This early phase of his career is governed by practical concerns, and his job is not an important part of his life or his self-definition.

In writing fiction, however, David finds an activity that is fulfilling to him as well as bringing in money. Here he can employ his talents and creativity. Curiously though, he has decided to keep his novelistic pursuits out of his story: "It is not my purpose, in this record, though in all other essentials it is my written memory, to pursue the history of my own fictions. . . . When I refer to them, incidentally, it is only as a part of my progress" (990; chapter 48). To David himself, then, the story of his "progress" to some extent includes the story of how he came to write, but not the activity of writing itself: "I do not enter on the aspirations, the delights, anxieties, and triumphs, of my art," he repeats toward the end of the book (1208; chapter 61). But it is evident that writing gives him a feeling of satisfaction and fulfillment. There could be many reasons for David's (and Dickens's) decision to play down his literary career. One possibility is that other life domains are simply more important to him. Dickens might also want to concentrate on more ordinary aspects of life that would be closer to the readers' own experiences. Whatever the reason, the brief glimpses we do get of David's professional development are sufficient to suggest a path from unconcern to foreclosure for practical reasons, then to identity achievement as a writer.

The interpersonal identity domain is arguably the most important one in this novel. In friendship as well as love David makes serious errors of judgment, and he learns that equality and mutuality are better foundations for both types of relationships than admiration of someone seemingly perfect. His schoolfriend Steerforth holds tremendous fascination for him, but having been pampered and treated as special by his mother and others, Steerforth is incapable of empathy. Self-interest governs his behavior, and he lives out his own temporary desires even when he knows he is ruining others' lives. Steerforth is the source of the greatest betrayal David experiences. Poor and unglamorous Traddles proves a much more valuable friend. At the end of his story, David has learned to recognize what kind of people he gets on with and what kinds of friendship enrich his life. Beauty, status, and appearance have been discarded in favor of other qualities.

As regards love and gender roles, David gets what he wants only to find out that he had wanted the wrong thing. He starts out foreclosing, not on the kind of relationship he has seen in the home in which he grew up, but on a romantic dream common in his day of what the most desirable woman should be like. He falls desperately in love with the adorable Dora, frail, beautiful, and totally useless in all practical matters. According to Gilbert and Gubar, this is the kind of woman who was adored and glorified by Victorian England (Gilbert and Gubar 1998, 601-603). But once married, David realizes he misses something:

I did feel sometimes, for a little while, that I could have wished my wife had been my counsellor; had had more character and purpose, to sustain me and improve me by; had been endowed with power to fill up the void which somewhere seemed to be about me. (929; chapter 44)

Increasing dissatisfaction makes David try to change his “child-wife” (929; chapter 44), but eventually he has to acknowledge that “Dora’s mind was already formed” (997; chapter 48). Deciding to make the best of the situation, David keeps loving her, but the marriage remains unsatisfying. He has to treat her like a child, they cannot have intelligent conversations, and he cannot share his feelings with her. He becomes totally responsible for both their lives, and the relationship is unequal in most ways. According to Kate Flint, “Dora represents Dickens’s attack on a showy and shallow conception of womanhood as ornament that is fostered by aspects of contemporary, consumer-led society” (Flint 200, 45). Although marrying Dora at first appears to David as “[t]he realization of my boyish day-dreams” (902; chapter 43), being married to her soon teaches him the difference between romance and reality: He learns from experience that what he really needs and wants is “an emotional relationship that is both nurturing and equal” (Glancy 1999, 76).

Gilbert and Gubar use Agnes Wickfield as an example of the typical Victorian “angel-woman” (1998, 600) who has to surrender “her self,” “her personal comfort, her personal desires, or both” (1998, 602). David describes her in feminine, passive terms as an “angel” (396; chapter 18), with a “placid and sweet expression” and “a quiet, good, calm spirit” (331; chapter 15),<sup>32</sup> but while Dora’s frail beauty succumbs to illness and death, Agnes has the capacity to live and act in the real world and feel and behave as a mature adult. She is David’s “counsellor and friend” (396; chapter 18) in childhood and youth, managing her father’s household, and working to support herself and her father when that becomes necessary. David longs for a wife he can talk with, share his feelings with, and who can share responsibility for the family with him, that is, someone who will keep house while he provides the income. This arrangement might not meet the standards of a present-day feminist, but considering that the book started appearing in 1849, it does seem to promote a quite unusual degree of equality between the sexes. Agnes is often said to be idealized, in which case it is even more remarkable that she should form part of Dickens’s conception of the perfect love relationship.

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<sup>32</sup> Agnes, for her part, calls Steerforth an “angel,” albeit a “bad” one (chapter 25).

In the area of morality and conduct, David's main concern has to do with weakness and strength, pliability and rigidity. Many of the characters fall into one of these two categories, and both are shown to be detrimental when allowed to control an individual. As mentioned in the character section above, David himself is usually regarded as a weak character. Somerset Maugham, for instance, finds him "incapable of coping with difficulty," weak with Dora, "obtuse," "sadly incompetent," "a bit of a fool," and finally "the least interesting person in the book" (1968, 161). But even as a child David is not nearly as helpless and ineffectual as his mother, Agnes's mother, and his first wife Dora, who all die young.

Several others are led to destruction by stronger characters: Little Emily, Mr. Wickfield, and Ham. Emily and David's and Agnes's mothers become the victims of rigid, hard, unforgiving people. Dora dies young, but her life is reasonably good because she has the fortune to marry David rather than someone like Mr. Murdstone. David himself complains about his "undisciplined heart" (954; chapter 45), which causes him to marry Dora when he should have seen that Agnes would have made a much better wife.

These two pairs of opposites – weakness and strength, pliability and rigidity – are also associated with childhood and femininity on the one hand, and with adulthood and masculinity on the other. David's mother, Clara, and his wife, Dora, are both extremely feminine and very child-like. As Ruth Glancy points out, "[t]heir deaths in childbirth are expected because of their inability to move out of childhood themselves and their timidity and fear of confronting life as adults" (1999, 78). Clara is too immature and unassertive to take responsibility for her son and protect him when she realizes her new husband and sister-in-law are authoritarian bullies. Miss. and Mr. Murdstone, by contrast, are both firm, masculine, and unfeeling. They might be more like adults than the child-wives Clara and Dora because they take responsibility, but they take so much responsibility that those who come under their sway lose all power over themselves. Both sets of characters, Dora and Clara on the one hand, and the Murdstones on the other, go too far. Dora and Clara fail because they are too weak; the Murdstones crush others because they are too strong.

Glancy sees the novel as "Dickens's exploration of the influence we exert over each other or of our failure to provide the right kind of support and love in our connections with other people" (1999, 79), and sees the "misuse of weakness" as just as dangerous as the "misuse of power" (1999, 79). David's lesson is that he must find a balance between the two extremes. He must be both pliable and rigid, child and adult, feminine and masculine. He must learn "to discipline my heart" (1202; chapter 60) as he says just before proposing to

Agnes, but he must do so without losing his goodness, or his ability to feel enthusiasm and sorrow. Margaret P. Myers describes him as a new man when he returns from Europe:

it is Trotwood Copperfield who returns, renewed, from Europe. As Trotwood . . . , David is able to make a living as an artist, he is able to weep openly . . . , and perhaps most important of all, he is able to acknowledge his love for the “right” woman, Agnes. At the same time, David loses none of the quality of masculine enterprise; he retains his capacity for earnest hard work. (Myers 1986, .)

David is thus developing an androgynous identity that allows him to live out both sides of himself. He can combine his child-like enthusiasm, playfulness and need for nurture with an adult capacity for work, taking responsibility and nurturing others. David finds a code of conduct and a morality influenced both by the bad examples he has been subjected to, and the good. Aunt Betsey, Peggotty, and even Traddles and his wife Sophie, are all examples of healthy combinations of masculine and feminine, adult and child-like qualities. When he is still young, his aunt tells him she hopes he will become

‘a firm fellow. A fine firm fellow, with a will of your own. With resolution. . . . With determination. With character, Trot—with strength of character that is not to be influenced, except on good reason, by anybody, or by anything. That’s what I want you to be. That’s what your father and mother might both have been, Heaven knows, and been the better for it.’ (404; chapter 19)

David develops a character marked neither by the pliability of his mother nor the self-righteous authoritarianism of Mr. Murdstone.

David’s development is not straightforward. Emotionally, it is quite harrowing and so full of death and loss, that Alan Barr reads it as a story “of lost innocence, in which the specific losses . . . are reiterations of this loss” (Barr 2007). David is supported by good and loving people, but is lead astray by Steerforth and must take the consequences of the actions of the evil Uriah Heep. His wise aunt advises him not to marry Dora, and tells him he is “blind, blind, blind,” in love. But David’s heart is still untamed, and only experience can teach him to discipline it. He reaches full maturity only at the end of the novel, after an extensive period of mourning (Barr 2007). David comes to see what is the right kind of life for him, finds a home in terms of family and friends, and an occupation he is happy with. In

terms of beliefs, his life is given meaning by being able to lead this kind of full, ordinary, everyday life, and being with those he loves. When he “look[s] back” on his life “for the last time” (1249; chapter 64) in the “Last Retrospect,” he sums it up with the faces of his loved ones: Aunt Betsey and Peggotty, his numerous children, Mr. Dick, Traddles and Sophie, and finally his wife. They are an odd mix, originally from different geographical locations and social classes, and their relations to one another are not defined by convention; they are bound by choice and shared experiences.

## **Great Expectations**

Using *Great Expectations* as one of his examples, Franco Moretti claims English bildungsromans resemble fairy tales: The hero is unchanging and the point of youth as a stage is to get through it unchanged (Moretti 1987, 185-186). This view contrasts sharply with that of most critics, who see a radical change in Pip. John Irving, for instance, says in his introduction to *Great Expectations* that Pip “is the first major character in a Dickens novel who changes realistically, albeit slowly” (Irving 1982, xx). How Pip changes has, however, been interpreted very differently by critics: As success and failure, as disillusionment or moral awakening. While Marianne Hirsch thinks Pip goes through degeneration resulting in dehumanization, Goldie Morgentaler finds that

Pip represents the evolution of the human species away from its primitive origins, whether the primitive be defined as the degenerate [criminal] or the spontaneously goodhearted. For better or for worse, Pip – and the rest of humanity with him – has been civilized. He has learned to adapt to the city, and he must learn to enjoy the benefits of civilization without succumbing to its corruptions. (1998, 719)

Critics thus disagree about whether or not Pip’s road to maturity results in a positive, healthy identity that makes him feel part of his society. The BRI does not give points only for a positive outcome, as long adjustment to society is the direction in which the protagonist is heading, and there is a development from youth to maturity. So while a positive outcome does not affect the novel’s status as a bildungsroman, the question is of prime importance in any interpretation of the book.

As with the other Classics, I will use the above analysis of BRI features, combined with the developmental psychology of Erikson and Marcia, to throw light on Pip’s identity

formation. Supplementing these with a more sociological approach that distinguishes between ego identity and the social aspects of self/identity would probably have been useful in this discussion, but I do not want to introduce yet another theory at this stage. The stages of Pip's development will structure the following analysis.

If one accepts Erikson's premise that the outcome of the identity formation stage of human development depends on how the earlier stages have been resolved (Marcia 1994b, 35), Pip's childhood constitutes a particularly difficult starting point. *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield* also have difficult childhoods, but the detrimental effects on their personality and development are less pronounced. What the novel calls the "first stage" of Pip's development – before he moves to London – is dominated by the negative emotions of fear, shame, and guilt. In the opening scene of the novel, we see the seven-year-old orphan trying to figure out the "identity of things" and of himself in the graveyard where his mother, father and five little brothers lie buried (7; chapter 1). The landscape is described as "bleak," "leaden," and "savage," and Pip himself is but "a small bundle of shivers, growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry" (8; chapter 1). As the beginning of Pip's identity development, this is close to nothingness; Pip has only words on a tombstone to build his identity on, and even his life is in danger when the convict appears and threatens to cut his throat. There is no past to anchor Pip's identity, human love is missing, and the external world itself is indifferent and scary.

Pip's childhood gives him a weak base for interpersonal development. On the one hand, Joe loves him and he loves Joe, which is crucial for the ability to form close relationships later in life. On the other hand, his sister is a tyrannical, inconsistent parent who metes out punishment for neither rhyme nor reason. Her bringing him up "by hand" (e.g. 13; chapter 2) is probably the reason for Pip's deep-seated fear, particularly his constant fear of doing wrong. As illustrated in Table 14, Erik Erikson's model of human development starts with Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust in the first year of life. Although Joe says to Pip that part of the reason he married Pip's sister was the baby she was raising, Joe is unable to compensate for her lack of love. According to Erikson, "[T]he test for a successful resolution of the conflict is whether the child develops a firm sense of belonging and trust that the parents' upbringing makes sense" (Erikson 1973, 241). It is obvious that the second of these elements is missing. Belonging, however, is strong in Pip until the Satis House period. Pip trusts Joe, but he has good cause not to trust very much else, whether people or the external world.

The second of Erikson's stages is Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt at ages two to three. We do not know whether Pip developed shame and doubt that early, but after meeting

Estella and Miss. Havisham, shame becomes his most dominant characteristic, and, he tells us, “[i]t is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home” (139; chapter 14). In the first few chapters, we also see that he mistrusts his own autonomy, probably because he has so often been punished for it. Initiative vs. Guilt is the focus of the period between age four and six, and again guilt is more prominent in Pip than initiative. Every aspect of his early life seems controlled and supervised by the adults around him, and they miss no chance to convey to him that he is a nuisance. The fourth stage in Erikson’s model takes place during school age and concerns Industry vs. Inferiority. Although Pip is a good, competent worker in his world, being able to help Joe in the forge from an early age, he has had few other chances to show himself and others that he masters a variety of skills. The Havisham experience ruins what little mastery Pip thought he had, leaving him with a profound sense of incompetence and inferiority. As Pip enters adolescence and approaches the fifth stage of identity formation he is thus at a disadvantage in numerous respects.

In the early phase of identity formation, role models play an extremely important part. Before people can start evaluating identity options and experimenting with different roles, they must have people to model their behavior on. Joe provides a good model in terms of occupation, but in interpersonal and ideological matters he sets a dubious example. Placidly accepting his wife’s bullying of himself and Pip, he does not help Pip find ways to resist unfair treatment. Nor does he explicitly defend Pip against the other bullying adults. Indeed, as Jack Rawlins has pointed out, Joe “sees no evil, and thus is unable to validate Pip’s vision of the world” (1983, 670). Joe thus forms part of the large group of adults who repeatedly try to impress on Pip that the way he sees the world (as bad) and the way he sees himself (as basically good) are wrong. Another serious problem is the society surrounding Pip and its values. Apart from Joe, everybody is focused on appearances and trying to pass themselves off as being of a higher class than they really are. They therefore appear shallow and inauthentic. The people around Pip thus send two contradictory messages: Firstly, that he must respect the social hierarchy and fill his natural place as a blacksmith, and secondly, that the class he belongs to is not really good enough.

The Miss. Havisham period makes social status the most important element in Pip’s life and the starting point for his dreams for the future. He adopts Estella’s judgment of him as “common” (e.g. 79; chapter 8) and “ignorant and backward” (93; chapter 9). The importance of social status is reflected in the secondary characters. While Wilhelm Meister is surrounded by people who illustrate different world-views and ways of living, Pip is shown representatives of different social classes. As he rejects his background, he finds himself



between the lower class – of which the convict is a frightening symbol – and the gentleman, represented ironically by the dead-looking Miss. Havisham. Other characters are interesting for their in-between or ambiguous status: Gentlemen like Mr. Jaggers make their living working with criminals (that Jaggers desperately tries to wash off); the Pockets belong to the gentry; Pip's friend Mathew lives in a house that Joe “wouldn't keep a pig in” (284; chapter 27); and finally Estella, the novel's prime symbol of aristocratic wealth and refinement, is the daughter of a convict and a maid suspected of murder. Joe and Biddy turn out to be representatives of a morality that most of the higher-class people are lacking.

The end of the Havisham period and beginning of Pip's apprenticeship at the forge bring many changes in Pip's life. The attack on his sister leaves her an invalid and thus unable to continue torturing Pip, and when Biddy enters the household, the two teenagers become friends and confidantes. This is Pip's first intimate friendship with someone his own age, and he uses it both to learn and to develop his need for closeness and understanding. He discovers that Biddy, although his own age, is a good model in several respects. In spite of her bad start in life, she exploits every opportunity that comes her way to learn and progress. She also has a much more acute ethical sense than Joe, saying straight out that Estella is immoral and is abusing her position of power in relation to Pip. Even before the announcement of his great expectations, Pip has started on the road to identity foreclosure, making a premature choice to be a gentleman without a period of proper exploration (moratorium). He is also too young to fully understand what he is doing, or the implications of foreclosing either on being a blacksmith or on advancing from his “common” status to the identity of a “gentleman.”

Calling *Great Expectations* “a fairy tale turned inside-out,” Goldie Morgentaler states that “one of the novel's most obvious intentions is to overturn the fairy-tale plot of hidden identity” (1998, 712), in which heroes find out that their biological origins are in a higher class than they thought. According to Morgentaler, *Great Expectations* asserts the Darwinian point that all human beings come from lowly origins. Since Magwitch is Pip's symbolic father, Pip discovers that his true origins lie in the criminal class. But the plot of hidden identity which *Great Expectations* turns on its head was found not only in fairy tales but also in older novels about growing up or becoming an adult, such as *Oliver Twist*. In such books, the plot can be interpreted as an expression of the traditional belief (in the sociological sense of belonging to pre-modern rather than modern societies) that people's identities are determined by their origins, particularly by the social class they are born into. It is this belief that *Great Expectations* contests. Pip's society is one of inherited class position. All the villagers and townspeople (including Joe) accept and help uphold the social hierarchy based

on birthright, believing that those who have inherited a high social position are inherently better than those who have not. Pip accepts this view, but after falling in love with Estella, he also adopts the opposite (modern) position, namely that class position can be acquired; he decides to become a gentleman. He decides to acquire a high social position that he is not born to. He is thus trying to have his cake and eat it too: While the possibility of social mobility in itself invalidates the theory of inherited status, Pip wants both mobility *and* status.

Pip's disillusionment and maturation consist in seeing through the false values of his society. Critics emphasize how Pip comes to distinguish between the status of a gentleman and the "true" gentleman, for, as Herbert tells Pip, "no man who was not a true gentleman at heart, ever was ... a true gentleman in manner" (232; chapter 22). Pip learns that a true gentleman is a good, moral individual, and that wealth and status are unimportant in comparison. But he also comes to realize that it is not what is *given* (by birth, by inheritance, by a Miss. Havisham or a Magwitch) that decides a person's worth, but what people *make* of themselves, how they decide to manage their own personal freedom. As both blacksmith and gentleman, Pip's identity was decided by external factors, either by the heredity of the traditional class society or by money, which was establishing itself as an alternative path to social status for the new middle class. It was his community that "bound" him to Joe as an apprentice, and it was Magwitch who made the decision to make a gentleman of him. In both cases, Pip was fulfilling a role made for him by others, even if he had come to want one rather than the other. Although Pip comes to love Magwitch and accept his own ties to both the criminal class and his blacksmith foster father, the loss of Magwitch's money liberates him so that he is finally free to fashion his own identity. Accepting his origins is part of that process, but it is not enough.

Rawlins chides Dickens for betraying the original vision of the novel when he "revalues many of the adult characters ... and excuses their former behavior" (1983, 674). In his view, Pip is made to feel guilty when his judgment has really been right all along. His only error was to dream, and to be in love with a woman who was not worthy of his love (677). But Pip (and Dickens's) reevaluation of other characters can be interpreted slightly differently: It can be seen as Pip's liberating himself from his earlier judgments of Joe and Herbert, which had been based on externals and society's evaluations. Instead, as he finds his own identity, he can also accept the others as they are – but without thereby making them models to be emulated.

Pip's development in the ideological area is closely related to social class, and it has a similar circularity to it as Wilhelm's: He rejects the values of the family he grows up in, tries

to escape to something radically different, and in the end reaches a compromise position in which he lives differently from what seemed to be his destiny, while accepting and respecting his background.

## **Anatomy of the classic bildungsroman**

This subchapter summarizes some of the major findings on the Four Classics and places them within an historical and critical context. Like many bildungsroman scholars before me, I emphasize the connection between the historical emergence of the genre and the changes wrought by modernity. But my study includes a second emphasis, that of community and the Other, which has received little attention in bildungsroman study.

## **The Birth of the Individual**

Many of the index features discussed in my analyses have to do with the portrayal of the individual in the bildungsroman. And the principal theme of the formation of identity is by definition about this issue.

A single round, changing protagonist – that is, the combination of Features 8-10, “One main character,” “Protagonist is a round character, not flat,” and “Protagonist is dynamic; changes in the course of the novel” – is very common in contemporary fiction. In the eighteenth century, however, it was an innovation reflecting changing perceptions of time and the recent discovery of the individual. A number of index features attest to the importance of the individual in the genre, particularly the first three of the Protagonist section.

In “The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism,” Mikhail Bakhtin suggests classifying novels “according to how the image of the main hero is constructed” (Bakhtin 1996, 10). He sees historical progression from flat, static characters in Antiquity toward round, changing characters by the turn of the nineteenth century. For Bakhtin, the bildungsroman constitutes the apex of this development. In it, for the first time, the hero is no longer “ready-made and unchanging” (Bakhtin 1996, 21):

The novel of emergence provides an image of man in the process of becoming. ... The hero himself, his character, becomes a variable in the formula of this type of novel.

Changes in the hero himself acquire plot significance. ... Time is introduced into man.  
(Bakhtin 1996, 21)

According to Bakhtin, the greatest advance of the bildungsroman genre is that it, for the first time, manages to show people living and changing in time. People are many-sided and complex, they have psychological depth, and their psychology and identity are capable of undergoing real change.

One of the ways in which the bildungsroman shows that the protagonist changes is through narrative technique. As outlined above, the focalization is split between narrator and protagonist, the reader is given access to the protagonist's consciousness, the narrative is retrospective and ironic, and the narrator understands more than the protagonist. This combination makes it obvious that the protagonist is different at the beginning and end of the novel.

On the one hand, character focalization and access to the main character's consciousness allow the novel to present the protagonist's subjective experiences, thoughts and feelings, and make the reader empathize with him or her. This gives an emphasis on individual experience and personal, interior life. On the other hand, the distance between narrator and main character makes the young protagonist appear more naive and less knowledgeable than the narrator. Moving forward toward an approximation of the two viewpoints, the novel shows the immature hero or heroine against a backdrop of maturity, and thus, "in the process of becoming" (Bakhtin 1996, 21). There are other novels about childhood or youth that focus only on capturing the experience and consciousness of that particular life period. What is peculiar to the bildungsroman is the process of development, seen, for instance, in the switches between the mature narrator and the less mature protagonist.

In an historical perspective, the bildungsroman is among the earliest novel types to give expression to the individualized personality and voice of the protagonist. Older narrative forms tended to express more "eternal truths" and use characters as examples of social values such as proper conduct and godliness, while the bildungsroman foregrounds and values the individual. Although the voice of the mature narrator has more authority than the innocent young protagonist in the Four Classics, it is still a personal, individual world-view that is expressed. The bildungsroman is a form of novel that emphasizes personal reality and truth over "objective" or social truths.

As Bakhtin discusses in another essay (1981), the portrayal of psychological interiority in literature is another modern characteristic. In the classical biography, for instance, public and private selves were identical: “There is no mute or invisible core to the individual himself: he is entirely visible and audible, all on the surface” (134). Interiority only emerged historically with the new conception of the individual that gradually came into being with modernity. “I think therefore I am” expresses the rationalist side of this understanding, but all forms of interior life – emotions, memories, even dreams – became constitutive of the individual. This more psychologically complex portrayal of the individual also extends (in varying degrees) to minor characters. Secondary characters in *Wilhelm Meister* tell life stories that show how they have changed in the course of their lives. Pip and David Copperfield make serious mistakes because they misjudge characters, often failing to see their complexities.

Until the late eighteenth century, novels tended to focus on characters as types or ideals to be emulated, rather than as individuals with thoughts and emotions that were interesting for their own sake. The heroes of the Four Classics are basically ordinary, representative, and typical of their time. Both Goethe and Dickens have been accused of making their protagonists too bland, passive, and uninteresting. But their very ordinariness emphasizes what is perhaps one of the main points of the genre: That the unremarkable individual is worthy of our interest, and that such individuals have the capacity for change and growth. The emphasis on one rounded, developing human being is probably one reason the bildungsroman has earned a reputation for promoting individualism (over community and society).

Before *Wilhelm Meister*, novels about the growth and development of a young person were written all over Europe. Germany had the tradition of the *Staatsroman*, which was about the learning experiences and preparations of a young prince who was to become a good ruler.<sup>33</sup> Britain had a genre of female development novels depicting idealized marriages and relationships.<sup>34</sup> And the lives of saints were read by children and adults all over Europe. These genres portrayed development as it *ought to be*, not as the process of trial and error that it usually is in reality. The protagonists were idealized models to be emulated rather than realistic individuals. The bildungsroman represents something radically different. Firstly, individuals are given opportunities to define themselves on the basis of their own

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<sup>33</sup> See for instance Koepke (1991).

<sup>34</sup> See for instance Bannet (1991) and Fraiman’s discussion of women’s conduct books in the introduction to *Unbecoming Women* (1993).

individuality, rather than just emulating a given model. Secondly, the process of individual growth depicted in the Four Classics leaves room for error, indeed, presents error as not only unavoidable but beneficial to the development of morality and individuality.

The genre of biography, which became very popular at the same time as the bildungsroman, differs from the latter by being about extraordinary, famous, or exceptional individuals, although as Justin Kaplan says, the biography has always aimed to reveal private and daily life (1978, 1). The bildungsroman represents a new development not only in its focus on ordinary, everyday life, which the reader is likely to recognize, but also in finding ordinary people interesting. It shows formation, development, personal progress as achievable goals for ordinary, middle-class individuals. Protagonists are seen to get much further in the direction of personal fulfillment than would have seemed possible in their early youth: Wilhelm Meister becomes accepted by a community of aristocrats he thought would have been closed to him; Pip manages to rise from the forge to become a middle-class clerk abroad; David Copperfield escapes the drudgery of child labor and becomes a white-collar worker and author; and Jane Eyre marries the upper-class man she loves (although he has by then lost most of his property). The genre's recipe for a happy life is not fame and fortune, but an "ordinary," comfortable middle-class existence

Another bildungsroman characteristic that should be mentioned in relation to the individual is the lack of family. As stated in the discussion of the index scores above, the three British main characters are orphans without siblings, and with very little other family. Wilhelm Meister loses his father in the course of the book, and his mother and sister are basically absent. As we will see in the next chapter, the five twentieth-century protagonists are also orphans. Of the nine protagonists treated in this study, eight are thus orphans and one is fatherless. I believe the orphan in the bildungsroman is a metaphor for the modern individual.

Nineteenth-century Britain (and much of the West) was characterized by industrialization, growing cities, and increased geographical and social mobility. At the same time, religion, family and traditional values decreased in importance. In the orphan, bildungsroman authors found a way to represent social trends concretely in one character's life. Deprived of family, the orphan hero is also deprived of the principal transmitter of religion and other values. And pressure to enter a particular profession or choose a particular partner is also usually missing. The protagonists of the three British Classics lack the security and nurture that children need. But they are also free: Their identities are not determined by

the family they are born into. Hana Wirth-Nesher understands the tradition of the “literary orphan” as a result of increased individual freedom after the fall of feudalism:

Pip and Huck are born into a tradition of literary orphans who, by virtue of their not being limited by the rules and constraints of parents and kin, are free to seek spiritual surrogate parents and moral codes. The rise of the novel is in part a response to the newly found freedom of such individuals in the wake of feudalism. In a new society of shifting social classes, the roving orphan or picaro could create a past that suited his aspirations rather than his blood ties. (1986, 260)

If the main theme of the bildungsroman is the fashioning of modern identity, that is, an identity that is not dictated by birth and inheritance but the result of choice and experience, then the orphan is a perfect incarnation of the modern individual.

It has been noted that the protagonists of the Four classics are untypical for their sex and that what I have called psychological androgyny is presented in a positive light. I do not have a good explanation for this, but it might be related to individualism and identity formation. We have seen a decline in the importance of socially defined roles in the characters’ sense of identity. They discover that their identities are not determined by their social class, their profession (unless they want it to be), or the geographical place they come from. Wilhelm Meister, for instance, first assumed that his own and the aristocracy’s identities were strongly tied to their social roles, but discovered that people’s identities to a large extent can be decided by their own actions and choices. Gender roles are likewise socially constructed, and can therefore be questioned. The heroes and heroine of the Four Classics are in a position, at least to some extent, to adapt existing gender roles to their own personality and desires.

I have aimed to show that many common features of the bildungsroman point to the genre’s emphasis on the individual: That the protagonist is a rounded individual rather than a type, that this person is capable of change, has an interior life, has a voice in the novel, is ordinary rather than a perfect model, and is an orphan. But the most important link between the bildungsroman and the “new” individual of the modern age is the identity formation process portrayed in it. Choosing one’s occupation, marriage partner, and beliefs is a radically new development in human history, and one that is still not shared by the majority of the world’s population. Many of the conflicts we see today over forced marriages, so-called “honor killings,” the custom of burning widows, etc. have to do with radically different ways

of viewing identity – as something belonging to and determined by the community/family, or as personal property and personal choice. I will now turn to the issue of the relationship between the individual and the Other, self and society.

## **Identity Development and the Other**

Human development is an ongoing dialectic between connection and separation, between relatedness and solitude. Any portrayal of the human condition and of identity that overlooks either pole shows us only half the picture. (Marcia 1993, 101).

Especially since the 1970s many critics have seen the genre as essentially individualistic and concerned primarily with the search for self. According to Susan Fraiman, for instance, *Wilhelm Meister* is the archetype of the male bildungsroman whose “fetishiz[ing]” of the hero has served to “define the genre in terms of a single heroic figure and to privilege an approach that emphasizes character” (Fraiman 1993, 10). This individualist view is reasonable given the historical development traced by social scientists, historians and anthropologists in Western societies since the mid-eighteenth century: The combined influences of Renaissance humanism, the Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment and the social changes wrought by industrialization are seen to have led to a new conception of individuality and increasing individualism. The novel, the biography and the autobiography are literary expressions of this increased focus on the individual in the West. According to Michael McKean, “[T]he emergence of the novel and the transformation of biography in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, profoundly express the modern discovery of the subject, of the autonomous subject” (McKean 1991, 17).

But Sandra Zagarell argues that, alongside the individualist novel – represented by the bildungsroman, among other types – the “narrative of community” (1988, 499) is also a strong tradition in Western literature. Such works

take as their subject the life of a community (life in “its everyday aspects”) and portray the minute and quite ordinary processes through which the community maintains itself



as an entity. The self exists here as part of the interdependent network of the community rather than as an individualistic unit. (Zagarell 1988, 499)

This type of fiction is obviously quite different from the bildungsroman, but Zagarell's main point is similar to my own: Namely that individualism in Western fiction has tended to receive more attention than community and belonging, and that this latter tendency is also strong. This is quite striking in the bildungsroman, which at least in the case of the novels selected here, rarely promotes selfishness or isolation, but emphasizes the importance of belonging and the role of others in the formation of the individual.

The Four Classics are about the identity formation of the main character and are therefore "individualist," but they present that formation as totally dependent on the goodwill, help, and psychological influence of others. Ian Watt's *Myths of Modern Individualism* (1997) offers some useful contrasts. He discusses Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan and Robinson Crusoe as representation of individualism, finding that early versions of these myths show selfish main characters who lack emotional ties to other people. Watt's main interest is whether individualism is condemned, accepted, or applauded in later versions of the same myths. But comparing his fifteenth-to-eighteenth-century representations of individualism with those of the Four Classics shows a striking contrast: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan and Robinson Crusoe are loners. Although they have parents and other family, they care little for them, and they do not marry or have children. While Watt's stories end with liberation and a self-centered and selfish individualism, the bildungsroman protagonists want attachment, albeit of their own choosing rather than those imposed by family or community. Liberation is only the first step in the process.

According to James Marcia, human development entails two opposite processes:

"We are going to have to hold as equally valid the two following statements. *Separating oneself from embeddedness in a relational matrix is a necessity for psychological development. Psychological development includes the establishment and maintenance of interdependent relational matrices*" (Marcia 1993, "Relational Roots," 109; italics in original).

The Four Classics tell the story of individuals who leave their familiar environment and go into the world to construct their own identity through the bonds they form with others.

Features 21 and 22 of the index show one of the apparent contradictions in the genre, in that secondary characters are both essential and secondary to the protagonist. The Four Classics make it clear that the growth of the protagonists is strongly dependent upon the efforts and influence of others. Particularly for the male heroes, the important formative experiences happen in interaction with other people. Whereas typical American success stories show success and happiness as the result of the exceptional efforts, talents, or personalities of the protagonists, in the bildungsroman, the outcome and the road that leads there depend on ties to others. Only in *Jane Eyre* is the heroine's determination and strength of character of prime importance.

The analyses of the four protagonist's identity development show the essential role played by others. In occupational development, the interpersonal domain of love, friendship, and sex roles, and the ideological domain of morality and philosophy of life secondary characters are vital. Intimacy, social skills, and emotions can only develop through relationships. In addition, minor characters are examples to be emulated, rejected, or just reflected on. They represent various occupational choices, social and sex roles, and philosophies.

As already mentioned, the bildungsroman starts with a separation from family. The most important secondary characters are rarely related to the protagonist (if they are, the relationship is not known). Unlike many people in pre-modern societies, these modern individuals are shaped by educators, companions and lovers, rather than blood relations. Had he entered his father's business, Wilhelm's first mentor might have been his father, and Pip was meant to spend his youth as his brother-in-law's apprentice. When parents are not dispensed with altogether in the Four Classics (because they are dead), they are, as noted, often bad nurturers and mentors. Good parenting, on the other hand, particularly in Dickens, is often provided by people who are not biological parents. This illustrates not only the declining role of family, but also the increasing importance of relationships entered into voluntarily, based on mutual feelings rather than obligation. Characters are free to replace unworthy and unloving family members with people who are not related but nevertheless provide the intimacy and care one would ideally want from family.

Both the index analysis and the thematic studies of the Four Classics show that bildungsroman heroes progress towards a positive view of family and community. Wilhelm, Jane Eyre, and David Copperfield all find the experience of having children and a loving partner essential both to their sense of identity and their happiness. That the genre starts by rejecting family and then embraces it at the end might seem contradictory. In reality it is not,

because it is not the same family or the traditional conception of family that is valued. It is family with a new meaning.

The historical development of the family is discussed by sociologist Anthony Giddens, who in *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991) claims that interpersonal relationships changed dramatically in the development from traditional to modern societies. Whereas in traditional societies people have close bonds because it is necessary and practical, modern relationships are motivated primarily by emotional needs. “Pure relationships” is Giddens’s term for these new friendships, love and family relationships, which are “not anchored in external conditions of social or economic life” (89). Characteristic of modern societies, pure relationships are entered into voluntarily, and maintained because they give personal satisfaction. They are reflexively organized, so that the parties constantly examine the relationship. They require commitment from those involved, mutual trust, and a conscious will to keep them going. Moreover, “The pure relationship is focused on intimacy” (94), which “is only possible between individuals who are secure in their own self-identities” (95). Modern families are not primarily practical, utilitarian institutions, but emotional, “pure” relationships. In traditional societies, family members were bound together by mutual dependence on each other. People played different roles, all necessary for the functioning of the family. Today, child-rearing and education have to some extent been taken over by institutions. Women do not have to marry out of economic necessity, and men can cook and clean for themselves. Family members need each other emotionally, and according to Giddens, that is the primary reason for the existence of the family today.

The Four Classics all show the beginning of this transition from externally-based relationships to pure relationships and demonstrate the most central characteristic of such relationships, whether love relationships or friendships, namely choice. The pure relationship is *chosen* voluntarily by the partners, rather than by the community, parents, or other external factors. The fact that it is “not anchored in external conditions of social or economic life” is particularly noticeable in the case of marriage, which in traditional societies is “a contract, often initiated by parents or relatives” (Giddens 1991, 89). Modern marriages, on the other hand, are based on love. The protagonists of the Four Classics all reject economic and practical reasons for marriage and search for love. This historical change is underlined by the number of misalliances in them: All the marriages at the end of *Wilhelm Meister* are social misalliances; the partners come from different social classes or *Ständer*; Jane Eyre marries a man from the aristocracy; and in *Great Expectations*, Wemmick marries his housekeeper. Although the son of a class-conscious woman from an old, distinguished family, Pip’s friend

Herbert marries the daughter of a common drunk and jokes: “What a fortune for the son of my mother!”.

What happens towards the end of the Four Classics is that characters find personal satisfaction in being part of one or more close, pure relationships. Wilhelm Meister finds friendship in the Society of the Tower, and a wife and son in Natalie and Felix. Jane Eyre finds the friendship of her cousins and marries Rochester, and they have children. David Copperfield has a large social circle, and finally marries Agnes and has children with her. Only Pip is formally unattached and childless at the end. He does, however, live with close friends who function as a family, and we know he has discovered the value of intimacy and is ready for a family of his own.

According to Erik Erikson, adolescence can be regarded “as a psychosocial moratorium during which the individual through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society, a niche which is firmly defined and yet seems to be uniquely made for him” (1980, 120). Their own unique niche is what all the protagonists long for, and all either find it or reach a point where they feel confident they will. The concept of identity domains is useful because it cuts the pie of identity into several slices, thereby pointing out that belonging has more than one aspect. Belonging has to do with family and friends, the important people in one’s life, geographical place, a job and social ties, and finally with the metaphysical and philosophical sense of being part of something larger than oneself. The interpersonal and ideological domains are important in all four books, in that all protagonists find emotional bonds to others to be important, and all find their own values and beliefs. The occupational domain, however, is quite variable. Some protagonists find occupational identity and work to be of prime importance, while others seem not to care that much. This is somewhat surprising, given the historical origins of the bildungsroman in the opening up of new possibilities for occupational choice for the middle class. Today, psychological research also finds profession and work to be of prime importance to people’s feeling of identity.<sup>35</sup>

Interpersonal bonds – Wilhelm’s to Felix, Natalie, and his new friends in the Society of the Tower; Jane Eyre’s to Rochester and her children – are important to their sense of belonging, of having found their proper niche in life. But belonging in these novels also means finding one’s place in the larger scheme of things, in life, or the universe. Both Erikson and Marcia mention religion and politics as important areas in the ideological domain. Neither is of much importance in the Four Classics; perhaps because religious and political beliefs

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<sup>35</sup> Kroger sums up much recent research on the importance of work (2007, 77, 101-103, 122-124).

tend to be organized (by political parties or churches), the adaptation of such beliefs might often be the result of merely accepting what is handed down (identity foreclosure) rather than personal exploration. Wilhelm Meister does reflect on religious issues, but ends up without any definable religious beliefs. Only Jane Eyre expresses religious beliefs by the end of the book. The protagonists of our novels largely reach their own very personal life philosophies. The books thus give a view of ideological formation as more individualized and less social than posited by Marcia. Although social influences are important, the end result is usually not a ready-made ideological “package” such as Catholicism or Existentialism. The protagonists of these novels all find themselves struggling for meaning, something that can make sense of things and make life feel comfortable. They illustrate the change to a modern world in which individuals are free to choose their own philosophy of life.

The formation of the bildungsroman protagonist starts with freedom or liberation. The hero or heroine liberates him- or herself from bonds such as parents, a restrictive father in *Wilhelm Meister*, cruel step-parents and boarding school in *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre*, poverty and a cruel sister in *Great Expectations*. The first stage of the formation process – the beginning of the moratorium – comes when they are liberated from whatever binds them at the start. They then go through the experiences discussed in the subsection on identity formation above, and the process ends with the establishment of commitments and social and personal bonds. I have presented the family as a declining, if not negative, force in many of these novels. But at the end, the family tends to be re-established as a positive value, which contributes to the circularity often remarked upon by critics. The bildungsroman can be regarded as a balancing act: From the beginning it has promoted the modern individual, while recognizing that that individual is thoroughly social, and can only come into existence through interplay with others. The genre is therefore profoundly two-sided: It insists on the freedom of individuals by marking the protagonists as orphans, and then sends them out to be shaped and molded, and finally to find themselves through others. Freedom is only found in belonging: The self is found through the Other.



## INTERLUDE: *THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN* (1885)

Although this study cannot give a detailed picture of the history of the bildungsroman in English over two centuries, I had hoped to make it more inclusive by adding at least one American example from the nineteenth century. Twain's *Huck Finn* was the obvious choice because, since Hemingway claimed that "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*" (qtd. in Chase 1957, 139), the novel has been hailed both as archetypically American and the prime example of the bildungsroman or novel of formation in America. However, the novel turned out to get a quite low score on the BRI. It is thus not a good example of a bildungsroman, but it might nevertheless illustrate an interesting aspect of the genre's history in the nineteenth century. For, while it would be a simple matter to find dozens of British novels from that century that are generally considered bildungsromans,<sup>36</sup> American equivalents are difficult to trace: *Huckleberry Finn* is the only novel regularly used as an example. Some of Henry James's novels are sometimes seen as belonging to the genre, but of these, only *Roderick Hudson* (1876) and *Portrait of a Lady* (1881) were published in the nineteenth century. According to Bettina Friedl, there was no novel of development in America until the emergence of fictive biographies of women and immigrants toward the end of the century (2001, 84). Given that the bildungsroman seems to have had trouble crossing the Atlantic, it is interesting to see how Twain uses the tradition to depart from it.

### Index Analysis

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has a low overall score compared to the classics, represented in the table below by *David Copperfield*. The weak thematic section is particularly notable, while the presence of certain bildungsroman traits in the protagonist and the narrative perspective and mode go some way toward explaining why it is often regarded as an American story of formation.

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<sup>36</sup> For instance Benjamin Disraeli's *Contarini Fleming*, (1832); Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham* (1828), *Ernest Maltravers* (1837) and *Alice; or, The Mysteries* (1838); Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853); and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, (1860) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

Table 29. Section results for *Huckleberry Finn* and *David Copperfield*

Section	Section	Max. points	<i>David Copperfield</i>	<i>Huck Finn</i>
1	Narrative perspective and mode	15	15	8
2	Characterization: Protagonist	15	15	10
3	Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	17	17	8
4	Topical story elements: Protagonist	26	26	8
5	Topical story elements: Secondary characters	9	8	4
6	Setting	5	5	2
7	Plot and Structure	28	28	2
8	Generic signals	4	3	1
9	Themes	29	27	10
	<b>Total score</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>53</b>

*Huck Finn* is focalized through the main character, but there is no shifting between narrator and character focalization, and it lacks the typical narrative distance that marks the bildungsroman: Temporal distance (retrospective narration), cognitive distance (narrator understands more than protagonist), and irony. Although Huck tells us about his past in the past tense, there is little difference in outlook between the two Hucks. He describes how his attitude to Jim changed, and how his moral sense won over the dictates of society, but Huck the narrator is basically the same person as Huck the character. In a pivotal moment, contemplating whether to send a letter informing Jim’s owner where he is, Huck faces a conflict between his social conscience and his gut feelings:

I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I’d got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:

“All right, then, I’ll *go* to hell”—and tore it up.

It was awful thoughts and awful words, but they was said. And I let them stay said; and never thought no more about reforming. I shoved the whole thing out of my head, and said I would take up wickedness again, which was in my line, being brung up to it, and the other warn’t. And for a starter I would go to work and steal Jim out of slavery again; and if I could think up anything worse, I would do that, too; because as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go the whole hog. (Twain 1992, 271; chapter 31)



The passage is highly ironic because *we* know that Huck is showing himself as more moral than the moral codes of his society, but *Huck* does not. As Arac points out, this effect is achieved by setting the novel about 40 years into the past, so that “everyone in the author’s world knows more and sees differently from everyone in the novel’s world” (2006, 844-845). Huck does what he *feels* is right, but without changing his *belief* that going against the rules of society and religion is “wicked” and that he really will go to hell. Contrasting *Huck Finn* and *Great Expectations*, Hana Wirth-Nesher says that “Pip can see his own past misunderstandings ironically, while Huck, still seeing the world from the same point of view ..., is the target of Twain’s irony” (266).

My analysis of the Four Classics supports Marianne Hirsch’s claim that in the bildungsroman “[t]he narrative point of view and voice ... is characterized by *irony* toward the inexperienced young protagonist, rather than nostalgia for youth” (298). Twain’s book does have irony, but as in the extract above, the irony is the author’s rather than the mature protagonist’s, and it is directed at society and other characters rather than at the ignorant young hero. The effect of Twain’s strategy is that the reader sympathizes with the young innocent, and *Huck Finn* comes to express exactly that “nostalgia for youth” that Hirsch says is absent from the bildungsroman.

As a hero, Huck shares many features with the protagonists of the Four Classics: Although his father is alive at the beginning of the story, he is in effect an orphan, and his father dies during the course of the action. He is an only child without relatives, and he is basically good and helpful to others. He departs, however, from the English norm of being of middle-class background and average in personal characteristics. Huck is from the bottom of society, but this has not affected his personality in the way Dickens’s Pip, for instance, is affected by living in poverty. Huck is resourceful and full of self-confidence and can-do spirit, and in that sense both more active and more masculine than Wilhelm Meister, Pip, and David Copperfield, although he does cry on a number of occasions, and even dresses up as a girl.

In the secondary characters section, some differences between *Huck Finn* and the Four Classics are due to the fact that Huck is a child throughout his story. He is simply too young to contemplate a mature love relationship, marriage, and children. For the same reason, there is little point in providing him with exemplary relationships and marriages. Mentor and companion roles differ from those of the Classics, in which friends tend to be of the same age, while the educator is older, with more experience and authority. In Twain’s book, Huck seems to outgrow his friend Tom Sawyer. They become opposites, much like Wilhelm and Werner, but when Tom returns at the end, he wins Huck over again. Jim functions as both parent

substitute, companion (equal) and educator (authority), but he is problematic and ambiguous in all functions. I have chosen to give the novel points for “companion” rather than “educator,” although the reverse would also be possible. I chose companion because the novel seems so unwilling to give Jim the authority of a mentor. Even after Huck has been taught a powerful lesson about love and friendship by Jim and managed to “go and humble myself to a nigger” (194; chapter 15), the ensuing relationship is one of equality, rather than the more natural relationship between man and boy. Much of the time, Huck is the more resourceful of the two, and he often takes on a parenting role in relation to Jim. That is, of course, also part of the institutionalized relationship between master and slave.

Jim plays an important part in Huck’s moral and emotional development, which is why I have given the novel points for Feature 19, “Other character(s) essential in making protagonist change and grow.” On the other hand, the book seems to use a strategy, often employed by children’s books, of making the child not only a hero, but a hero who can accomplish more than the adults in the story. This is probably a strategy of wish-fulfillment, aimed to stimulate the child audience’s belief in itself and compensate for lack of power. The child hero who saves a parent, other adults, or even the world, is familiar from such different genres as fairy tales, children’s detective books, and super-hero comics. It feels good for a child to identify with a child protagonist who can outwit adults and solve almost all problems. But the combination of white boy hero and adult black male side-kick becomes problematic in a society in which black people are regarded as property and inferior to whites. Eventually, in the farce ending, Huck’s dream of being a hero is reduced to what it has to be in the real world: Mere childish games and make-believe. The defeat of Huck the hero is simultaneously the defeat of Jim, who fails to be given the power and humanity of an adult.

As regards characters of different social classes, *Huck Finn* has an even wider array than the Dickens novels. But although the novel is packed with characters and action, many are different from those typical of the bildungsroman. Indeed, they are more like the events and characters of the picaresque, a genre that differentiates itself from the bildungsroman by its lack of emphasis on the educational effect of experience. In the picaresque, the picaro serves as a pretext for showing the reader exciting episodes. In the bildungsroman, the episodes are not only important in themselves, but also because they offer the protagonist experience. The world, full of people and actions, is what causes the bildungsroman’s main character to develop.

The novel gets a low score for topical elements affecting the protagonist, only 8 points out of 26. The starting point for Huck’s story is similar to that of the Four Classics: The

principal character leaves home and goes into a larger world where he is confronted with new social groups and professions, learns new skills, and discovers things about society he did not know before. Most of the remaining typical story elements are missing, however. While bildungsroman protagonists tend to travel into society and learn and develop because of their experiences there, Huck's experiences make him reject society. He wants to stay who he is and live his life outside of ordinary society.

There are two important settings in the book: Huck and Jim's journey is marked by a sharp division between shore and raft. The shore is society with its laws, customs, and rules of behavior. The raft symbolizes a natural state in which man's natural goodness is not obstructed by artificial laws. The Four Classics also tend to set up a dichotomy between a narrow world, which usually belongs to childhood (and early-to-middle adolescence), and a wider, more various world which is that of the protagonist's education. While the world of adulthood and experience contains negative people and events, it is still portrayed as preferable to the world of origin. *Huck Finn* treats the small town that Huck comes from as part of society, and it is rejected along with all the other versions of culture and society.

Other ways in which *Huck Finn* departs from the other older bildungsromans looked at is its time-span and the age of the main character. The book says very little about Huck's childhood before the start of the plot, and it does not follow him from childhood to adulthood. (Although many readers would know more about Huck's childhood from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, which has nothing in common with a bildungsroman.) Huck is a boy at the beginning of the book and a boy at the end. He undergoes a change in moral outlook, but this cannot be described as reaching maturity. It is doubtful whether his development can be seen as the main theme of the novel, but some of the typical bildungsroman themes and motifs are no doubt important. Especially in his questioning of the moral issues and weighing of social norms against the feelings of his own heart, Huck shows himself as a typical bildungsroman protagonist.

The title of Twain's novel might indicate a bildungsroman, but as mentioned elsewhere, titles including the name of the hero or heroine are also a staple of the picaresque, and the addition of "adventures" is more common in that genre than in the bildungsroman. It is also typical of children's books. Amazon.com gives well over 400,000 hits for "the adventures of", including *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Tintin*, and *The Adventures of Beowulf*.

The clearest indication of *Huck Finn*'s departure from the Four Classics is its low score in the thematic section. I would not say that Huck's psychological and moral development is the main theme of the book, even without the addition of "from youth to adulthood." But even if the novel was given points for this feature, the section score would remain low, since the other subthemes and motifs are largely missing.

Table 30. Section 9 scores for David Copperfield and Huckleberry Finn

Features	Section 9: Theme, subject matter and motifs	Max. points	Copperfield	Huck Finn
82	The psychological and moral development of the protagonist from youth to adulthood (main theme)	3	3	0
83	Protagonist strives for liberation from the people he/she depends upon in childhood, their values, and their plans for his/her future	2	2	2
84	Search for new commitments to people and ideas	2	2	0
85	Tension/conflict/discrepancy between inner and outer worlds	2	2	2
86	Protagonist confronted with at least one philosophy or philosophical system	2	0	0
87	Learning through pain and loss	1	1	1
88	Development from false self-perception to self-knowledge	2	2	0
89	False idealism gives way to acceptance of reality	1	1	0
90	Fate and chance	1	1	0
91	Free will	1	1	1
92	Death and grief	3	3	0
93	Love, relationships, and marriage	3	3	0
94	Portrayal of society	2	2	2
95	Social criticism	2	2	2
96	Family becomes at theme at the end	2	2	0
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>10</b>

In my opinion, *Huck Finn* is inspired by several different genres, the most prominent of which are the bildungsroman and the picaresque. It also has traits of children's novels and the American tall tale, and Arac also finds passages of "backwoods pastoral" (2006, 844). The combination of Huck and Jim is reminiscent of such unequal pairs as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, but their closeness and the fact that Jim brings about a moral change in Huck belongs to the bildungsroman, not the picaresque. Many other events of the novel, however, have little influence on Huck, and are there because Twain wants to give the reader a picture of life on the American Frontier before the Civil War. This theme is more typical of the picaresque than the bildungsroman, and although there is social criticism in the book, there is also a nostalgia for the past and for childhood that is untypical of the bildungsroman. In the end, Huck wants to escape from civilization, rather than grow up, take on responsibilities, and find a place for himself in society. Comparing Huck to Dickens's Pip, Hana Wirth-Nesher

points out that Huck never accepts moral responsibility for Jim the way Pip does for Magwitch: “Jim’s freedom comes about through a manipulation of the plot that gets Huck off the hook ethically, that permits him to maintain his cherished outsider status. The so-called new society of equals on the river amounts to nothing but a gentle interlude on the way to cherished amoral solitude and self-reliance” (264).

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* does have formal and thematic features of the bildungsroman, as well as many of its typical characters and events. It is therefore understandable that critics have noticed the resemblances between this novel and the bildungsroman. Nevertheless there are also important differences. The narrative only covers a short period of Huck’s life, and does not take him into adulthood. The moral change in him is likely to persist, but it affects only a small part of his identity. He is too young to have learned much about love and relationships, and too young to make any lasting commitments. Maybe that is why the ending has Huck and Tom Sawyer playing games with what should be important issues: They are after all only children, not ready to think or act like adults. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is not a bildungsroman but a novel with that uses traits of the genre.

*Huck Finn* has become so central to the American literary canon partly because of the way it uses elements from older traditions to shape a kind of novel that is different from all the various precursors and distinctly American. While the European bildungsroman takes care to balance a whole range of different concerns – both in form and content – Twain is more free and careless, and more extreme in his views. Instead of balancing youth and maturity, individual and society, freedom and conventions, as the Four Classics do, Twain unabashedly supports youth, the lone individual, and freedom. Huck’s starting point is also different: While Huck wants to escape the civilizing and abuse of society (embodied by his father and Widow Douglass), his European counterparts want to belong to a better community than the one they come from – in the case of Pip and Wilhelm, to a higher social class. But ironically, given the more individualist focus of Twain’s book, “Twain does not show human beings making their history” (Arac 2006, 409). Neither Huck nor Jim does anything of consequence for their own lives. The ending of Twain’s book is at least as disputed as those of the Four Classics, and as in the case of *Wilhelm Meister*, it partly concerns the contrast between serious content and a farcical ending. In the end, there is fundamental doubt in *Huck Finn* about people’s ability to control their lives, and about whether compromise between individual and society is at all possible.



## CHAPTER 5. TWENTIETH-CENTURY NOVELS

This chapter analyses three twentieth-century novels, one British, one American, and one Canadian. Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* and John Irving's *The Cider House Rules* were written after WWII, while *Of Human Bondage* was started in the 1890s and published in 1915. The aim of the chapter is twofold: Firstly, I want to show that there are novels from the twentieth century that are very similar to the classics. Secondly, these modern novels will be used for an investigation of the development of the genre after its classic phase.

Part of the aim of my project is to ascertain whether novels resembling the classic bildungsromans have in fact been written since the First World War, the time around which many theorists believe it to have ended. I have selected novels that are likely candidates for inclusion in the genre. *Of Human Bondage* is often described as a bildungsroman, while *The Diviners* and *The Cider House Rules* are books that struck me as having a close connection to the classic genre, but I have not seen this mentioned very often in criticism of them. *The Catcher in the Rye* is often considered a bildungsroman in the United States, but not elsewhere, and is therefore an interesting test case. However, *Catcher* scores only 49 points on the BRI. It is thus too different from the Four Classics to be regarded as a bildungsroman and is therefore discussed in an Interlude after this chapter.

The three novels are analyzed in the same way as the Four Classics, that is, first using the BRI and then focusing on the theme of identity development. The analyses focus on how the novels resemble and differ from the older works. How have form and structure altered in the twentieth century? Is the process of identity formation similar throughout the period, or do fundamental changes occur? This is particularly relevant for the two novels written after the onset of postmodernist tendencies in Anglo-American literature in the 1960s. Do the novels manage to combine tradition with innovation? And are the concepts of maturation and identity also valid for so-called postmodern authors such as Fowles and Auster?

As in the preceding chapter, the novels are discussed in chronological order. In the analysis based on the BRI, particular attention is given to focalization and narration, presentation of consciousness, the protagonist's gender identity, and the role and characterization of minor characters. Topical story elements, setting, and generic signals are largely left unexplored, while the plot and structure section is given considerable attention.

Many of the features of Section 9, “Theme, subject matter and motifs,” are discussed in the second half of the analyses, the identity-development part.

Here are the detailed scores for *Of Human Bondage*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Diviners*, and *The Cider House Rules*.

Table 31. Full scores for *Of Human Bondage*, *The Diviners*, and *The Cider House Rules*

Section 1	Narrative perspective and mode	Max. Points	<i>Of Human Bondage</i>	<i>The Diviners</i>	<i>The Cider House Rules</i>
1	Focalization shifts between narrator and protagonist (whether 1 <sup>st</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> person)	3	3	0	3
2	Access to protagonist’s consciousness	2	2	2	2
3	Retrospective narrative (1 <sup>st</sup> person or omniscient)	2	2	2	2
4	Narrator understands more than young protagonist	2	2	2	2
5	Ironic attitude to young protagonist	2	2	0	0
6	Plot combines action and reflection	2	2	2	2
7	Verisimilar novel: Portrays existing world realistically	2	2	2	2
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>
Section 2	Characterization: Protagonist	Max. points	<i>Bondage</i>	<i>Diviners</i>	<i>Cider House</i>
8	One main character	1	1	1	0
9	Protagonist is a round character, not flat	1	1	1	1
10	Protagonist is dynamic; changes in the course of the novel	2	2	2	2
11	Protagonist is an only child	1	1	1	1
12	Protagonist is an orphan or	2	2	2	2
13	Fatherless or	or 2	0	0	0
14	Parent dies in the course of the novel	or 2	0	0	0
15	Only one or no (known) living relatives	1	0	1	1
16	Of middle-class background	2	2	0	0
17	Ordinary (not particularly talented or untalented)	2	2	0	2
18	Protagonist is basically good and willing to help others	2	2	2	2
19	Male protagonist: Relatively passive, uncertain about goals, leaves decisions to chance or other people	1	1		1
20	Female protagonist: Relatively active, has strong goals, makes decisions easily	or 1		1	
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>
Section 3	Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	Max. points	<i>Bondage</i>	<i>Diviners</i>	<i>Cider House</i>
21	Other character(s) essential in making protagonist change and grow	3	3	3	3
22	Other characters more important in their relationship to protagonist than in their own right	1	1	1	0
23	Important educator(s)	3	3	3	3
24	Important companion(s)	2	2	2	2
25	Important lover(s)	3	3	3	3



26	Other characters' love relationship as exemplary or as contrast to protagonist	1	1	1	1
27	Other characters' marriage as exemplary or as contrast	1	1	1	1
28	At least one important character from lower, middle, and higher social classes	3	3	3	3
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>
Sec- tion 4	Topical story elements: Affecting protagonist	Max. points	<i>Bondage</i>	<i>Diviners</i>	<i>Cider House</i>
29	Experiences poverty	2	2	2	0
30	Experiences hunger	2	2	2	0
31	Goes to boarding school	1	1	0	0
32	Moves to big city or	2	2	2	0
33	Moves away from home or	or 2	0	0	2
34	Leaves home to go on journey	or 2	0	0	0
35	Introduced to new social groups, classes, and professions	1	1	1	1
36	Learns skills	1	1	1	1
37	Tries on particular role or roles	1	1	1	1
38	Falls in love	2	2	2	2
39	Has money problems	1	1	1	0
40	Is wounded or sick	1	0	1	0
41	Nursed back to health by parent substitute or loyal friend	1	1	1	0
42	Nurses other sick person	1	1	1	1
43	Adopted parent dies	2	2	2	2
44	Death of close relative or friend	2	2	2	2
45	Repents immoral or insensitive action	1	1	1	1
46	Rescued from emergency or cliffhanger	1	1	1	1
47	Gets inheritance at the end or	2	2	2	2
48	Loses prospective inheritance at the end	or 2	0	0	0
49	Gets engaged or married	1	1	1	1
50	Has children	1	1	1	1
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>18</b>
Sec- tion 5	Topical story elements: Affecting secondary characters	Max. points	<i>Bondage</i>	<i>Diviners</i>	<i>Cider House</i>
51	Serious crime such as murder	1	0	1	1
52	Dangerous or disastrous fire	1	0	1	0
53	Character seriously ill	1	1	1	1
54	Character becomes an invalid	1	0	1	1
55	Character ruined financially	1	0	1	0
56	Character dies (not close relative or close friend)	1	1	1	1
57	Funeral	1	1	1	1
58	Identity or family relationship outside protagonist's family revealed	1	1	0	1
59	Family secret of other family revealed	1	1	1	1
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>
Sec- tion 6	Setting	Max. points	<i>Bondage</i>	<i>Diviners</i>	<i>Cider House</i>
60	Setting for childhood scenes is countryside or provincial town	2	2	2	2
61	English-language novels: Setting after school-leaving age is capital or large city	3	3	3	0
62	German-language novels: Setting after school-	or 3			

	leaving age is one or more large houses (other than family home)				
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>
Sec- tion 7	Plot and Structure	Max. points	<i>Bondage</i>	<i>Diviners</i>	<i>Cider House</i>
63	Plot is primarily chronological	2	2	0	2
64	Main part of plot about period when protagonist is between 18 and 23 years old	3	3	0	3
65	Plot goes from childhood to adulthood (early 20s)	2	2	2	2
66	Inserted letter(s)	1	1	1	1
67	Inserted narrative: Other character's life story (brief)	1	1	1	1
68	Inserted narrative: Other character's life story (long)	2	0	0	2
69	Turning point, reversal: Protagonist experiences important defeat or failure	3	3	3	3
70	Journey toward the end of the book	1	1	1	1
71	Returns to childhood home after many years	1	1	1	1
72	Protagonist develops from self-centeredness to compassion and desire to be of use	2	2	0	2
73	Protagonist discovers tie to his or her family towards end	2	2	2	0
74	Protagonist learns to "see" at the end	3	3	3	3
75	Episodic structure that nevertheless forms a pattern at the end	1	1	0	1
76	Epigrammatic utterance by the protagonist at the end or just before	2	2	2	2
77	Projected ending: Protagonist finds a place in society (but expectation may not be met)	2	2	2	2
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>26</b>
Sec- tion 8	Generic signals	Max. points	<i>Bondage</i>	<i>Diviners</i>	<i>Cider House</i>
78	Book title includes the name of the protagonist	1	0	0	0
79	Book title includes the words "years," "life," "adventures," or "history"	1	0	0	0
80	Allusions to bildungsromans, typically <i>Jane Eyre</i> , <i>David Copperfield</i> , or <i>Great Expectations</i>	1	1	1	1
81	Indications from early on that this will be a life story	1	1	1	1
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
Sec- tion 9	Theme, subject matter and motifs	Max. points	<i>Bondage</i>	<i>Diviners</i>	<i>Cider House</i>
82	The psychological and moral development of the protagonist from youth to adulthood (main theme)	3	3	3	3
83	Protagonist strives for liberation from the people he/she depends upon in childhood, their values, and their plans for his/her future	2	2	2	2
84	Search for new commitments to people and ideas	2	2	2	2
85	Tension/conflict/discrepancy between inner and outer worlds	2	2	2	2
86	Protagonist confronted with at least one philosophy or philosophical system	2	2	2	0
87	Learning through pain and loss	1	1	1	1

88	Development from false self-perception to self-knowledge	2	2	2	2
89	False idealism gives way to acceptance of reality	1	1	1	1
90	Fate and chance	1	1	1	1
91	Free will	1	1	1	1
92	Death and grief	3	3	3	3
93	Love, relationships, and marriage	3	3	3	3
94	Portrayal of society	2	2	2	2
95	Social criticism	2	2	2	2
96	Family becomes at theme at the end	2	2	0	2
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>27</b>
	<b>Total score</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>123</b>

Table 32. Section scores for *Of Human Bondage*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Diviners*, and *The Cider House Rules*

Sections	Section names	Max. Points	<i>Bondage</i>	<i>Diviners</i>	<i>Cider House</i>
1	Narrative perspective and mode	15	15	10	13
2	Characterization: Protagonist	15	14	11	12
3	Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	17	17	17	16
4	Topical story elements: Protagonist	26	25	25	18
5	Topical story elements: Secondary characters	9	5	8	7
6	Setting	5	5	5	2
7	Plot and Structure	28	26	18	26
8	Generic signals	4	2	2	2
9	Theme, subject matter and motifs	29	29	27	27
	<b>Total score</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>123</b>

## ***Of Human Bondage* (1915)**

Published in 1915, *Of Human Bondage* stands at a crossroads in the history of the bildungsroman in two senses. Firstly, it was published at precisely the time that Moretti says marks the demise of the genre. Secondly, realism and naturalism were giving way to modernism, and the idea was taking hold that just telling a good story was “a debased form of fiction” (Maugham 1968, 28). It is interesting that John Fowles, Paul Auster, and John Irving – three of the five other twentieth-century writers to be discussed in this study – share with Maugham a love of storytelling and a wish to appeal to a broad audience. *Of Human Bondage* shares Brontë’s and Dickens’s focus on plot, character, and telling a good story, and Maugham has shown his familiarity with Dickens by writing an introduction to *David Copperfield* (and Irving has written an introduction to *Great Expectations*, a book Fowles taught at university).

Maugham started writing *Of Human Bondage* in the 1890s and revised it several times. On publication, the critical reception “varied from condescension to disapproval” (Loss 1990, 9). Many reviewers found it immoral or, like *The Dial*, saw in it only “a most depressing impression of the futility of life” (qtd. in Spence 1951). In the course of the 1920s, however, the novel became a popular bestseller, and critical opinion also turned. According to Archie Loss, “Maugham is remembered today primarily for one work .... – *Of Human Bondage*” (1990, 88). Robert Calder says *Of Human Bondage* conforms closely to the apprenticeship pattern described by Susanne Howe (1992, viii). It is also termed a bildungsroman by Buckley (1974), Jeffers (2005), Jost (1969), Loss (1990), and Shaffner (1984), an indication that the BRI, at least in this case, reflects the critical opinion.

Maugham’s novel tells the story of Philip Carey’s road to adulthood, from the age of nine to almost thirty. The book starts with the death of his mother, and since his father is already dead, Philip is now an orphan. He goes to Blackstable to live with his aunt and uncle, who become his guardians. Philip is a timid boy, and throughout his years at boarding school he is continuously taunted because of his club foot. At seventeen, however, he starts making his own decisions about life. He goes to Germany to study German, then to France to become a painter, and finally returns to London, determined to become a doctor. A long and expensive relationship with the selfish and cruel Mildred, combined with some unfortunate investments, lead to bankruptcy, and Philip has to give up medical school. He is rescued from starvation by the kind former patient Thorpe Athelny, who also finds him a job. When his uncle finally

dies, Philip comes into his inheritance and can resume his medical studies, feeling that his uncle's death has saved his life. Seven years after entering medical school, at 28 or 29, Philip is finally "really going to begin life" (661).<sup>37</sup> At the end he decides to marry Athelny's daughter Sally and start a family with her.

### **Index analysis**<sup>38</sup>

With a BRI score of 138 out of 148, *Of Human Bondage* is very similar to the Four Classics. Maugham's novel gets the full 15 points for "Narrative perspective and mode," since it is retrospective (told by an omniscient narrator), the narrator knows more than the protagonist, and there is ironic distance between narrator and main character. There is a combination of action and reflection, and the mode is clearly verisimilar. Philip Carey is also a conventional protagonist, apart from the minor point that he has more than one living relative for part of the story. The novel has almost all the traditional "Main events in protagonist's life," including hunger, which should perhaps be unlikely given Philip's solid middle-class background, but is fully justified by the plot. *Bondage* scores three and four points lower than the two Dickens novels on "Topical story elements: Secondary characters," which is partly due to a relatively low number of disasters befalling other people. On the other hand, Philip has more than his fair share of disaster. He is, for instance, financially ruined, and so does not need others' example to learn about that aspect of life. The novel has the usual bildungsroman settings and resembles the Classics in plot and structure. It gets the full 29 points for "Theme, subject matter and motifs." Measured by the index, this twentieth-century novel is very close to the nineteenth-century Classics, but there are differences that are not captured by the index.

### **Section 1**

While the British Classics are first-person narratives, *Of Human Bondage* is in the third person, told by a narrator who is sometimes fully omniscient, sometimes restricted to the perceptions of one character. Focalization shifts between the protagonist and the omniscient narrator, but other characters are sometimes given brief appearances as focalizers as well. The distance between narrator and protagonist is greatest in the early parts, and diminishes steadily in the course of the book. Maugham's novel shares all these characteristics with *Wilhelm Meister*, but there are a number of innovations.

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<sup>37</sup> As Loss points out, there are some internal inconsistencies in the dates and ages given (1990, 93-96).

<sup>38</sup> Since full scores are given at the beginning of the chapter, they will not be repeated here..

When secondary characters are focalizers in *Wilhelm Meister*, it is usually to supply information Wilhelm does not have. In *Bondage*, minor characters are sometimes used as focalizers in order to put Philip's thoughts and emotions in perspective, and show how people are unaware of each other's interior life. When he leaves for France, for instance, his aunt "stood at the door of the carriage, trying to keep back her tears. ... Her heart was dreadfully heavy" (198). Her thoughts are given in narrated monologue: "It was natural enough that he should be eager to go, she thought" (198). Mrs. Carey's feelings are then contrasted with Philip's: "But Philip ceased to think of her a moment after he had settled down in his carriage. He thought only of the future" (198). In this way, Philip's callousness and self-preoccupation are brought out, and the narrator does not resort to the kind of overt evaluation that *Wilhelm Meister* is full of. Nor does he invoke humanity in general, but keeps his focus on Philip as an individual.

At other times, the narrator's presence is overt, and irony is achieved through direct comment and explanation. The narrator seldom addresses the reader directly, as Goethe's narrator does, but he distinguishes between his own "objective" view and Philip's more or less faulty impressions. On first arriving in Paris, for instance, Philip is shown two of Mrs. Otter's portraits, "and to Philip's inexperience they seemed extremely accomplished" (200). The room he rents is described as ugly and dingy, but to "Philip the room seemed quaint and charming" (199). In this way, the narrator creates distance between himself and Philip and is able to point out his mistakes and naivety to the reader.

In the course of the novel, the narrator's attitude to Philip changes: From being marked by distance, irony, and dissonance in the first half, the narrative becomes more and more sympathetic to Philip. Focalization increasingly stays with the hero, and "consonant psycho-narration" (Cohn 1978) makes the views and feelings of the narrator seem in accord with the character's. Philip's reaction to Flanagan's paintings, for instance, is described in the following manner:

They showed in fact an astounding cleverness. The difficulties had been avoided with skill, and there was a dash about the way in which the paint was put on which was surprising and even attractive. Flanagan, without knowledge or technique, painted with the loose brush of a man who has spent a lifetime in the practice of the art. (270-271)

The evaluative elements – “astounding,” “with skill,” “dash,” “attractive” – seem to be Philip’s, but they could also be the narrator’s. There is no irony here, and we cannot separate the narrator’s opinions from Philip’s. This extract stands in marked contrast to the irony with which the narrator presented Philip’s reaction to the other paintings at the very beginning of his Paris period, 70 pages earlier. The difference is an indication that Philip’s opinions are approaching the norm of the narrator: He is on his way to maturity.

The change to more consonant narration and Philip as center of consciousness takes place gradually in the Paris chapters. After his return from France, the narration becomes almost consistently consonant. The philosophical speculations he now engages in mark the beginning of a more persistent convergence of narrator and hero, and thus a shift from authorial to figural narration. We get no more asides about Philip’s inexperience; rather, Philip becomes more self-conscious and capable of reflecting on his shortcomings, psychological inadequacies, and his frustrating conflict between reason and emotion. Throughout the painful relationship with Mildred, Philip himself is fully aware of her faults and his own unreasonable behavior, and the narrator refrains from comments and interpretations behind Philip’s back.

In *The Art of Fiction*, Maugham discusses advantages and disadvantages of omniscience versus first-person narration, and holds up Henry James’s method as an improvement on both: “In this the author is still omniscient, but his omniscience is concentrated in a single character” (1968, 21). In the course of *Bondage*, Maugham gets closer and closer to the “center of consciousness” type of third-person narration, but without abandoning the overt omniscient narrator altogether. In addition to explanations and summaries of thoughts and events – which imply an after-the-fact perspective that the protagonist does not have – the narrator at times also enters the minds of other characters, although this is done sparingly. Examples include a few glimpses of the abominable Mildred’s thoughts. These are remarkable in that they merely confirm the external view of her as a despicable, immoral person. There are also a few cases in which other characters’ thoughts are related in order to show the negative effects of not talking openly with others. The doctor who writes Cronshaw’s death certificate, for instance, would like to help Philip financially, but is embarrassed to broach the topic of money. So, although Philip is the primary focalizer for the second half of *Bondage*, shifting to other character or narrator focalizers allows Maugham to complement Philip’s views with other perspectives or information he does not have.

According to Dorrit Cohn, “[f]or writers seeking to present the most complex inner adventures in the most direct possible manner, the consonant techniques in third-person narration offer obvious advantages over the retrospective [first-person] techniques” (1971, 172). Brontë and Dickens use retrospective first-person narration, and the development of the protagonist is seen partly in the distance and difference between the young and older versions of him or her. Maugham uses distance in a similar way in the first half of his novel, but in the consonant narration of the second half, the tension is internal – inside Philip’s consciousness. The process of development is not just a before-and-after contrast, but the struggle of a consciousness with itself. Pip understands, and then changes, but for Philip, understanding is not enough. Reason does not automatically lead to changes in emotions and behavior. He has to struggle hard to subject his emotions and behavior to his reason.

*Of Human Bondage* is clearly a verisimilar novel. Loss places the book squarely in the Realist period, and also sees a touch of naturalism in its “emphasis on the most unpleasant aspects of life” and because it is “heavily deterministic” (1990, 77). This is in fact the only straight realist work in my sample. It is free of unlikely coincidences and secret benefactors. Only the ending has been deemed implausible by some critics.

Maugham uses third-person narration, as Goethe did, but his consciousness-revealing techniques are more advanced and the depiction of the hero’s inner life is given more importance. While the Four Classics have a distance between narrator and protagonist that gradually diminishes as the story of the past approaches the time of narration, Maugham goes further in approximating narrator and character toward the end of the book. More is made of the difference between public and private, and conscious and unconscious, than in the British first-person novels.

### ***Sections 2-6***

Philip is a typical bildungsroman hero with the usual family background and personal qualities. He is basically good and always willing to help others, and this goodness in fact becomes one of his most interesting qualities. He has a clear masochistic tendency, discussed below, which sometimes induces him to be “good” in order to feel superior to others. But he also develops from egocentrism to true compassion and caring. The hero, who Loss says “is not, in a sense, a hero at all” (1990, 5), was on the novel’s publication described as “a weakling” and “a poor fool” (Weiss 1973, 68), a typical description of a male bildungsroman protagonist. But there is less androgyny in Philip and *Bondage* itself than in the Four Classics.



While Susan Howe thinks bildungsroman protagonists typically have “exceptional powers of mind and spirit” (qtd. in Calder 1991, xiii), the BRI regards them as middle-class and ordinary. Admitting that Wilhelm Meister makes a similar choice, Calder still sees Philip as “almost unique among such figures in choosing domesticity and a modest occupation over the pursuit of experience, exoticism, and art” (Calder 1991, xiii). I disagree. I have argued that the heroes of three of the Four Classics are ordinary, while *Jane Eyre* is exceptional, at least for her time. Consequently, my claim is that Philip is perfectly traditional in this respect. Like Wilhelm Meister, one of the illusions Philip abandons in the course of his development is the belief that he has special artistic talents. His choice of “domesticity and a modest occupation” is also made by Pip and David Copperfield.

Secondary characters in *Bondage* are complex and multifaceted. A few come across as Dickensian types, that is, representatives of a particular profession or kind of person. Philip’s uncle, for instance, conforms to Philip’s and the reader’s expectations, showing himself as self-absorbed and lacking in empathy until the end. Yet, as the retired vicar realizes that death is approaching, Philip discovers weaknesses and fears in him that he had been unaware of, and comes to see the old man in a more human light. This experience is one Philip has repeatedly. Most of the characters he gets to know surprise him at some point, and he realizes they are more complicated than he first thought. Griffiths, for instance, is both the caring nurse who devotes days to seeing to Philip’s every need when he is sick, and the callous flirt who deliberately seduces Philip’s girlfriend and then dumps her, leaving Philip to clean up the mess. One of the few consistently one-dimensional characters is Mildred, who remains bad from start to finish.

The most important minor characters in the novel play the roles of educators, friends, and lovers. Mentors and friends represent a way of life or life philosophy, much as in *Wilhelm Meister*. Hayward and Weeks, for instance, represent idealism and realism respectively. Minor figures also introduce Philip to a group or community that he can choose to belong to for the long term. In Paris, his artist friends accept Philip into their community and bohemian life style, even as they individually stand for different approaches to art and life. Foinet, the art teacher who tells Philip honestly that he does not have the talent to be a first-rate painter, has a tiny part in the novel, but nevertheless plays a pivotal role in Philip’s choice of direction. Cronshaw’s talk of the pattern in the carpet helps Philip create meaning in his life. Both men help Philip understand something that was already maturing in him. With the exception of Thorpe Athelny, few mentors or teachers have long-term guiding roles and close emotional relationships with Philip.

Athelny becomes both mentor and father substitute, and in both roles he is essential for Philip's development. Athelny is a composite of honesty and grandiosity, benevolence and misogyny, and his marriage and life style are untraditional for a man of middle-class background. Originally married to a rich woman, he chose to divorce her and live as the common-law husband of a strong, active woman from a Kentish farming village who has borne him nine children. Their sex-roles are strictly traditional, and his wife bears sole responsibility for the home. Although Loss calls Athelny's domestic arrangements "domestic hedonism" (71), an order "focused on the satisfaction of his needs" (71), Athelny's contribution to his family is the dreary, exhausting low-status job he holds in order to support them. He has rejected the sophisticated pleasures of the middle class for a life of hardship and love, work and simple pleasures.

Mildred is a psychologically realistic character, but also bad to a degree worthy of Dickens. Although a virtually endless list could be compiled of her negative qualities, she comes across as believable, perhaps because she is bad in such an individual way. Mildred does not conform to any ideals of turn-of-the-twentieth-century womanhood: She is not good-looking and her personality is extremely unpleasant. Philip finds her "heartless, vicious and vulgar, stupid and grasping" (388), which are negative personality traits for women and men alike, but several critics have noted her androgynous looks, especially the "narrow hips and the chest of a boy" (306).<sup>39</sup> She has no motherly instincts, and when her daughter is born, Philip is "startled at the callousness with which she insisted on getting rid of it so soon" (404). Housework is not agreeable to her either, and she is a terrible cook. As a wife, she is just as useless in practical matters as David Copperfield's Nora.

As Jerome Buckley points out, bildungsroman heroes usually have "at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting" (Buckley 1974, 17). In *Of Human Bondage*, this traditional wrong woman/right woman dyad is constituted by Mildred and Norah Nesbit. In the Four Classics, the protagonists have to learn which of the options (women) presented to them is right for them. Maugham's pair is different because Philip knows from the start that Mildred is wrong. What he has to learn is to control his emotions, and "that self-control might be as passionate and as active as the surrender to passion" (503) and also makes for a better life.

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<sup>39</sup> Noted for instance by Calder (1992, x).

## ***Section 7. Plot and structure***

I have given *Bondage* points for “Main part of plot about period when protagonist is between 18 and 23 years old,” although the story takes Philip from the age of nine to his late 20s. What might look like a major departure from the classic pattern is on closer scrutiny just a small extension of the period treated. Summarily, the page distribution is as follows:

*Table 33. Relationship between number of pages and years of Philip’s life*

Age	pages	pages per year
9-18	100	11
18-23	400	80
24-30	200	33

Maugham’s novel follows the example of the British Classics in covering childhood from age 9 to 18, but using much less space on it than on the period from 18 to 23. Likewise, as the book approaches Philip’s thirtieth year, each year takes up less and less space. Instead of merely jumping ahead and narrating how it all turned out, as Brontë and Dickens do, Maugham lets us accompany Philip until he decides to marry, takes a permanent job, and generally decides the course of his life. There is a difference between this work and those of Brontë and Dickens in that Philip keeps developing until the very end, until he is almost 30. Of almost 700 pages, approximately 400 are nevertheless spent on the years from 18 to 23. The emphasis is thus on the same time period as in the other bildungsromans.

*Bondage* differs from the Four Classics in not having a long embedded narrative. It does, however, have several short ones. As we have seen, embedded narratives in the bildungsroman tend to be life stories, and their purpose is typically to illuminate aspects of the main characters’ life and life choices and make them understand themselves better. There is a range of life stories in *Bondage*, but most are incorporated into the plot itself, instead of being told or read. In this way, the fates of other characters are brought closer to the reader and to Philip, and the characters themselves assume more importance. There is, for instance, the sad story of Fanny Price, who sacrificed everything to be a painter, but had no talent and eventually starved to death. A whole string of people with great self-confidence and grand ideals come to nothing: The Spaniard Miguel, who “had everything to make a good writer but talent” (265); Clutton, who might be a genius or a hack, but is too terrified to show his paintings to ever find out which; and finally Cronshaw, with his picturesque cloak and poetry, who would have died in lonely misery if Philip had not taken him in.

Maugham starts the foreword to his book by admitting that it “is a very long novel” (1). Part of the reason it is so long is no doubt his inclusion of the lives of so many minor characters, which accentuates the story’s concern with personal experience. Words and ideas are repeatedly shown to be less important to people’s actions and development than personal, emotional experience. Seeing Fanny Price’s emaciated, dead body has an altogether different effect on Philip than merely hearing of people’s good or bad fortune. Advice from his uncle also had little effect. After his Paris experience, Philip tells his uncle that “one profits more by the mistakes one makes off one’s own bat than by doing the right thing on somebody’s else advice” (291). It might be to illustrate this lesson that the book is also more concerned with actual experience than with stories. Perhaps Maugham’s book shows less confidence in the power of stories to offer insights, make people see themselves, and eventually, to change, than do the Four Classics. *Bondage* puts life over literature, experience over example.

Philip Carey experiences two dramatic reversals of fortune: Firstly, the end of his attachment to Mildred, and secondly, the economic loss that forces him to give up medical school. Managing to free himself from Mildred is a long process that leads to intense feelings of loss and defeat. Afterwards, Philip has a period of calm, but the second disaster – economic ruin – leaves him even more shattered and miserable than the first. This period breaks him down in several ways. He loses his membership of the upper middle class and becomes a white-collar worker. He loses his identity as a medical student, and can no longer identify with what he does. Thus his sense of who he is must be supplied by something else. He loses his belief that the world is basically a good, safe place and that things will eventually work out. This is an experience bordering on the loss of what Erik Erikson calls “basic trust” (e.g. Erikson 1994, 96-107), which is essential for our psychological health and ability to cope with life. Finally, he loses his sense of life having meaning. These are all serious losses, and we may ask how much identity he has left at this stage.

Luckily, these reversals lead to positive changes as well. Being rescued by Athelny and his family alerts him to the importance of goodness and other people in his life. The Athelnys let Philip feel what living in a family can be like, and their natural generosity and compassion make it possible for him – for the first time in his life – to expose his weaknesses. This is an emotional turning point, which influences him both psychologically and philosophically. Living with other shop workers makes him more tolerant and aware of the suffering of others.

*Bondage* consists of episodes that form a pattern of development at the end, but it lacks the slightly haphazard, picaresque qualities of *Wilhelm Meister* and *David Copperfield*.

It is structured around a series of life periods, each with its own specific concerns and lessons. The symbol of the Persian carpet functions as a unifying device: It alerts the reader to the persistence of Philip's search for meaning and adds an element of patterning to the novel.

The last seven features of the Plot section have to do with the ending of the book, and some of these will be discussed in relation to identity development below. "Learning to see" in *Bondage* comes in phases, and the first phase is Philip's art studies. When his uncle asks him if his time in Paris has been wasted, Philip says no:

"I learned to look at hands, which I'd never looked at before. And instead of just looking at houses and trees I learned to look at houses and trees against the sky. And I learned also that shadows are not black but coloured." (292)

This might be taken as an insolent answer, but Philip's training has actually taught him to see the external world. He has seen that observation must be learned and developed, and that art teaches this better than anything else. Back in Blackstable again, he realizes that "[t]wo years in France had opened his eyes to the beauty of his own countryside" (293). A more important and symbolic eye-opener occurs right at the end of the novel, when Philip realizes he wants a wife, children, and an ordinary life (chapter 122).

There are four journeys towards the end of the book: Philip's return to the vicarage to bury his uncle, and again to settle his estate, his journey to the island of Farnley to work, and finally going hop picking with the Athelnys. Back in Blackstable for the funeral, Philip finds a letter from his mother announcing his own birth to his uncle. The letter gives him a strange feeling of conversing with the dead, but it is also the only bond to his mother he has ever had. On his second visit, he goes back to his old school and is left echoing Wilhelm Meister's words after leaving the theater: "It seemed to him that all those years, vanished beyond recall, had been utterly wasted" (642). Philip feels human existence is futile: "Each generation repeated the trivial round" (642). At Farnley, however, Philip is the youthful optimist compared to the older Dr. South. The final journey to Kent to visit the Athelnys again gives Philip the chance to experience the joys of family life. He goes swimming with the children and gets on well with them. This experience is probably a major reason why he starts wanting a family for himself.

Philip's epigrammatic utterance is taken from *Wilhelm Meister*, and it is a thought rather than a spoken statement: "America was here and now" (699). When Sally reveals that she is not pregnant, and Philip realizes he is free to travel and does not have to marry her,

what he feels is dread, despair and emptiness. He realizes that what he wants is a wife and family, not adventure and foreign cities.

*Bondage* ends happily in marriage and with Philip feeling he has found his place in life and in society. The ending can be seen as forced and idealized, but is nevertheless more “realistic” than the overwrought, implausible ending of *Wilhelm Meister* and partly the British Classics as well. A new perception of realism is at work in this novel, which does not allow for the kind of ending that solves all problems and mysteries and reveals that everybody is really related to everybody else. On the other hand, the novel has a very strong sense of ending: Not only does Philip marry, finish his education, and get a job as a doctor, but his identity development has come full circle. He realizes what Cronshaw meant by his bit of Persian rug; the episodic structure of the book thus comes together to form a pattern, for Philip as well as the reader.

## **Identity development**

The most salient identity areas for Philip Carey are work, the interpersonal domain (friendship, love and sex roles), and philosophy of life. As mentioned before, “adolescents do not resolve or work on all issues simultaneously” (Grotevant et. al. 1982, 35). In Philip’s case, one or two identity domains tend to take precedence at a time. In the following, I will discuss Philip’s childhood first, then move on to his development in the various identity domains. Since his ideological development lasts the longest, I will treat that one last.

### ***Early development***

Philip has a difficult childhood after the death of his mother, a fact many critics have used to explain his problems in youth and early adulthood. Two different articles in the *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* diagnose Philip as masochistic (Weiss 1973, Barbara 1974). According to Dominick Barbara, masochism “is also applied to self-induced psychological suffering such as shame, humiliation, and rejection, not necessarily connected with sexual intercourse” (1974, 73). Thus defined, “masochistic” is an apt description of Philip’s relationship with Mildred. Describing Philip’s masochism as “mild” and not of the sexual type (1973, 74-75), Frederick Weiss attributes the problem to overprotection by his mother followed by “rejection and humiliation” (1973, 75) by his foster parents and his peers in school. The result is that Philip hates and despises his own self, even as he has an idealized image of himself as special and better than others. In order to become a healthy, happy person

with a firm sense of identity, Philip has to rid himself of this detrimental pattern – now often called self-defeating personality disorder – as well as go through normal identity development. He also has to free himself of the urge to passively increase his sufferings and start acting in his own best interest.

Philip's moratorium starts in sixth form when he decides not to be a vicar like his uncle, not to apply to Oxford, and to leave school early. This is his first major act of self-assertion, and being allowed to go to Heidelberg is thus an important victory. In Heidelberg he starts a conscious search to find out who he is, what he believes, and how he fits into the larger scheme of things. His three months in Germany are marked by religious and philosophical questioning and a general opening up of the small world he had previously known. Being accepted by the other people at his lodgings also helps his self-esteem. In the summer he has his first taste of the mysteries of romance and love, and he and his uncle settle on a profession for him. The occupational, interpersonal and ideological identity domains have now all been brought onto the stage.

### ***Occupational development***

Back from Heidelberg at 19, Philip is no closer to knowing what occupation he wants to pursue. As a compromise with his uncle, he agrees to train to become a chartered accountant. The decision is reached without much reflection and primarily for practical reasons. Once in training, however, Philip quickly realizes that the work gives him nothing, does not agree with his natural talents, and that the kind of life and social world associated with it disgusts him. He has made a premature choice based on the practical and economic need to reach agreement with his uncle. He is thus still in diffusion in this domain.

His second choice of going to Paris to train as a painter is given more thought than the decision to be an accountant, but it is not solidly anchored in his nature or experiences either. It is based more on the romantic notions of the artist's life in Paris provided by Miss Wilkinson, with whom he had a summer romance when he was 19, than on any deep need to express himself through painting. The Paris period is nevertheless profoundly different from his accountancy training and much more fruitful. Whereas in London he had gone to work hating it and knowing he could never hold down this kind of job, in Paris he puts his whole being into what he is doing. It therefore affects his personality development in a way his training in London did not. In the London offices he endured in quiet rebellion; in Paris he tries to learn all he can, technically, intellectually, and socially. He acquires the identity of a painter, even though he is uncertain whether this is the best choice for him. He learns how

choice of profession determines other aspects of one's life, and sees that, as Foinet says, "[m]oney is like a sixth sense without which you cannot make a complete use of the other five" (282). As Calder remarks, Philip goes through a series of disillusionments in the novel, one of which concerns his romanticized notions of the bohemian life in Paris. At the end of his Paris period "he has learned what the bohemian life really entails" (1992, xvii).

Philip makes his decision to give up painting in a very different way from the important choices he has made before. He examines his situation carefully, focusing on reality rather than his dreams or ideals. His acquaintance with the talentless Fanny Price and Miguel Ajuria taught him that dedication is not enough, and that you cannot trust your own evaluation of your talent. Philip therefore gets a well-known painter and teacher to assess his work, and is told he will never be a great painter. Philip has now understood what Wilhelm Meister was told by Jarno, namely that "one should be wary of any talent that one cannot hope to bring to perfection" (Goethe 1989, 337). While Wilhelm resented being told, Philip has matured enough to value the judgment of others, and also seeks advice from Cronshaw and his friend Lawson. In addition, he sees several examples of what happens to second-rate artists: They become poor eccentrics, like the poet Cronshaw, or hang themselves like the talentless art student Fanny Price. This is not the kind of life Philip wants for himself.

As Randolph Shaffner has pointed out, the title of Maugham's novel comes from, the fourth book of Spinoza's *Ethic*, which is called "Of Human Bondage, or of the Strengths of the Affects" (Shaffner 1984, 41). Spinoza sees people's dependence on their emotions as "bondage" and proposes reason, the intellect, as the way out of enslavement. Giving up painting is evidence that Philip – in this one area at least – has realized that emotions are not the best guide. He understands he has to think through his options and evaluate the consequences of his choices. He can make rational choices that will increase his chances of having the kind of life he wants, rather than let his emotions lead him into a future he does not want, as has happened with Cronshaw and Foinet. Shaffner sees Philip's choice as liberation from the illusion of artistic talent (42) but it is also a release from bondage to an idealized image of oneself as gifted and special. Fanny Price's and Miguel Ajuria's error is to hold idealized images of themselves that have no basis in reality, and to do nothing to find the truth.

The careful rational process that made Philip give up painting seems forgotten when he makes his third career choice: Medicine. When his uncle asks him, he "had not made up his mind" and "had thought of a dozen callings" (292). Medicine seems a clever answer, and afterwards it "amused him to make up his mind in that accidental way" (292). Starting his



courses at the teaching hospital, he does not feel particularly dedicated to becoming a doctor, and soon gets bored. He tries to study hard, but soon his relationship with Mildred takes precedence. It is only when he starts working with patients as an out-patients clerk that he discovers he loves the work he has been training for. He is not so interested in theory and medical technicalities, but is immensely interested in people. He feels at ease with the poor patients who come to the clinic and discovers he has a talent for dealing with and them. He is trusted and liked. ““Perhaps,”” he thinks to himself at one point, ““perhaps I’m cut out to be a doctor. It would be rather a lark if I’d hit upon the one thing I’m fit for”” (459). Philip sees it as “a lark,” an ironic joke, the result of chance more than anything else.

When Philip has to give up his studies and work only to feed himself, he learns more about what he really wants; he finds himself living only for the future, when he can go back to his studies. Back at the hospital after receiving his inheritance, he feels happy and fulfilled: “The future was before him, rich with possibilities” (641). He likes the work and finds it deeply meaningful, but part of his reason for wanting to be a physician is that he wants to travel the world, working as a doctor in Spain and other places. It is only when the other aspects of his life fall into place – the ideological and interpersonal identity domains – that he really knows that being a country doctor is his proper calling.

Philip’s path toward a profession is thus rather haphazard, a practical trying out of various options, rather than a process of reflection followed by choice. This is also what happens in *Wilhelm Meister*; only when he has completed his training and is working at the theater does Wilhelm know enough to decide that it is not the right thing for him.

### ***Interpersonal development***

The development of that aspect of Philip’s identity that has to do with relations to other people is complicated and somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, the novel shows a progressive development in Philip from idealism toward realism and isolation toward companionship and intimacy. On the other hand, this positive process of development is periodically halted or even reversed by deep-seated psychological problems that probably have their roots in his childhood. Ambiguities remain at the end of the novel, and I find it doubtful whether Philip achieves a fully mature interpersonal identity. The following analysis contains a brief discussion of positive change and a longer treatment of Philip’s psychological problems and their improvement.

From the beginning of the novel, Philip suffers from low self-esteem and has difficulties in interacting with others. He is a very lonely child, and has only experienced one

friendship by the time he goes to Heidelberg. That friendship was dysfunctional as a result of his psychological problems, but in Heidelberg he becomes increasingly sociable and able to talk with a variety of people. In Paris he becomes part of a circle of friends who meet often and feel tightly knit, although Philip is not fully intimate in his dealings with his friends. He trusts himself sufficiently to be open and honest about many things, but he is not capable of sharing very personal thoughts and emotions.

Part of Philip's problem is that he wants himself, others, and his relationships with others to be perfect. He therefore suffers repeated disappointment in friendship as well as love. His fellow boarders in Heidelberg, Hayward and Weeks, represent realism and idealism respectively, and thus serve to illuminate this problem, which reaches its first full development in his romance with Miss. Wilkinson. On first meeting her – and later Miss. Price and Mildred Rogers – Philip has clear ideas about how love should be. He has a recurring daydream of meeting the perfect woman at a ball: They dance, realize they were made for one another, and go away to Paris together. The woman is beautiful, Philip has no club foot, and their love for one another is equally strong. In real life, he fails to feel the passion he longs for, and the women fall far short of his ideals. Although he does find passion in his relationship with Mildred, everything else in their relationship is totally contrary to what he wants. Philip is gradually disillusioned and has to come to terms with the way he, others, and life itself really are. It is a long and very painful process.

The most significant leap in interpersonal skills comes through his relationship with Norah Nesbit. By this time, Philip has become much more realistic in his perceptions of others as well as himself, and he is not looking for perfection in Norah. Rather he is able to enjoy her as she is, and she is the first person he relates to honestly and openly, without thinking about making an impression or hiding his weaknesses.

Learning intimacy and realism in his relationships with others, Philip repeats the lessons learned by the protagonists of the Four Classics. The primary difference between the latter and Philip lies in the detailed account of his psychological problems and their effect on his development. The novel presents the conflict between reason and emotions as Philip's principal problem, but critics wonder about the reason for Philip's irrational attraction to Mildred and tend to regard his emotions as expressions of psychological disorder, although they disagree about its exact nature.

Interestingly, analyses of Philip are found as much in psychology journals as in literary ones. In the *Journal of Individual Psychology*, Forrest Burt finds that Philip exemplifies what psychologist Alfred Adler calls "the pampered life style" (1970, 68).

Philip's memory of falling asleep in his mother's arms "describes ... a condition of complete happiness and contentment in which he is small, quite passive, and receiving and enjoying comfort" (67). Having been pampered and overprotected by his mother, Philip later becomes unable or unwilling to take responsibility for himself, trying instead to use his handicap and deprived childhood to get others to take care of him.

According to Frederick Weiss, it is lack of love and affection that makes Philip masochistically turn "against that self which he feels is hated or despised" (1973, 69). Overly sensitive about his club foot, he escapes into fantasy, and begins to develop "an idealized image of himself" as different and superior to the other boys in school (70), and also "the beginnings of a defensive, sadistic attitude" (70). For Joseph Dobrinsky, however, Philip's problem is primarily that he is a homosexual (1988). Calder sees a Realist preoccupation with heredity and environment, and thinks that "physical disability, pressures to conform, economic hardship, and domestic tyranny" give Philip "a host of deeply ingrained psychological handicaps" that he has to combat (1992, xv). Archie Loss diagnoses Philip as a masochist and voyeur (1990, 16) with homosexual tendencies (54).

Several of these interpretations place the origins of Philip's problems in his childhood, claiming that he lacks self-esteem and expects too much of others. As a schoolboy, he tended to efface and dislike himself, and, at the same time, to demand perfect friendship and complete loyalty from friends. His relationship with the boy called Rose illustrates this pattern. In Heidelberg and Paris, we see little of these tendencies, as kindness and acceptance help him build a core of self-worth. But his persistent vulnerability to criticism and ridicule emerges in his reluctance to break off his art studies because he fears being seen as a failure by his Paris friends. Back in Blackstable after Paris, he understands that the death of his parents has deprived him of the emotional ballast that could have made him more sociable and capable of expressing his feelings.

Until he meets Mildred, Philip has been developing in a positive direction, moving toward greater self-knowledge and better interpersonal relations. His obsession with her represents a pathological turn, which makes him gradually lose control over himself. That love has little to do with it is obvious from the start: Mildred is both unpleasant and ugly and only attracts Philip's attention because she is so exceptionally rude: "If she had treated him with civility he would have been perfectly indifferent to her" (30). But his sensitivity to criticism and ridicule makes him take what she says personally. He starts seeking her out in order to engage in psychological warfare with her. His interest develops into obsession, and

then he realizes what the “peculiar sensation in his heart” is (311): “He was in love with her. It was incredible” (317).

The intensity and extreme pain with which Maugham relates Philip’s obsession with Mildred have led critics to surmise that it must be based on Maugham’s personal experience. Calder says that “Mildred’s androgyny has led a growing number of people to believe that Maugham was recounting a painful and protracted homosexual liaison from his medical student days” (x). Whatever Maugham’s motivation, the affair with Mildred constitutes a return of the repressed for Philip, which has been prepared by other experiences after leaving Paris. Firstly, back in Blackstable, he is filled with dissatisfaction and confusion. As regards career possibilities, “he was still so undecided that he did not wish to speak of the future” (289). He has failed to find a girl friend, and his social life is back to zero. He finds his whole past life in Paris quite “futile” (289). He uses the break to study philosophy and sets out for London “eager to put into practice [his] new theories of life” (297). As he starts medical school, however, many negative thoughts and emotions resurface.

At St. Luke’s Hospital, his age makes Philip feel different from the other students, and listening to Griffith’s parties upstairs, he thinks of his Paris days and feels “sick at heart” (305). His work in medical school is “very tedious,” anatomy is “a dreary science,” and “he did not see the use of dissecting” (305). Loneliness returns too: “He made friends by chance, but not intimate friends, for he seemed to have nothing in particular to say to his companions” (305). His schoolboy desire for love and friendship coupled with passivity and low self-esteem also reappear:

Philip desired popularity but could bring himself to make no advances to others. A fear of rebuff prevented him from affability, and he concealed his shyness ... under a frigid taciturnity. He was going through the same experience as he had done at school.... (306)

His meeting with Mildred thus comes at a time when Philip is particularly vulnerable. He feels lonely, slightly depressed, socially inadequate, and generally dissatisfied with himself. He has given up his artist identity without putting a new one in its place. He does not feel part of a community, as he had in Paris.

According to Frederick Weiss, Philip is attracted to Mildred because “his masochistic character structure” makes him recognize her contempt for him as “the same contempt which he has for himself” (72). It is typical of people with masochistic disorders to seek out partners

who will hurt and humiliate them. Such treatment then makes the masochist feel better than the other, as he can demonstrate how nice, generous, and pleasant he is in spite of the horrible behavior of the other. He is a victim of the partner, and can hate the partner for being so cruel when he is so good in return. The pain the other induces simultaneously accomplishes two things: Firstly, it allows the masochist to feel bad because his partner's treatment confirms that he really is as despicable as he himself believes deep down. Secondly, the pain brings pleasure because the masochist gets to demonstrate his own goodness (Barbara 1974, Weiss 1973). The relationship between Philip and Mildred might seem strange because Philip sees her precisely as she is right from the start. His intellect knows she is an awful person, yet his emotions need her. As Calder says, "[t]he split in Philip [between reason and emotion] baffles readers who expect his attraction to Mildred to be conventionally romantic when it is actually driven by complex psychological needs arising from deeply rooted problems" Calder (1992, xix).

Philip "had thought of love as a rapture which seized one so that all the world seemed spring-like, he had looked forward to an ecstatic happiness" (319), but instead love becomes "a hunger of the soul," "painful yearning," and "bitter anguish" (319). Loving Mildred makes him a hapless victim of his own emotions, incapable of remedying the situation via reason. This is the climax of the novel's title theme of bondage to the emotions. According to Spinoza, "[t]he impotence of man to govern or restrain the affects I call bondage, for a man who is under their control is not his own master, but is mastered by fortune, in whose power he is, so that he is often forced to follow the worse, although he sees the better before him" (qtd. in Shaffner 1984, 41). Philip's problem is exactly that he sees the madness of his emotions but is nevertheless incapable of freeing himself from them.

I believe Philip's cure is effected through a combination of outer and inner forces, and that it happens in stages. After Mildred leaves the first time – to marry Emile Miller – the influence of other people brings about a complete transformation in him. Starting with the arrival of Hayward, his esthete friend from Heidelberg, Philip reverts to the person he was in Paris. He enjoys talking about art again, finds London and the weather stunningly beautiful, and when Lawson also arrives, his social life has almost reached its old heights. He also soon starts a relationship with Norah Nesbit that has all the positive qualities his obsession with Mildred lacked: The two are intellectual and social equals, talk openly with each other, and for the first time in his life, Philip has someone he can speak his mind to and who understands and supports him. This is a restorative and healing relationship that builds up his psyche and boosts his self-confidence. Norah loves him unconditionally and brings out his most positive

sides. The grumpiness, self-hate, and jealousy he experienced with Mildred disappear. And his education gets back on track, as he passes several exams that he failed while seeing Mildred.

Philip should thus be much stronger when Mildred appears again, pregnant and unmarried. Yet, his passion returns instantly and his love for Norah turns to disgust. This reaction is harder to explain than his first affair with Mildred, but might be related to his deep-seated beliefs about reason and passion. In one of his weekly philosophical discussions with Lawson, Hayward, and Macalister, Philip says reason means nothing in life and free will is an illusion (372). He also realizes he misses the “singular vigour” he felt when “he was under the influence of passion” (371). A second factor is that Mildred is nice to him at first, playing helpless and pleading for his assistance. This feeds his ego, and again he enjoys feeling good and noble. The sinister development of the relationship between him and Mildred further demonstrates that he is not yet cured of his self-defeating pattern.

This second period of Philip’s relationship with Mildred becomes even more horrible than the first. It is masochistic as much because it is painful as because it is self-defeating. Even at the start, Philip knows that Norah “was worth ten of Mildred” (387), but “he would rather have misery with the one than happiness with the other” (388). When the relationship finally ends, it is because Philip pushes Mildred and Griffiths together so that they can fall in love. As much else during this period, he does so because “a strange desire to torture himself seized him” (416). The passion, intensity, and “singular vigour” he had missed have all returned, but this time Philip recognizes that “‘It is awful, love, isn’t it? ... Fancy anyone wanting to be in love’” (426). Finally, Philip actually seems to comprehend that he does not want to live with this kind of destructive passion. If he is going to be free, he has to learn to master his emotions.

In addition to feeling the full horror of the suffering he has brought upon himself, a further element in his “cure” is the Athelnys and the El Greco revelation discussed in the Ideology section below. The Athelneys let Philip feel the pleasure of a being a family, sharing meals and small-talk, and ordinary, down-to-earth pleasures. El Greco’s paintings show him that controlling passions can be passionate as well. It is probably through these basic shifts in attitude that Mildred loses her power.

Although Philip becomes mentally healthy, I am uncertain about whether he becomes fully mature interpersonally. *Of Human Bondage* has an ambiguous attitude to the meaning and value of love which persists until the end. In the Four Classics, the main characters struggle to discover what kind of relationship they want, but they all have a deep desire for

love and marriage. Philip does not. He is interested in sex, but throughout the book, love and relationships either do not concern him, or he accidentally happens to be involved with someone. His long-term plans never include another person. At 18, Philip has an affair because he is curious about sex, but during his year in London and two years in Paris he does not fall in love and has no relationships. Nor does he have any clear notion of what kind of relationship he might want. There are no important examples of love relationships, and no discussion of the topic. Indeed Philip seems rather uninterested and identity diffused in this area. He falls into obsession with Mildred because of a psychological weakness he does not understand. Then he drifts into a relationship with Norah Nesbit which seems perfect in every way, yet Philip seems oddly uninvolved, and the affair has little lasting impact on his hopes and dreams for the future. After Paris, his main ambition is to travel and be free in all ways imaginable. When he decides to marry it is because the prospect of a family fills him with hope and contentment, but he discovers this almost by chance, as he had earlier discovered that he had happened to choose a profession he actually liked.

As Joseph Dobrinsky points out, almost all the female characters in Maugham's novel are curiously unattractive (1988, 40). Căcilia, the young woman in Heidelberg who elopes with a Chinese, is "exceedingly plain" (158). Miss. Wilkinson, although "sometimes quite pretty," turns out to be "unattractive" and "grotesque" naked (167). Even in Paris, the music-hall singers, shopgirls, the model in the studio, Fanny Price, and Cronshaw's common-law wife are all quite unappetizing. Charming Ruth Chalice is "flat-chested," has bad teeth and "corns on her toes" (257), and even wonderful Norah has "a pleasant ugly face" (360). The young men, however, are more appealing. Miguel Ajurias has "a fine figure; there was no fat on him and his muscles stood out as though they were of iron" (262). And Griffiths is "a handsome creature, tall and thin" with "friendly blue eyes" (412).

*Of Human Bondage* is a deeply biographical novel, written, the author admits in the foreword, to free him of an obsession with "teeming memories of my past life" (2). The first draft was written in Seville (1), the place Philip dreams of visiting, and during the two periods of rewriting, Maugham was still struggling with the choice between marriage and exotic travel. It is thus easy to explain Philip's identity diffusion in the domain of love as the author's own indecision and bisexuality.

If we return to Philip himself, his psychology – at least before Mildred – combines a longing to be loved and taken care of with a self-defeating or masochistic bent, an underlying belief that life is lived to the full only in passion, and a romantic belief that love equals passion. At the same time, he has a deep desire to be free, and his prime intellectual ambition

in life is to be as independent as possible, both intellectually and in terms of other people. It is impossible to satisfy all these desires at the same time. Indeed, his masochism might partly stem from the combination of a desire for love in childhood, and the lack of love he experienced from his foster-parents and the people around him in school. The only way to be rid of this situation is to gain freedom, but the psyche will still go on demanding love. Hence the desire to lose oneself in passion. But in passion one is unfree. And so the relationship must be destroyed so that one can be free again.

### ***Ideological development***

Philip's ideological development starts at seventeen in Heidelberg. As Randolph Shaffner notes, Philip liberates himself from a number of bondages in the course of this novel, the first of which is (hypocritical) religion (1984, 42-44). During long discussions with his fellow boarders, Weeks and Hayward, Philip starts questioning his religion. This is his first encounter with other life philosophies than his own, and it is a shock to discover "that religion was a matter upon which discussion was possible" (127). Philip has believed that the Church of England was the only road to salvation, but encountering the convictions and goodness of members of other churches, he understands that his belief is illogical: Why should God favor members of one church over those of another? Soon after, he realizes he no longer believes in God: "Faith had been forced upon him from the outside. It was a matter of environment and example. A new environment and a new example gave him the opportunity to find himself" (130). Liberated from his bondage to religion, Philip feels that "[h]e was his own master at last" (131). He now starts looking for an alternative to Christianity, a search that continues until the end of the novel.

In Paris, Philip encounters another philosophical system: The bohemian poet Cronshaw points out to him that although he has relinquished Christianity, Philip has "preserved the ethic which was based upon it" (237). All men are basically selfish, according to Cronshaw, and everything they do is out of self-preservation and search for pleasure. Philip finds this preposterous. To him, "everything" breaks down if he cannot believe in such things as "honour and virtue and goodness and decency" (238). It is also Cronshaw who introduces the metaphor of "the figure in the carpet," which will occupy Philip almost until the end. Asked what the meaning of life is, Cronshaw tells Philip to go and look at the Persian carpets at the Cluny museum, "and one of these days the answer will come to you" (242).

Back in England after his aunt's death, Philip reflects on what he has learned in Paris, and feels he has reached a "complete liberty of spirit" (294). He takes Cronshaw's advice, and



abandons Christian morality with its ideas of good and evil. He will “think things out for himself” (294). The quiet summer break sees him started on an ideological moratorium, devised as a “plan of study” with three focuses: “[M]an’s relation to the world he lives in, man’s relation with the men among whom he lives, and finally man’s relation to himself” (295). Philip reads Darwin and the great philosophers, and spends much time thinking about the relationship between society and the individual (that classic bildungsroman theme). When he leaves for London, he has decided to try out Cronshaw’s ethics: “Follow your inclinations with due regard to the policeman round the corner” (294). He will pursue individual happiness, but within the boundaries of what society allows. This gives him a code of conduct, but the meaning of life is still a mystery to him.

In the madness of his obsession with Mildred, Philip realizes that his “system of personal philosophy ... had not served him” (329). His thoughts and feelings seem driven by forces within himself that he does not know or understand (441-442). Yet, after deciding to “inflict suffering upon himself” by joining the other students after failing an exam, he comes close to part of the truth:

He forgot for the moment his maxim of life to follow his inclinations with due regard for the policeman round the corner; or, if he acted in accordance with it, there must have been some strange morbidity in his nature which made him take a grim pleasure in self-torture. (330-331)

Self-torture is exactly what he desires at this time in his life, and he cannot think his way out of it. Philip has to his search for beliefs that will help him in his everyday life.

Through Thorpe Athelny he glimpses yet another philosophy of life, which is as much about the senses as about rational thought. Seeing one of El Greco’s paintings, Philip feels “on the brink of a discovery” (503). In art he has been a realist, but in El Greco he detects a coming together of realism and idealism. Unlike the impotent idealism of people like Hayworth, that of El Greco is passionate and alive, accepting “life in all its vivacity, ugliness and beauty, squalor and heroism” (503):

He seemed to see that a man need not leave his life to chance, but that his will was powerful; he seemed to see that self-control might be as passionate and as active as the surrender to passion; he seemed to see that the inward life might be as manifold, as

varied, as rich with experience, as the life of one who conquered realms and explored unknown lands. (503)

Philip does not get any further at this time, but these ideas are the beginnings of a new outlook which is only fully realized at the end of the novel.

An epiphany at the British Museum brings Philip a step closer to his own philosophy of life, as he suddenly solves Cronshaw's riddle of the figure in the carpet. It happens during his darkest and poorest period, as he sits looking at Egyptian tombs and thinking of the death of his old friend Hayward. He decides that life is governed by chance and it makes no difference whether people are good or bad or how they live their lives. The answer is that "[l]ife had no meaning. ... Life was insignificant and death without consequence" (602-603). Philip feels euphorically happy as "the last burden of responsibility was taken from him; and for the first time he was utterly free" (603). He realizes that it is possible to be free even when poverty, unhappiness, and lack of freedom mark one's life, because he is still free to choose the pattern he wants to see in his life: "Out of the manifold events of his life, his deeds, his feelings, his thoughts, he might make a design, regular, elaborate, complicated, or beautiful" (604-605). And the design need not be the general ideal of the good life, nor did happiness have to be the aim. And "Philip thought that in throwing over the desire for happiness he was casting aside the last of his illusions" (604-605).

The Persian carpet is an allusion to Henry James's 1886 short story "The Figure in the Carpet," which is about interpretation. It tells the story of a year-long search for what the author Hugh Vereker meant when he said critics had missed the main point of his writing, "my secret," "like a complex figure in a Persian carpet." James's story does not give the answer to the mystery, and the protagonist speculates that it may only be revealed to loving couples. His friend Corvick, however, thinks he finds the solution when traveling alone in India. Maybe these two – marriage and love, or exotic travel – are alternative solutions, just as they are the two alternatives Philip has to choose between at the end of *Of Human Bondage*.<sup>40</sup> Philip in the end opts for the pattern which is "the most obvious, perfect, and beautiful, in which a man was born, grew to manhood, married, produced children, toiled for his bread, and died" (605).

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<sup>40</sup> The same choices were facing Maugham as he was writing the book. In 1913 he proposed to Sue Jones, but was turned down. In 1914, the year before publication of *Of Human Bondage*, he joined a First-World-War ambulance unit and started a life-long relationship with Gerald Haxton, with whom he would travel to exotic parts of the world (Johnson and Freeland 2007).

Realizing that he wants a wife and a family, Philip also understands that being a country doctor is the right choice of profession. He thus commits himself in all three identity domains. This is a truly happy ending that fits with even the most conservative definitions of what a bildungsroman ending “should” be like. In psychological terms, however, some ambiguity remains at the end. After developing at different rates for over a decade, all aspects of Philip’s identity seem to come together into a unity of identity achievement. But it all happens a bit too suddenly, and a bit too patly. Philip does not seem to have been prepared psychologically for all these changes.

## **Conclusion**

*Of Human Bondage* is an early-twentieth-century novel that maintains virtually all of the classic bildungsroman features. In its emphasis on philosophy, it turns from the British Classics towards the model of *Wilhelm Meister*, but it also keeps a sharp eye on social injustice and gives shocking descriptions of the lives of the poor. Maugham’s use of restricted third-person rather than first-person narration enables him to probe further into the consciousness of his hero than the three British Classics. There is more room for the unconscious, and the differences between public and private, social and individual, and reason and emotions, are more fully explored.

*Of Human Bondage* gives a large and complex picture of the development of an individual from youth to adulthood and (at least partial) maturity. Philip’s road toward a mature philosophy of life is a complicated and tortuous one. Important issues for him are bondage and freedom, and he learns that neither is what he first believed them to be. He discovers that being in love makes him unhappy and a slave of his emotions, whereas the less passionate feelings of respect, friendship, and warmth can form the basis of a happy relationship in which he can maintain his freedom. The freedom he thought he wanted – freedom to travel, see foreign lands, and have interesting experiences – he finds he can do without. He wants responsibility for a family instead. This is the same choice made by *Wilhelm Meister*, *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield*. Family is held up as the most important value and provider of meaning in life in all of these novels.

*Of Human Bondage* is interesting in relation to the idea that the bildungsroman died out around the First World War. It could be argued that since Maugham started writing it in the 1890s, it was really one of the last nineteenth-century bildungsromans. However, the book was generally disliked when it appeared, and found both obscene and depressing, but after the

Great War, during the 1920s, it became a popular and critical success. *The New York Times* even called it a “classic” (Spence 1951). Maugham might thus have been ahead of his time, catching a mood that would only be generally recognized in the following decade. Samuel Rogal sees Philip “as a historically transitional figure. Unlocking the restrictions of Victorian social and religious values, he searches for meaning in a truly modern world” (1997, 202). The prime characteristic of this modern world is the absence of God. As Robert Calder suggests, Philip’s religious skepticism “is not only Maugham’s own agnosticism but the loss of faith of generations of late Victorians” (1992, ix), and this loss of faith became even more acute after the First World War. Whereas the Four Classics walk a tightrope between Christian belief and personal responsibility, Maugham’s Philip is poised over a gulf of meaninglessness. Life’s meaning has gained a new fervor as the main focus of Philip’s ideological identity formation. Philip also goes much further than his predecessors in questioning moral codes and social convention, and marrying Sally clearly breaks with what is suitable for a person of his status.

### ***The Diviners* (1974)**

*The Diviners* is the fifth and final book in Margaret Laurence’s Manawaka cycle and the last novel she wrote. Mark Sutton calls it a “somewhat autobiographical bildungsroman” (n.d.), which makes it an autobiographical *last* novel, unlike so many other bildungsromans, which are autobiographical first novels.<sup>41</sup> This might partly account for its emphasis on retrospection, maturity, and identity development in adulthood.

The frame-tale of *The Diviners* follows 47-year-old author Morag Gunn and her daughter Pique from June to early fall one year in the early 1970s, while the main part of the novel consists of Morag’s life story from age five to the time of narration. After the death of her parents, Morag grows up with Prin and Christie Logan, old friends of her father, in Manawaka. Her childhood is marked by poverty and a feeling of exclusion. Morag goes to university, marries her much older teacher Brooke Skelton, and then gets divorced in order to have the child of her old lover, the Métis Jules Tonnerre. As a struggling single mom, Morag becomes a well-known novelist, lives for a while in London, and finally settles in a small

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<sup>41</sup> According to Laurence, going to Africa in her early twenties made her “so fascinated by the African scene that [she] was in this way prevented from writing an autobiographical first novel” (1970, 81).

Manitoba town with her daughter. Revising her life story reconciles Morag with her past, her choices in life, and finally with the fact that Pique is becoming an independent person.

The analysis below focuses on differences and resemblances between *The Diviners* and the older novels analyzed so far. In the BRI section, particular attention is given to narration, secondary characters and their function, plot and structure, and social themes. Sections 4, 5, and 6 – topical story elements and setting – will not be discussed except where relevant in connection with other issues. The identity development section shows that Morag is more independent than the male protagonists encountered so far. Another difference is that *The Diviners* takes its heroine through several identity changes, only one of which happens in late adolescence.

## **Index Analysis**<sup>42</sup>

*The Diviners* gets a combined BRI score of 123, which is 14-21 points lower than the Four Classics. This is a very high score considering the novel was regarded as modern and experimental when it was published in 1974. Given that feminist critics often claim that the “female bildungsroman” subverts the genre rules of its male equivalent and expresses very different values, it is worth noting that this book – which depicts the life of an independent woman, an author and a single mother by design – gets 27 points for “Theme, Subject Matter and Motifs,” only two less than the full score. This could of course be because Laurence’s heroine follows a male pattern, but I will show it is not. *The Diviners* is representative of post-war (social) realism, although it also has modernist and postmodern traits, which is part of the reason why it gets only 10 out of 15 points for “Narrative perspective and mode”.

### ***Index Section 1***

Narration in *The Diviners* is both innovative and traditional, a fact that is only partly brought out by the index score of 10 points in Section 1. It is a verisimilar novel containing action as well as reflection. The narration, however, is highly untraditional. The customary ironic attitude toward the young protagonist is missing, and the relationship between narrator and focalizer is unusual in other ways as well.

“*I used to think words could do anything. Magic. Sorcery. Even miracle,*” Morag muses a couple of pages into *The Diviners* (5). The novel is interspersed with such brief

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<sup>42</sup> For BRI scores, see the tables at the beginning of this chapter.

passages in the first person, set off from the rest of the text by italics. These are direct quotations of Morag's thoughts in the present tense. Otherwise the novel is in the third person, and focalization shifts between a mature Morag in the present and a younger Morag in the retrospective parts. The reason the novel is not given points for Feature 1 is that within each part there is no distance between narrator and protagonist, or between young and old Morag. This is consistently consonant center-of-consciousness writing, and the narrator cannot be distinguished from the character-focalizer. All the chapters are structured the same way: They start in the present, and for some pages familiarize the reader with Morag's life now: The novel she is working on, her worries concerning her daughter who is traveling west alone, and her relationship with her neighbors. The title "Memorybank Movie" marks a shift to the past, and the rest (the bulk) of the chapter consists of relatively long subchapters dedicated to the past, each with its own "Memorybank Movie" title. The present-time sections are written in the past tense, while the sections about the past are in the present tense, thus reversing the "natural" or "realistic" relation between the two.

*The Diviners* cannot score points for Features 1 and 5, since the narration is consonant, and there is no ironic distance between narrator and protagonist. For Features 3 and 4, however, the mixture of usual and unusual elements makes it difficult to decide whether to give points or not. On the one hand, focalization shifts between younger and older incarnations of the main character, but whereas the three British Classics constantly juxtapose the two focalizers, *The Diviners* keeps them totally separate. The task of comparing and contrasting the two versions of Morag is left to the reader. The bulk of Laurence's novel is retrospective (traditional) in the sense that the "Memorybank Movie" sections are the memories of the adult Morag of the frame story, but this does not manifest itself in distance between narrator and focalizer, since Morag is not narrator of either part. Instead, both frame stories and memories are told by an external narrator. This "authorial narrator" is necessarily situated after the events, and knows the end of the story, but this information and time gap is camouflaged by use of the present tense. The past gives the impression of being narrated as it is lived. For that same reason, the fact that the external narrator must know and understand more than Morag is not expressed in the text; the young Morag is presented in the same way as the older one, without interference from the narrator, not even in prolepses or generalizations in gnomic present tense. Even though the novel does not quite fulfill the requirements of these index features, I have chosen to recognize that there is a mixture of tradition and innovation by giving points for Features 3 and 4.

Focalization consistently rests with the main character, Morag, in either her past or present incarnation. At the beginning of the book, for instance, Morag is 47 and looking at snapshots from her childhood. These are from a period she has no memories of, and the descriptions reveal how she has thought about them and read things into them afterwards. The first “Memorybank Movie,” however, takes us back to Morag the child at six years of age, and we experience the death of her parents through the child’s eyes. There is thus no corrective to the growing Morag’s thoughts and perceptions, as in the older books.

The frame-story sections have a contemplative feel to them, and although there are conversations and events – such as Pique coming back from her travels, getting a new boyfriend, moving in and then out – most of them are taken up by thoughts. Morag’s consciousness is explored through psychonarration, narrated monologue, and quoted monologue:

She had been working through the day, the words not having to be dredged up out of the caves of the mind, but rushing out in a spate so that her hand could not keep up with them. Odd feeling. Someone else dictating the words. Untrue, of course, but that was how it felt, the characters speaking. Where was the character, and who? Never mind. Not Morag’s concern. Possession or self-hypnosis – it made no difference. Just let it keep on coming. (404)

“She had been working through the day” is ordinary narration in the narrator’s words. The rest of the sentence describes Morag’s feelings, in what could be psychonarration or narrated monologue (because of “her” and the past tense rather than “me” and present tense). The clipped, incomplete sentences that follow could also be the narrator’s or the character’s. Such incompleteness is typical of stream-of-consciousness writing, and therefore likely to be interpreted as unmarked quoted monologue. Morag might have thought to herself: “Odd feeling. Someone else dictating the words. Untrue, of course, but that was how it felt, the characters speaking.” What follows, however – “Where was the character, and who?” – is in Morag’s words, but the past tense indicates narrated rather than quoted monologue. “Never mind,” is likely to be unmarked quoted monologue, whereas “Possession or self-hypnosis – it made no difference” can be either narrated monologue or psychonarration. The last sentence sounds like interior monologue, that is, unmarked quoted monologue. Such shifting and interweaving of the narrator’s and the heroine’s voices make the two inseparable, and there is thus virtually no distance between narrator and character.

The Four Classics constantly juxtapose the naivety of the young protagonist with the superior knowledge and wisdom of a narrator privileged by being older and situated after the events. *The Diviners*, on the other hand, separates the two positions completely, thereby giving up the genre's characteristic irony. This does not mean, however, that there is no distance or difference between past and present or between past and present incarnations of the main character. On the contrary, Laurence's novel has a very strong, though slightly untraditional, focus on these issues. Alastair Fowler suggests that the "tertiary stage" of a genre's development tends to turn some generic features into symbols or metaphors (Fowler 2002, 162). This is what Laurence is doing here. Time itself is a theme in this novel, and the opening metaphor – the river running both ways – initializes the questioning of the traditional view that time moves only in one direction, that is, forward. Presenting the present in the past tense and the past in the present tense calls the quality of each and the relationship between them into question. This is further underlined by the headings "Memorybank Movie," which make the sections from the past seem like Morag's memories. The past is nevertheless also in the third person, which begs the question of who is telling the story. Narrative perspective and mode are thus highly complex, and partly original, partly traditional.

### ***Sections 2 and 3***

In Section 2, "Characterization: Protagonist," *The Diviners* gets 11 points, three less than *Wilhelm Meister* and four less than the British Classics. Morag resembles Jane Eyre, Pip, and David Copperfield in being an only child and an orphan from a provincial town. The couple that takes her in after her parents' death are friends of her father rather than relatives, and she has no living relations. The book does not score points for "Of middle-class background," although the description of her parents' house at the beginning of the novel might indicate they belonged to that class. Morag grows up with Christie, "the scavenger" (31), on Hill Street, which is a slum, equivalent to "The Other Side of the Tracks" (28), and there are no great expectations waiting behind or beyond the dreariness of her lower-class childhood. Morag belongs in this class and her identity is shaped there, while Jane Eyre and David Copperfield always had one foot in the middle class, despite the poverty of their childhoods. The young Morag has more in common with Pip, who despises his origins and wants to advance socially.

Morag fits the description in Feature 20 in being active, having strong goals, and making decisions easily. These characteristics are particularly marked in her youth, when she works to get away from Manawaka and start her writing career. And at twelve she is



described as “tough,” “a tomboy,” and someone who can beat up the boys as well as play ball with them (61). Her friend and neighbor, Eva Winkler, the only one in her class from as poor a background as Morag, functions as a foil, showing a more typical girl of her class. Gentle and compliant, Eva sacrifices herself for others. She is raped by her father, marries young, and spends her life in Manawaka looking after her own family as well as Morag’s stepmother Prin. Morag, however, prioritizes her own life, making choices more traditional for men than for women. Her priorities are probably also more easily accepted in men, especially in Canada in the early 1970s. Morag’s attitude to and enjoyment of sex is another unwomanly quality. As Morley claims, “Morag’s sexuality offends ancient, firmly entrenched stereotypes of women as much less highly sexed than men” (1981, 131-132). According to Morley, this is one reason *The Diviners* caused controversy in Canada in the 1970s, and many attempts were made to ban it, for instance, from school reading lists (Morley 1981, 130-131).

Morag is thus a typical bildungsroman protagonist. Nevertheless, the novel is strongly marked by the period in which it was written, and the heroine’s development is an early version of the women’s liberation stories that became widespread in the 1970s.

Secondary characters are likewise very close to those of the Four Classics, and *The Diviners* scores full points in the secondary-characters section. I have given it points for Features 21 and 22 although other characters are less important in Morag’s development than in the development of the Four Classics’ protagonists. Secondary characters certainly play a part, but the question is whether they are *essential*. Morag is extremely independent, quite private, and her talent for writing is apparent to her at an early age. In her professional development at least, the drive towards maturation seems primarily internal. Others give advice and encouragement, and confirm Morag’s own opinion, but it is her own strong desire to write that wins over external impediments. Her development into a writer is very different from David Copperfield’s, which is not presented as essential or even as identity development. In *The Diviners* minor characters are more important in other identity domains, particularly in the interpersonal area, which cannot develop if an individual has no contact with others. On the other hand, the interpersonal arena has less weight than in the Four Classics. In the ideological area Morag is also relatively independent compared to the strong influence of certain characters in some of the older books.

Although secondary characters in *The Diviners* are presented solely through Morag’s eyes, they also have an independence that makes it hard to see them as mere adjuncts to Morag’s *Bildung*. The focalization makes the inner thoughts and feelings of these characters inaccessible to the reader, but maybe Morag’s own feelings of never quite getting to the

bottom of them help establish them as subjects in their own right. With Christie, especially, it takes Morag until adulthood to recognize his worth. On his death bed, his “knowing” (394) and “shrewd” (395) eyes hint at his depth, and Morag’s guilt and regret for missed chances help establish Christie’s worth. Something similar is true of Brooke, Jules, and even her daughter Pique, whom Morag also fails to know fully.

Laurence’s secondary characters fill the roles of educator, companion, and lover. Her stepfather Christie and the mother of her college friend Ella are both mentors as well as parent substitutes. Ella’s mother shows Morag that a woman can lead an independent life and be a breadwinner. She stimulates Morag intellectually, and furthers her education by lending her fiction by foreign authors. Christie is not a bookish or educated person, but his stories stimulate Morag’s imagination as a child and even inspire her to make up her first story.

Miss. Melrose, the high school English teacher who makes Morag see her talent for writing, also spurs her on her way to becoming an author. Asking Morag to submit her essay to the school paper, Miss. Melrose is the first adult to show she believes in Morag. For her part, “Morag worships her” (121), and feels “as though a strong hand has been laid on her shoulders. Strong and friendly. But merciless” (122). Miss. Melrose’s value lies in her ability to simultaneously support Morag and demand that she do better. The next person to function as a mentor is Brooke, her literature teacher in college. Initially, he encourages her writing and bolsters her intellectual ego. Morag has always had talent and interest, but needs the evaluations of others as a corrective to her own, and in order to get a realistic view of her work. Their encouragement also increases her belief in herself.

In the frame story, old Royland is a mentor of sorts. He is the second diviner in this book, the first being Christie, who reads the town garbage. Royland divines for wells. The two men’s status comes from their link with the past, even as they also look into the future, by passing on traditions to a new generation. Christie divines in the garbage what the townspeople want to hide. Realizing that everybody is much the same, in spite of some people’s gilded facades, Christie also knows they are all mortal and will turn to garbage in the end. This gives him a kind of dignity in spite of the fact that others look down on him as the “scavenger.” Royland is a diviner of a more positive and practical nature, possessing the ancient gift of finding water. His connection to the future is through his discoveries, as when he provides the young Smith family with a well for their farm. Christie and Royland bring what is eternal and hidden up to the surface and pass on an inheritance. Christie’s simple exchange of cigarettes for a knife makes it possible for Jules Tonnerre to give Pique his father

Lazarus's knife when he dies. On Morag's death, Pique will also receive the pin that symbolizes the Scottish side of her background.

Ella is Morag's one close friend. Starting in their student days and still strong in the frame story, this is a typical female friendship, which includes shared activities, emotional support, and intellectual stimulation. This friendship is a vital source of intimacy for Morag. Later friendships, such as that with her old schoolfriend Julie Kazlik and her eccentric new landlady Fan Brady are less close and therefore less significant. In the present, A-Okay and his family function as traditional good neighbors. All in all, friends are less important than in the Four Classics, particularly *Wilhelm Meister*. Pip and David Copperfield also have a life-long friend who influences the direction of their lives. Only Jane Eyre is without a faithful companion until she finds her cousins and moves in with them.

Instead of the opposition between right and wrong lovers, Morag has three long-term relationships, all of which are partly right and partly wrong. Her first lover is Jules Tonnerre, a Métis in her class in high school. They have a brief affair at the beginning of the war, but pick up their relationship twice during Jules's relatively short life. Jules is right for Morag because he gives her what she needs at the moment: intimacy, sex, and freedom to be herself. Their relationship is easy. Morag loves him for his freedom, his lack of planning and ambition, and his ability to simply show up and love her there and then. But those same qualities make him unfit as a husband or long-term partner.

Brooke is in most respects Jules's opposite. He is an English university professor who can offer both the intellectual stimulation and escape from poverty that Morag has always dreamed of. He is also older than her and can provide material security. Although he treats her as a child to some extent, he helps Morag develop self-confidence and trust in her ability to love and be loved. Ultimately, however, marriage to him becomes unbearable because his conventionality stifles her, he does not want her to work, and he leaves her little room to develop and lead her own life. It is the Scottish painter Dan McRaith, whom Morag has a long affair with during her three years in London, who turns out to provide just the kind of relationship Morag wants. The two are intellectually and emotionally compatible, and treat each other as equals, but the relationship is untenable for practical reasons.

Morag's daughter Pique is the only minor character of her kind in the literature examined thus far: A grown child, whose relationship with the parent is depicted in detail. *Wilhelm Meister*, *Jane Eyre*, and *David Copperfield* also have children, but Pique is a special case. Present from the beginning of the novel, Pique is 18, and thus a concrete representation of the problems and dilemmas Morag faced in youth. Pique's process of liberation makes

Morag relive her own liberation and identity formation. Morag’s identity is not fully formed until she can acknowledge Pique’s need to form her own.

Morag is a modern literary heroine molded by the generic tradition. Secondary characters are less important than in the earlier books, but *The Diviners* introduces a new element in linking Morag’s development with the identity formation of her late-adolescent daughter.

### ***Sections 7 and 8***

According to Jost, a bildungsroman should not be “a complete biography of the hero” but only cover “the *making* of the hero” (Jost 1983, 132). *The Diviners* might seem to break this “rule,” but in fact most of the novel concerns the “making” of the protagonist. What is unusual is that much of Morag’s formation takes place after the age of 23.

The novel has not been given points for Feature 62 since the period between 18 and 23 does not constitute the main part of the plot. It does score points for Feature 63 because the plot stretches from childhood to adulthood. The number of pages devoted to different ages is as follows:

*Table 34. The relationship between page numbers and years of heroine’s life*

Age	pages	pages per year
2-12	28	2.8
12-17	45	9
17-24	86	12.2
27-45	160	9.4
48	81	81

These page numbers are approximate, because some periods are summarized, the years from 24 to 27 basically left out, and some events given particular prominence. Nevertheless, there are clear tendencies. Childhood is given much less space – particularly by year – than later ages. Early and middle adolescence gets 9 pages per year, late adolescence 12.2, while the period after 24 gets as many pages per year as the period 12-17. The present-time level (when Morag is 48) has been counted separately, and gets 81 pages.

*The Diviners* differs from all the novels dealt with so far by being the only one to follow its main character into middle age. It is worth noting that about half the novel is devoted to the period after age 23, which gives a different picture of identity formation to the other novels. Morag definitely has a moratorium at the usual time, between 18 and 23, but a

new moratorium starts towards the end of her marriage, when she is 27. She has another period of exploration and change of direction at the end of her London period, when she is 40. The present-time level of the story depicts a fourth period of identity change. *The Diviners* thus presents identity formation as taking place first in adolescence, and then again (several times) in adulthood.

Whether *The Diviners* has a chronological plot or not is open to discussion. On the one hand, it shifts frequently between two time levels, and both narratives are often interrupted: There are headings indicating a change of subject, and inserted conversations, letters, songs, and stories, all of which are typographically set off from the rest of the text. Apart from these original features, the plot is in most respects chronological. The present-time frame tale is very short compared to the story of Morag's past life, and both stories move chronologically up to the same point. The difference between Jane Eyre's prolepses, analepses, and inserted references to the present time, and the shifting between past and present in *The Diviners* is one of degree. Nevertheless, the effect of the two time levels differs from that of the Four Classics. Firstly, Laurence emphasizes the present more than the older works. In Dickens and Brontë, the older narrator comes in as a commentator and frame for the main story, putting the story of the past in perspective and providing a privileged, mature viewpoint. In *The Diviners*, remembering and reflecting on the past becomes a theme in its own right. Secondly, there is an important plot-line that takes place in the present: The story of her daughter Pique, who has left home, and the relationship between mother and daughter. Thirdly, Pique seems to be the catalyst who started Morag's process of exploration and revision of her own youth and formation, and this process is not yet over. These two last points mean that *The Diviners* is not just the story of an adult's early formation, but also a book about a woman undergoing a process of change and identity exploration in middle age. The book's structure of switching between two time levels, symbolized by the river running both ways, emphasizes this theme of the past and present mutually influencing each other. Morag's recapitulation of her own life makes it easier for her to understand and accept Pique's explorations. And as she comes to accept her daughter's autonomy, Morag also accepts her own choices and mistakes.

Identity development in *The Diviners* thus does not stop on transition to adulthood. While Morag's life story partly explains how she came to be who she is and where she is today, its function is also to serve Morag's life now. Telling the story of her past is a project that Morag the 47-year-old uses to reflect on her own process of development. But the telling has more than therapeutic value: Morag also shapes the past as she remembers it, and is thus able to influence how she interprets it and how it defines her today. Therefore, not only the

past, but remembering it and relating it to her life today and to Pique's maturation, constitute ways in which Morag reaches a new stage of clarity, or, as James Marcia might say, a higher stage of identity-achievement.

*The Diviners* has a number of brief inserted life stories, such as Royland's, but other inserted stories are quite different from those of the Four Classics. Particularly early in the book, characters tell mythical stories about ancestors rather than the biographical stories of maturation that we know from the Four Classics. Together, these offer brief snatches of Canadian history from a variety of viewpoints. The emphasis is on showing how history can be and is presented in different ways, and that what is told and how varies with the teller and the teller's perspective. Laurence here changes a bildungsroman feature in order to illuminate the typically Canadian theme of history as remembering, particularly in relation to ethnicity and majority versus minority populations. This aspect changes the focus from personal story to collective, communal story, and makes the past that took place before the character's birth more important than in the older books. Moreover, the historical lesson can also be transferred to personal stories and individual pasts.

The only allusion to a bildungsroman in *The Diviners* is to Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (294), which links it to the genre of the *Künstlerroman* rather than the bildungsroman in general. This would be an interesting topic to explore, but since none of the other novels studied rely on this tradition, I will not go into it.

*The Diviners* gets 10 points less than the full score in Section 8. This is partly because I have chosen a strict interpretation of the BRI features, but also because Laurence has departed from the norm in a number of respects. The result is a book that retains the main concerns of the genre, while using literary techniques of its day to expand the theme of development into middle adulthood and a treatment of mother-daughter relations.

## ***Section 9***

*The Diviners* gets 27 points in the "Theme, subject matter and motifs" section, which is the same as *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre* and two points more than *Great Expectations*. Themes are primarily discussed below as part of the identity development of the protagonist, but a few particularities concerning gender and social class deserve mention.

Class and the possibility and desirability of (upward) social mobility are important concerns of the bildungsroman from the Four Classics onward, through *Of Human Bondage*, and to *The Diviners*. Like *Great Expectations*, Laurence's novel has a lower-class protagonist with an intense desire to escape the shame and humiliation of belonging to this class. But once

she has left her background, Morag shares Jane Eyre's realization that the mores and values of the higher classes (the academic middle class in *The Diviners*, the aristocracy in *Jane Eyre*) do not agree with her. Social status is also coupled with gender roles, and in both novels, entry into the higher class means that the wife's main function is as adornment for her husband. Such a role is far too dependent and passive for Jane and Morag.

Class is shown to be a very important part of Morag's identity as a child, and it shapes her understanding of herself as an adult as well. In addition to the traditional focus on social class, Laurence's social criticism and her portrayal of a Canadian small-town community include specifically Canadian ethnic issues. The town has people of Scots, Irish, and English heritage, as well as descendants of Eastern European immigrants. And it has a small group of Métis, or "half-breeds" as the bottom echelon in this society. Morag finds solace in stories about her brave Celtic ancestors, while ethnic background is an added burden to the poor Tonnerre family, who are of mixed Indian and French background. Ethnicity is thus a factor in identity formation, which it is not in the (older) European bildungsroman.

Morag does escape Manawaka, but is not comfortable in the middle class of a large city. Following an independent road to the identity and life style of an artist in a rural area, she manages to find her own niche. This is partly an adaptation to society, but also part of the *Künstler* motif which offers the life of an artist as liberation from a strict social hierarchy and an alternative to social integration. Morag thus keeps much of her freedom, while progressing socially and economically.

## **Identity development**

Analyzed in terms of the interpersonal, occupational, and ideological identity domains, *The Diviners* differs markedly from most of the novels studied so far. Firstly, the occupational area is more prominent than the other two domains, and it develops almost organically, without much doubt and without the false starts and wrong choices seen in most of the older books, perhaps most strongly in *Wilhelm Meister* and *Of Human Bondage*.

Secondly, in the ideological domain, philosophy and religion are relatively unimportant, while social and ethnic belonging are emphasized. A salient concern for Morag is the past – her own personal past, the communal past of the place she comes from, and also national and regional history. Sex role identity (psychological sex) is at least as important as in the older books, But although Morag's main identity areas are somewhat different from those of the older books, identity formation is still the most important theme.

Another difference from the Four Classics is not only that the development continues further into the protagonist's life – as in *Of Human Bondage* – but that the large present-time part of the book is concerned with Morag's identity change in middle age. Paralleling the development that takes place in the past is a process that finally results in identity achievement, although Morag is then 47 years old.

### ***Occupational identity***

Apart from David Copperfield, Morag is the only protagonist so far to have a clear talent and to know from an early age what she wants to do in life. The issues for her are whether she can get anything published and whether she can earn money from writing, not whether she wants to do it or not. She becomes aware of her writing skills when quite young, and by the time she is working for Lachlan MacLachlan at the local newspaper she already feels superior to all those who do not “have the knack of words” (155) that she has. From this time on, part of her identity is built on being a writer.

As already mentioned, Laurence's novel alludes to, and has thematic resemblances with, the *Künstlerroman*, a novel about “the growth of a novelist or other artist into the stage of maturity that signalizes the recognition of artistic destiny and mastery of artistic craft” (Abrams 1988, 120). Wikipedia adds that “Such novels often depict the struggles of a sensitive youth against the values of a bourgeois society of his or her time” (“Künstlerroman” 2008), a description which perfectly fits the early parts of *The Diviners*. Morag despises the genteel people of the town, their hypocrisies, and their disregard for “halfbreeds” and people lower down on the social ladder. Her ambition is always to escape, develop her talents, and create a better life for herself.

Morag's identity as a writer is never in doubt. It develops while she is living with Brooke and writing regularly, but is cemented as she goes through the process of publishing her first novel. Discussing ideas and revisions with her publisher, she realizes that she believes in what she has done, and has the courage both to defend it and accept criticism. She is beginning to experience herself as a professional who knows her trade, and being able to talk about her work with a publisher gives her much-longed-for intellectual stimulation. When her first novel is published, Morag is starting to realize that she can use her talent to build a career for herself. Perhaps that is why she actually finds the courage to leave Brooke when Jules appears, bringing into the open her inner turmoil and her resentment with her husband.



### *Interpersonal development*

“You learn hard with that stiff neck of yours,” editor MacLachlan tells Morag, when she is working as a journalist for a year after high-school (157). Even as a child, Morag is proud, and she does not like to admit mistakes or accept that others know more than she does. She is therefore hard to teach and liable to trust herself more than others. Her occupational development does of course have social and interpersonal aspects because she is dependent on response from others to know her own strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless, Morag is remarkably independent and self-sufficient compared to other main characters in this study.

In childhood, her identity is built on being different. Morag resents belonging to one of the poorest families in Manawaka more than she resents being an orphan. It pains and humiliates her that Prin and Christie are despised and ridiculed by people higher up on the social ladder. Because of her social background, Morag does not feel she belongs among her classmates. Eva Winkler is a convenient friend, but the relationship between the girls is far from symbiotic. During her early years in school, Morag makes it clear to the other children that she will not take harassment lying down: She learns to fight and put on an expression that signals that she does not care about being taunted. In this way she puts an end to the pestering, but does not make close friends in primary school.

Intimacy is not really available at home either. Prin never functions as a mother to Morag. She is there, provides ill-fitting clothes, and takes Morag to church, but Morag gradually distances herself from the stepmother she feels intensely ashamed of. Prin’s early dementia also makes it hard for the two to have a close relationship. Christie does not provide physical contact or invite Morag’s confidences. Yet he is vital because he gives her the unconditional love that is essential for a child’s emotional development. He takes her to school on her first day, is available when she needs him, and helps her build psychological strength. With his stories of the brave Piper Gunn and his wife Morag, Christie teaches her that being active, brave and strong will ultimately bring success. Morag later discovers that his tales were partly invented, but, as Eleanor Johnston says, Christie’s technique is “to isolate the essential truth and then to elaborate it with details,” and “[t]he truth of these stories is their legacy of heroism” (1978, 113). Morag demonstrates that she has understood the message when she makes up her first story. It is about the mythical Morag Gunn, who is never afraid because she has “the power and ... the strength of conviction” (52). Christie understands that Morag has a tough time of it as a child and that she needs stories to inspire her to fight and be brave. And the stories work. Morag finds the courage she needs to get through her childhood

and youth and to work hard for what she wants. But courage is a double-edged sword, since being brave means hiding or ignoring one's feelings. Later in life, Morag finds it difficult to open up to others and trust them with the side of herself that is not strong or brave.

As a teenager, it is not primarily being poor that makes Morag feel different. She starts working to earn money to buy her own clothes. But she discovers that she is too independent, intelligent, and intellectual to have much success at the games boys and girls her age play. Even her old friend Eva is more popular at dances than Morag. She wants to fall in love with someone like her, who likes and respects her as a person. She cannot accept the gender roles others take for granted; her primary goal in life is not to marry and have children, but to get away from Manawaka and go to college.

According to psychologists Kimmel and Weiner, female adolescents "are generally inclined to focus on *interpersonal* aspects of their identity formation, such as their attachments and connections, and males on *intrapersonal* matters, such as their individuation and achievements" (1985, 406). This means that girls learn about themselves from *who* they are with, while boys learn from *what* they do. Ideology and vocation are more important to boys, friendship and relationships to girls. Boys and girls do not have different abilities, but their priorities differ: "What distinguishes the genders with respect to their identity formation are the priorities generally assigned to intimacy by adolescent girls and to instrumentality by adolescent boys" (Kimmel and Weiner 1985, 407). Morag does not fit the female pattern observed by Kimmel and Weiner. Intimacy is of no great importance to her while living in Manawaka, and she does not have any girlfriends she is especially close to. She wants to be accepted by a group, but social acceptance matters more to her than personal relationships. She is also more focused on doing, on developing her writing, achieving her goals, and learning, than on building close relationships, whether with men or women. It is only when she feels the strong arms of Ella's mother around her that Morag begins to realize she also needs to be held, and that losing her parents has been a great emotional loss as well. It is nevertheless striking that close friendships play a smaller role in this novel than in the books with male heroes.

Ella and her mother further Morag's interpersonal development, Ella by providing intimacy and helping her open up, her mother by giving Morag the mothering she has not experienced before. From Ella's mother Morag finally receives the nurture and emotional support she needs to develop her feelings and her trust in herself. Indeed, Ella's whole family give Morag a sense of relationship and connection that is new to her.

Morag's capacity to give and receive love, and her awareness of what kind of relationships and sex roles she wants, develop in the course of her three important love relationships. Her first sexual encounter is with Jules Tonnerre, and it is presented with realism and a lack of romantic idealization. He gives her a very positive introduction to sex and provides an alternative to the relationships of her classmates. With him she discovers that men and women can relate on an equal footing, and that she can be a desirable lover as she is, with her honesty, intellectual prowess, and un-girlish looks, all of which make her undesirable to the other boys. This first relationship is particularly important: Firstly, because Morag learns that she is able to love and be loved; and secondly, because she learns that bodily and intellectual harmony and equality are possible between a man and a woman.

Morag's relationship with Brooke seems quite accidental. His primary attraction is his exoticism and ability to take her away from Manawaka and a culture she despises. She dreams of the "halls of Sion," the "prince," and pleasant "pastures" of the hymn "Jerusalem the Golden." But her dreams are idealizations, and she has had no role models to help her form ideas about what kind of marriage and relationship she wants. It takes her many years to realize that she and Brooke do not want the same kind of life at all. He wants her to be a perfect 1940s housewife. She probably wants to be him more than she wants to be his wife. Although she does love him and they have a good sex life, Morag learns that a conventional marriage, and the gender roles that go with it, is not what she wants. One reason Morag cannot develop her identity with Brooke is that she is terrified of being found out; she thinks she must hide her background, or Brooke will lose his regard for her. They talk at length about his background, however, maybe because Morag is fascinated by the idea of India and British public schools. But Morag's past is not good enough for her and thus taboo. In this sense she continues, and internalizes, the prejudices of the high-society people of Manawaka, whom she despises.

David Lucking sees a tension in Laurence's fiction between two ideas or forces that on a general level represent a conflict between civilization and its opposite (2002). This tension is accompanied by more specific oppositions, such as conformity versus rebellion, repression of self versus abandonment, and the familiar versus the unknown. Lucking does not extend this conflict to Jules and Brooke, but the two men can be seen as representations of opposite principles, related to nature and culture respectively. Although Morag loves them both, neither can offer a life she would like to live. Brooke's civilizing is stifling, but Jules's life is too chaotic to combine with the stable family and professional life Morag wants. Dan McRaith has both the natural and civilized impulses – as Morag herself does – and might have

been able to give her the kind of relationship she wants, were it not for his family in Scotland. But their relationships make Morag aware of what she wants and needs in a relationship, and by the end of the novel, she has developed into a person who can give and receive intimacy. That she nevertheless ends up single seems to be partly the result of bad luck.

Morag's development is not a straightforward one from childhood to adulthood. Rather, she struggles towards maturity, is derailed into foreclosure (with Brooke), breaks out of foreclosure into moratorium (when she leaves him), finds a new identity as a writer and single mother (achievement), and finally goes through another moratorium as she writes the book, which ends in a new identity achievement.

The period between 18 and 23, which is when Erikson and Marcia think the first identity formation process takes place, does not result in identity achievement for Morag. She does have a period of exploration as she becomes acquainted with a much larger world than she had known previously, develops her talents and interests, and broadens her emotional register. But with Brooke, her interpersonal and ideological development is halted, while she continues to develop as a writer. Another moratorium is signaled by dissatisfaction with her marriage and her subsequent divorce.

The literary subject and action of "a protagonist who attempts to find value in a world defined by love and marriage" are, according to Susan J. Rosowski, characteristic of the genre she calls "the novel of awakening" (1983, 49). This genre is, Rosowski claims, similar to the *bildungsroman* in some ways, but turns on the female protagonist's realization of a split in herself between social role and real self, and a subsequent awakening to the realization that the two cannot be reconciled; the social world she lives in is too restrictive for women to develop their talents and have their emotional needs satisfied. Laurence's Morag starts out as a Jane Eyre-esque *bildungsroman* character, but on her marriage gradually comes closer to the heroine of a novel of awakening. But whereas Rosowski's women experience "an awakening to limitations" (49), Morag awakens to opportunity. At her point in history it is becoming possible to break out, start again, and create the kind of life and identity that she wants and needs. Laurence here places herself at the beginning of an international trend in fiction: With the growth of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 70s, many novels described women breaking out of restrictive marriages to start new lives and develop their identities. Whereas "[t]ension in the novel of awakening results from the reader's awareness that the protagonist's attempts to escape human realities are impossible" (Rosowski 1983, 51), Laurence uses the *bildungsroman* tradition to explore possibilities for women to find freedom and identity without the boundaries of the real.

### *Ideological development*

An important issue in Morag's life, and in her identity development, is her own power and control over her life. On the one hand, she has to believe that such control is possible in order to have the courage to leave Manawaka and try to create a life in keeping with her personality, talents, and ideals. On the downside, this belief becomes suffocating because it gives her complete responsibility for what happens to her, and by extension, to her daughter. That is why Pique's development becomes such a burden. The power of individuals to shape themselves and their lives is a very (North) American theme, which pervades not only Laurence's fiction,<sup>43</sup> but also American history and literature from *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* to *The Great Gatsby* and the whole debate about welfare and the deserving poor in the United States. Laurence's novel participates in this theme, but moderates the celebration of self-sufficiency and individualism through Morag's growing appreciation of connection and belonging.

Until her divorce, Morag balances her desires against the adaptations she has to make in order to have what she wants. During her marriage to Brooke she willingly gives up some her freedom, her desire to study, and finally some of her self-respect in exchange for his love and attention and the possibility to live as a well-off, intellectual city person. Brooke's hateful and degrading treatment of Jules Tonnerre helps her realize how much power and control she has in fact relinquished to her husband, and forces her hand. She decides she has to become her own master again. As a single woman, she creates a life for herself that contains most of the things she wants: She has a daughter, becomes a professional writer, has fulfilling love relationships with Jules and later with Dan McRaith, and makes a home for herself and Pique at the farm near McConnell's Landing. But this freedom comes at a price. Almost until the last page, Morag is haunted and burdened by feelings of excessive responsibility and of not living up to her own ideals. It is only when she decides not to be a new or old pioneer – and says goodbye to Catharine Parr Traill – that she begins to forge a viable philosophy of life for herself.

In an article called "Sources" (1970), Laurence says that it was only during her writing of *The Stone Angel* that she recognized "how mixed were my own feelings" (82) towards her

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<sup>43</sup> See for instance Morley (1981) and Lucking (2002). Lucking structures his book around dialectical oppositions, such as order versus anarchy. This pair is linked to the particularly Canadian theme of wilderness versus civilization (Lucking 158-160), and both are linked to what I call power and control. Morley makes freedom versus captivity a central theme of her study of Laurence's oeuvre, which again is a reflection of the same dilemma.

grandparents' generation, "the generation of pioneers of Scots Presbyterian origin" (81) who were among the first settlers in her home town. She then realized

how difficult they were to live with, how authoritarian, how unbending, how afraid to show love, many of them, and how willing to show anger. And yet – they had inhabited a wilderness and made it fruitful. They were, in the end, great survivors, and for that I love and value them. (Laurence 1970, 82)

David Lucking sees these mixed feelings in all of Laurence's Manawaka novels (2002, 160-175). In *The Diviners*, the conflict is inside Morag herself. She flees her home town of Manawaka, partly to get away from the values, prejudices, and taboos of the "good" Presbyterians of the town (that is, the people Laurence talks about above). Yet, she needs these same values and strengths – the pioneer spirit – to achieve her own social, material, and creative advancement. What she has to do in the present-time level of the story – that is, the frame tale – is to come to terms with both the positive and negative sides of this legacy.

On the one hand, making her own choices and insisting on being responsible and in control have been necessary and valuable for Morag. On the other hand, this "pioneer spirit" has made her repress her emotions. Afraid of opening up, and especially of showing weakness, Morag has missed out on closeness. Toward the end of the summer that constitutes the present-time level of the novel, her defenses begin to crumble. When she finally dares to be honest with Pique and her boyfriend Dan, she realizes that telling them about her own feelings – that she feels lonely and jealous of their relationship – eases tensions between the three of them and brings them closer together. Another important change is that Morag starts accepting that there are things in life she cannot foresee or control. She is not totally responsible for who Pique is becoming, nor for everything that happens to her daughter, nor for any unpleasant feelings Pique might have. She has to realize that she cannot protect her daughter from life; she is not God.

The novel's opening image gives a key to the process Morag is going through: "The river flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction" (3). The river symbolizes time, and the "apparently impossible contradiction" (3) in its seeming to flow both ways, is only apparent, because people have memories. Perception of time is a human faculty made possible by our capacity to remember. And in Morag's consciousness the past influences the present and the future. The present also influences the past, because in Morag's

mind, the past really does change from one time to another. The Canadian past also changes depending on whether it appears in Jules's stories, Christie's stories, or Morag's school curriculum, just as she rewrites her own past in accordance with how she sees things at a given time. In the present-time story, which is told in the past tense, Morag is remembering and rethinking her past life. This retelling makes her see the past differently, and by changing the past, she is also changing the present. She is initiating a change in herself which will prepare her for a better future.

As quoted earlier, Laurence once said she used a particular form of first-person narration in *A Bird in the House*, in order to "speak as though from two points in time, simultaneously" (qtd. in Morley 1981, 110). Why did she not use this type of traditional bildungsroman narration in *The Diviners*? In the Four Classics, the distance between the young protagonist and the mature narrator makes maturity seem the more valuable of the two stages. As discussed in Chapter 4 above, we are invited to sympathize and empathize with the somewhat naive protagonist, but we should nevertheless be glad when he or she reaches a more enlightened state. Youth is the means, maturity the end. In Laurence's book, the consonant narration and lack of commentary by an older narrator mean the reader's interest and sympathy lie with Morag at whatever stage she is at. At the same time, the presence of the frame story means we know from the beginning where young Morag is headed, and there is little potential for excitement about how the story of the past will end. Both techniques serve to give extra weight to each time period, and less weight to the goal or endpoint of the development. Laurence does not privilege maturity, but emphasizes each period in its own right. Still, the ending brings a sense of peace and accomplishment.

This narration is part of Morag's project, which is to write a revisionist history of her own life. The revision lies in seeing her past not only in terms of how things turned out or what she afterwards knew, but in trying to understand herself as she was then. That accomplished, Morag is able to accept and forgive her past weaknesses and mistakes. Also, the retelling makes her see that the result has actually been quite good, no matter what old or new pioneers might think.

Personal and collective history is important to Morag's sense of identity from early childhood. Since she cannot remember her parents, that part of her background is constituted by a couple of photographs (evidence to her that she has been loved) and the story her stepfather Christie tells her about the war. Christie and Morag's father fought in the First World War together, and Christie tells Morag her father saved his life when he himself fainted during the Battle of Bourlon Wood (90). It is also Christie who introduces her to the history of

her people, the Scots, primarily through his stories about the hero Piper Gunn and his brave wife Morag. Later, however, we find out that her father did not save Christie during the war, and that the Piper Gunn stories were largely invented. As discussed above, Christie's stories were intended for moral and psychological edification, and therefore their veracity mattered little to him. But as she becomes an adult, Morag needs to come to grips with her real background. According to Patricia Morley, "Morag's personal growth illustrates ... the need to come to terms with one's ancestors, to understand their experience in order to be released from its bondage" (Morley 1981, 128). As a child, Morag identifies with the mythical Scottish heroes of Christie's stories, but refuses to make the social environment she grows up in part of her identity. As a youth and young adult she is ashamed of her past and her adopted family, and searches for a more suitable and acceptable past. Going to Scotland to look for the place her ancestors came from is part of this quest. But as she watches Christie die, she realizes that her past is not in Scotland but in Manawaka. He is her real father, because he functioned as a father, and loved her like a father. Slowly she comes to terms with her real rather than imagined background.

## **Conclusion**

*The Diviners* differs from the Four Classics in many ways, especially in narration and plot. These differences are only partly expressed by the BRI, which might be because Laurence adds her own features rather than taking away many of the traditional ones. The book is therefore immediately recognizable as a bildungsroman, in spite of the obvious differences. *The Diviners* is thus a good example of how a genre can change over time without becoming something else. Written in the mid-1970s, it has the typical experimental, fragmented structure that characterizes many modernist and early post-modern works: For example, it shifts between two time levels, and the past is referred to in the present tense and the first person, while the present is related in the past tense and third person. Much of the material from the past is presented as photographs or isolated film clips with the title "Snapshot" or "Memorybank Movie." Stories told by other people are not fitted into scenes, but presented independently with a title, such as "Christie's tale of Piper Gunn." The impression is of bits and pieces collected more or less randomly, much as one digs old photographs out of drawers and reminisces about them. Nevertheless the "Snapshots" and "Memorybank Movies" are presented in chronological order so that the structural backbone of the genre is kept. Laurence thus writes in the bildungsroman tradition, but updates it to fit her own needs.



Identity formation in *The Diviners* resembles that in the older novels by taking the heroine to a mature sense of identity achievement and a feeling of having found her place in the world. Like *Of Human Bondage*, it differs from the Four Classics by putting less emphasis on fate and chance, and by totally excluding God. Occupational development is particularly important in this novel, and although love is a recurrent theme, Morag is the only protagonist not to have a love relationship (or prospects of one) by the end. While the protagonists of the Four Classics stop developing in their early-to-mid-twenties, Somerset Maugham takes Philip to 29. *The Diviners* follows Morag to her late 40s, and she keeps developing throughout her adult life. Morag's story is that of a post-WWII woman, which would be hard to imagine set in an earlier period.

### ***The Cider House Rules* (1985)**

I hate the twentieth century, and what I've seen so far of this one. The novel that made me want to write novels is that of the nineteenth century, Dickens especially, but not only Dickens; also Hardy, George Eliot. The novel has not been improved in the twentieth or the twenty-first century. (Weich 2005)

Described as “Dickensian” (Davis and Womack 1998, 297; Thompson 1986) and “self-consciously Victorian” (Booth 2002, 284), John Irving's *The Cider House Rules* combines the contemporary issue of abortion with nineteenth-century expansive storytelling and well-known themes from the classic bildungsroman. A bestseller and Book-of-the-Month-Club selection (Campbell 1998, 4), Irving's 1985 novel has been more popular among general readers than on university reading lists or in critical journals.

*The Cider House Rules* is included because it bears a number of close resemblances with the three British Classics. The reason might of course be Irving's professed love for the nineteenth-century novel, but there are many indications that the link is more direct. *The Cider House Rules* alludes to all three British Classics, and several characters keep reading these books over and over, comparing themselves with characters in them. Irving has also written an introduction to *Great Expectations* in which he claims that Dickens's novel is “the novel that made me want to be a novelist – specifically, to move a reader as I was moved then” (Irving 1982, 9). The novel is also frequently called a bildungsroman (cf. Booth 2002,

289; Thompson 1986).<sup>44</sup> Irving's novel balances what might be seen as American skepticism towards rules and authorities with the British Classics' positive attitude to others and community.

*The Cider House Rules* tells the story of Homer Wells from his birth and abandonment by his mother at St. Cloud's orphanage until he returns to St. Cloud's to work as a doctor when he is about 35 years old. In Irving's words, the novel begins

with the four failed adoptions of the orphan Homer Wells. By the end of the first chapter, when Homer returns for the fourth time to the orphanage in St. Cloud's, Maine, the orphanage physician, Dr. Wilbur Larch, decides he'll have to keep him./ Dr. Larch, an obstetrician and (in the 1930s and '40s) an illegal abortionist, trains Homer Wells to be a doctor. ... [With] the assistance of Larch's faithful nurses, Angela and Edna, Homer becomes an experienced obstetrician and gynecologist. He refuses to perform abortions, however. ... Homer's conflict with Larch over the abortion issue and Homer's desire to see something of the world outside St. Cloud's ... make him leave the orphanage with Wally Worthington and Candy Kendall—an attractive couple who come to St. Cloud's for an abortion. (Irving 1999, 9-10)

What starts as a summer job at Ocean View Farm, a large apple estate owned by Wally's parents, Olive and Wallace Worthington, stretches to a 15-year stay for Homer. While Wally becomes a WWII pilot and goes missing over Burma, Homer and Candy become lovers and they have a son, Angel. But Wally is found and returns, paralyzed. Not wanting to hurt any of the others, Wally, Candy, and Homer continue living together, all functioning as parents for Angel.

While Homer runs Ocean View orchard and lives in a family arrangement that defies the law as well as ordinary morality, Wilbur Larch forges documents to prepare for Homer to replace him as the abortion doctor at St. Cloud's. Homer goes on living his own life and disagreeing with Dr. Larch's plans for him until Rose Rose, the daughter of his black picking foreman, is found to be pregnant after being raped repeatedly by her father. Homer performs the abortion because Rose needs help and he can provide it. Afterwards he finds he cannot play God by giving an abortion to some and denying it to others. As Dr. Larch dies, Homer

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<sup>44</sup> Irving has also said that another famous bildungsroman, Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* is his favorite novel ("Irving Q & A" 2009).

decides to tell Angel and Wally the truth about his and Candy’s relationship, and returns to St. Cloud as Dr. Larch’s successor.

## Index Analysis

The table below shows a high score of 123 points for *The Cider House Rules*, the same as *The Diviners*. Though lower than the scores of the Four Classics and *Of Human Bondage*, this still indicates that Irving’s novels belongs to the bildungsroman tradition.

Table 35. Section scores for *Jane Eyre*, *Of Human Bondage* and *The Diviners*

Section	Features	Max. points	<i>Cider House</i> (1985)	<i>David Copperfield</i> (1849-50)	<i>Of Human Bondage</i> (1915)	<i>Diviners</i> (1974)
1	Narrative perspective and mode	15	13	15	15	10
2	Characterization: Protagonist	15	12	15	14	11
3	Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	17	16	17	17	17
4	Topical story elements: Protagonist	26	18	26	25	25
5	Topical story elements: Secondary characters	9	7	8	5	8
6	Setting	5	2	5	5	5
7	Plot	28	26	28	26	18
8	Generic signals	4	2	3	2	2
9	Theme	29	27	27	29	27
	<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>123</b>

*The Cider House Rules* has high scores in all sections except “Topical story elements: Protagonist,” where it is awarded 18 out of 26, and “Setting,” where it receives 2 out of 5. Two points less than the full score for “Narrative perspective and mode,” however, is high as is 12 for “Characterization: Protagonist.” A high overall score, and high scores in the remaining sections, including the important “Plot” and “Theme,” place Irving’s novel solidly as a bildungsroman. Surprisingly, maybe, *Cider House* scores higher than *Bondage* in the “Topical story elements: Secondary characters” section. The protagonist does not have all the typical experiences of bildungsroman heroes, especially the traumatic ones, but the events relating to secondary characters are more genre specific.

Section 9 on “Theme” is left out of the following consideration of index sections and features since it is treated in thematic analysis below.

### ***Section 1. Narrative perspective and mode***<sup>45</sup>

Omniscient third-person narration distinguishes *The Cider House Rules* from the two Dickens novels, which otherwise seem to be strong influences on it. Although focalization shifts between Homer and this omniscient narrator, it nevertheless differs from all the other English-language novels in the sample. Whereas both the first-person novels and *On Human Bondage* generally restrict focalization to protagonist and narrator, *Cider House* admits the thoughts and perspectives of a whole range of other characters too. The first page offers a good example:

[T]he doctor[’s] ... name was Wilbur Larch, which except for the scent of ether that always accompanied him, reminded one of the nurses of the tough, durable wood of the coniferous tree of that name. She hated, however, the ridiculous name of Wilbur .... The other nurse imagined herself to be in love with Dr. Larch, and when it was her turn to name a baby, she frequently named him John Larch, or John Wilbur (her father’s name was John) .... (1)

This is the prelude to the story of the hero’s birth and naming, and it acquaints the reader with Dr. Larch, Nurse Angela, and Nurse Edna. The narrator provides information about their backgrounds, personalities, and thoughts that would not be available to a character-narrator or a third-person narrator in a center-of-consciousness novel. Although this scene concerns the birth of Homer Wells, he does not have the stage to himself: The shifting focalization is one of several ways in which this book signals that Homer, the protagonist, is never isolated or independent. From its beginning, his life is closely tied up with the lives of the orphanage, Dr. Larch and the nurses, the other children, and later with several other people too. This departure from the first-person model of *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* serves to highlight people’s interconnections and relationships .

In the first chapter, the focalization stays largely with Homer or the narrator, and the thoughts of others occur only intermittently. Chapter 2, however, tells the story of Dr. Larch’s life and is largely focalized through him. For the rest of the novel, Homer and Larch take turns being the primary focalizer, but the authorial narrator also makes his presence felt, and the thoughts of a number of secondary characters are given in more or less detail.

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<sup>45</sup> For detailed section scores, see the tables at the beginning of this chapter.

As the narration and focalization weave together a large number of characters, Irving further connects and intertwines characters by rapid switches between the thoughts of several of them. At regular intervals, usually at important moments in the story, several people lie sleepless on the same night reflecting on similar things. In the middle of Chapter 9, for instance, which is entitled “Over Burma,” Olive, Mrs. Grogan, Wilbur Larch, the orphan Steerforth, Ray Kendall, Homer and Candy are all awake simultaneously. Irving shifts quickly between Larch’s worries over love and abortion laws, Olive’s belief that Wally is alive, and Ray’s thoughts about whether Candy should marry Homer or Wally. As an embodiment of these thoughts, Homer and Candy make love for the first time, unaware that she will become pregnant and Wally will return alive. Narration, focalization, and access to the minds of minor characters thus serve to bind people together and reinforce the importance of community.

The pronounced omniscience of the narrator means that the book is retrospective and the narrator knows more than the hero. We are frequently told things are *really* different from what the characters think, and the narrator anticipates the chronology of the story by giving information the characters do not have. As soon as Senior Worthington is introduced, for instance, the reader is told he has Alzheimer’s disease, a fact none of the characters will know for over a hundred-and-fifty pages. There is definitely distance, sometimes also ironic, between the narrator and various focalizers, including Homer and Dr. Larch. Repeatedly, people are shown to have limited understanding, either because of age, lack of experience, prejudice, or a range of other factors. The numerous voices complement and challenge one another, contributing to a Bakhtin-type polyphony, “[a] plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” (Bakhtin 1985, 6; italics in original), in which no single view is seen as the correct one. The “implicit author” or “the norms of the text” (e.g. Rimmon-Kenan 2003, 82) cannot be identified with any one character. The Four Classics have a gradual reduction of the distance between narrator and focalizer. In the case of the three British Classics, the voice of the narrator at the end largely comes to represent the voice of maturity and the concluding vision of the book itself. *The Cider House Rules* leaves a number of voices in play until its very last sentences, in which it combines several character perspectives to create a full, composite picture of Homer and Dr. Larch.

*The Cider House Rules* aims at verisimilitude and largely avoids contrived coincidences. On the contrary, it is clearly the hand of man – more specifically Dr. Larch – that brings things together at the end and makes it possible for the novel to turn full circle, leaving Homer to succeed Dr. Larch at St. Cloud’s. This strengthens the novel’s thematics of responsibility, “playing god,” and “doing god’s work” – that is, Larch and Homer take on

their share of responsibility for life on earth, since nobody else is doing it. This said, however, there are also unlikely chance events. An example pointed out by Davis and Womack is the fact that both Mrs. Eames and her daughter die of botched abortions soon after one another and in the care of Dr. Larch: “[I]n the fabulistic world of Dickens and Irving,” Davis and Womack claim, “coincidences are indispensable to the connective tissue of characterscape” (305). Coincidence also sometimes determines the plot’s direction, as in some “fateful” scenes in which many characters come together at a particular time and place. One such incident is the cluster around the Fred Astaire movie showing in Bath: Debra Pettigrew wants to go with Homer, but he takes Candy the following evening. On the same night, Lorna and Melony decide to go to the film (349), and Mary Agnes’s new adoptive parents take her as well. Following the well-known literary law that if a gun appears in the first act, it’s going to be used by the end of the play, the most surprising and original aspect of this convergence of characters in the same spot at the same time is that Homer does not meet Melony or Mary Agnes. His confrontation with Melony is thus delayed by fifteen years. While the Four Classics primarily use coincidence as a device for binding people together, Irving shows it to be an important element of life in its own right.

### ***Sections 2 and 3. Characterization***

Homer is an almost archetypal bildungsroman hero with all the index features except middle-class background. He is an only child, and an orphan with no living relatives. As a child he is almost too good, showing not only a desire to be useful and help others, but also a great capacity for empathy. He reads to the smaller boys in the orphanage and volunteers to help the worried, nervous pregnant women who make their way to the hospital. He has several qualities traditionally seen as feminine: A “passive hero” by Irving’s own admission (Irving 1999, 29), Homer is carried along by outside forces for much of the story. He is sensitive, warm, and compassionate, and has a talent for talking to women. In Dr. Larch’s opinion “he had a good hand for holding and eyes you could confess to” (83-84).

Watching his first movie, Homer compares himself to the black Bedouin who crosses a desert on camelback at the beginning of the pirate action. The Bedouin does not belong, and no one knows what he is doing in this film. “I’m a *Bedouin!*” Homer realizes: “[F]or the Bedouin – come from nowhere, going nowhere – there was no home” (259). Nevertheless, there is a strong sense of home or homes in this novel, since Homer comes to belong to both St. Cloud’s and Ocean View. And it is Homer’s capacity for love that creates the homes, a

good illustration of the saying “home is where the heart is.” His name is also a signal of the importance of home.

*Cider House* scores high in the secondary characters section, but nevertheless has two highly unusual characteristics: Firstly, minor characters are more important in themselves than is the case in any other novel in this study. This alone strengthens the community focus vis-à-vis the individualist angle. Secondly, the novel is unusual in the large place it assigns Wilbur Larch.

Homer’s development depends on the other characters; Larch, Wally, Candy, Olive, and later Angel, are particularly prominent, but the minor characters affect him too. At the same time the secondary characters are very marked presences in their own right, which might have to do with Irving’s style and technique. As Davis and Womack note, “Irving offers detailed histories not only of the novel’s two main characters, Wilbur Larch and Homer Wells, but also of Melony, Wally Worthington, and Candy Kendall, among others” (304). Secondary characters are generally not introduced by the protagonist, but by the narrator. And they are more likely to be focalized by the omniscient narrator or another secondary character than by Homer or Larch. In narrative terms then, minor characters are independent of Homer; they do not have to be seen by him in order to be in the story. Furthermore, their existence in time is not circumscribed by Homer, and we are often told what and how they were doing before Homer was born.

Davis and Womack think both Dickens’s and Irving’s techniques rest on “characterscape,” a particular attention to and fullness of character description on which also the plots are based. In their view, “Irving loads his own narratives with considerable detail and description” (299), as Irving himself praises Dickens for doing. This abundance of detail helps bring the secondary characters alive. In addition to strengthening the illusion of realism, the wealth of superfluous character detail also increases the importance and independence of secondary characters.

The most significant character roles in *Cider House* are the traditional ones of mentor, companion and lover. These are filled primarily by Dr. Larch, Wally, and Candy, respectively. Dr. Larch is perhaps the most pervasive presence, since his relationship with Homer lasts throughout the book. Larch is also the one who receives most attention, being the only minor character to have a whole chapter dedicated to him. According to Benjamin Demott “[t]here are two heroes” (1985, 1) in the novel, and other critics agree (cf. Davis and Womack 1998, 304). For Irving himself, “*The Cider House Rules* is a novel with two main

characters” (1999, 32). There are good reasons for agreeing with this, but I regard Homer as the main character because he goes through a major change.

Chapter 2, entitled “The Lord’s Work,” is a complete biography of Dr. Larch up to the time when Homer becomes a fixture in his life. The chapter starts with his birth and childhood, giving the chapter the feel of a second bildungsroman. The bildungsroman connection is further strengthened by the focus on Larch’s identity formation. We are told of his family background and all the important events and impressions that made him develop as he did. The chapter, and the story of Larch’s identity development, ends with Larch deciding to teach Homer: When Homer is 13 he finds a small fetus in the hospital waste. Larch explains that the fetus is “‘The Lord’s work,’” and “‘that was when he realized that this was also the Lord’s work: teaching Homer Wells, telling him everything, making sure he learned right from wrong” (70). And so the education (identity development) of Wilbur Larch is completed at the same time as Homer’s starts. Larch has a son and heir at last and knows what his legacy will be. From the third chapter onward, Dr. Larch has an important place, although his life story is secondary to Homer’s.

Dr. Larch is both a father substitute and Homer’s primary educator. He exerts the strongest formative influence on Homer until he leaves St. Cloud’s. Afterward, Larch continues affecting Homer’s life, for instance through the invented heart condition that releases him from going into the army and fighting in WWII. But the relationship between the two is not one-sided: Dr. Larch’s influence on Homer is partly a result of Homer’s influence on him. Homer’s attachment to and love for Larch is strong and persistent, at least from his early teens, and Larch returns his love. The result is that Homer – the orphan who failed to be adopted – nevertheless has a parent. Homer is about 15 when Larch makes him his apprentice, and soon after Larch realizes that “he had allowed himself to become a father” (85). There is no formal adoption. It is Larch’s feelings for Homer that give him the role of parent. Recognizing that “he was suffering from the natural feelings of a father” (84), is what marks the transition for Larch.

Larch has lived his life alone, without a wife or lover, and without any intimate relationships. His father-son relationship with Homer thus constitutes his first experience of love. Kissing Homer when he believes he is asleep is the first time in his life he has given or received a kiss of love. The act releases feelings and thoughts that are new to Larch: He starts realizing that he loves the other orphans as well, and he starts kissing the boys good night every evening.



That Larch has become a father is marked in the text by a switch from *Dr. Larch* to *Wilbur Larch*. The biography in Chapter 2 starts by calling Larch “Wilbur,” but as soon as he is qualified he becomes “Dr. Larch” (41). The text then switches between “Larch,” “Wilbur Larch,” “young Larch,” and “Dr. Larch” (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, however, Larch is consistently referred to as “Dr. Larch,” as in the long conversations between him and Homer about abortions (72-73) and Melony’s anger (82-83). But when Larch realizes he has become Homer’s father, he becomes “Wilbur Larch” again (84). The emotional connection to another person has changed Larch’s identity from the merely professional “Dr.” to an individual, “Wilbur.” From now on, *Dr. Larch* is only used when he is acting primarily in his professional capacity. Wilbur Larch the father is different from Dr. Larch; Wilbur Larch is “indecisive” (84), while Dr. Larch is efficient and resolute.

*Cider House* shares with *Wilhelm Meister* a strong female presence.<sup>46</sup> Not only are there a number of important women in the book, but the women Homer gets to know most closely are also very strong, almost manly, women. Melony, the oldest girl in the orphanage, is the first woman Homer has sex with. On one of their first walks together, he thinks: “She’s bigger than I am, she’s older than I am, she knows more than I do.... And she has a snake” (88). Melony is also much more aggressive than Homer. She is masculine not only in appearance, but also because she is uninterested in children and lacks compassion. Before Homer even meets Candy, we are told that although she is blond and unusually beautiful, she is “extremely tall for a woman” (143), she helps her father with lobster fishing and repairs, and is mentally tougher than Wally. Wally’s mother, Olive Worthington, is also a stronger character than her husband. Wallace Worthington has Alzheimer’s, and is therefore dependent on his wife. He manages the financial side of the apple farm, but everything else is Olive’s responsibility, partly because she is so enterprising and talented. When Dr. Larch receives a letter from her, he finds it “strange that Mr. Worthington was so little in view” and wonders “[w]hat’s his wife running the farm for?” (223).

The secondary characters in *Cider House* resemble those of the Four Classics in their functions and roles, but at the same time they assert themselves more strongly. Many people have a formative function in Homer’s life.

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<sup>46</sup> See the analysis of secondary characters in *Wilhelm Meister* in Chapter 4, Section 3.

### ***Sections 4, 5 and 6. Topical story elements and setting***

Although Homer's childhood takes place largely during the Depression, he is spared the experience of poverty and hunger, and there is no awful Dickensian boarding school. Homer moves away from his childhood home at 21, and then has a number of the typical experiences: He meets a great variety of people from different professions and classes, acquires new skills at the apple farm, and learns lobster fishing, mechanics, and how to drive and swim. He tries new roles as he starts dating and relating to fellow workers, and he becomes intimate with Candy and Wally, Mrs. Worthington, and Candy's father Ray. During the war, he is an assistant nurse at a local hospital and a substitute son to Olive Worthington. He gradually learns most of the physical, technical, administrative and social aspects of running the apple farm, and in the end becomes its manager.

A slight anomaly is the absence of money and health problems. At one point, Dr. Larch thinks Homer has a rigid morality and lacks understanding for people less fortunate than himself because he was "an arrogant, young doctor who'd never been sick," therefore "manifesting a sick superiority toward *all* patients" (420). Earlier, Homer accused a young doctor at the Cape Kenneth hospital of the same thing, but failed to connect the man's attitudes with lack of experience. Although Homer never gets sick, he eventually comes to understand Dr. Larch's point of view because he has experienced love. And, as Larch sees it, love is "a disease even more insidious than ... polio" (401). The problems, pleasure and pain of loving Candy in secret for 15 years affect Homer deeply. After Angel is born, "Homer thought that his desire for Candy had changed everything," (441), not only his relationship with Wally but his relationship with the world.

As he is never ill, Homer is not nursed by anybody else either. Yet he makes the discoveries that in the Four Classics are associated with difficulties and help from others: Understanding the frailty of life, one's own mortality, and that life can easily take a much more negative course. These realizations come to Homer throughout his life, from the death of Fuzzy Stone when Homer was a boy, to Rose Rose's pregnancy by her father. All the while he stays at Ocean View, he is aware how much of his happiness he owes to Wally, Candy, and Olive Worthington.

The negative experiences Homer does not have in his own life he sees in the lives of others. There are the sad destinies of the pregnant women at St. Cloud's, the woman at the orchard who is beaten by her husband, Mr. Rose's "knife business," and Rose Rose's murder of her father. Although Homer does not get everything he wants in life, there is a distinct

sense that he is living in his own little garden while the world around him is full of violence and disasters. There are as many deaths in this book as in the Four Classics: Fuzzy Stone, the couple that tries to adopt Homer, the stationmaster, “Senior” Worthington, and later also Olive, Ray, Grace Lynch, Mister Rose, and finally also Dr. Larch and Melony.

The setting of *Cider House* is as Demott says, “Maine, or rather the two Maines, dark and light” (1985, 1). But physical and metaphoric light is not the only difference between the orphanage in St. Cloud’s and Ocean View Farm in Heart’s Rock. Alison Booth is right in that both locations are “hybrid institutions” which “collapse public and private spheres” and “serve as home, school, workplace, death place” (2002, 285), but their social roles are starkly different. The orphanage-cum-hospital has come into being because someone had to provide for the poor orphans and pregnant prostitutes left behind when the logging company and paper mill had “used up” St. Cloud’s and moved downstream. Ocean View, on the other hand, is founded for the generation of private wealth. It is the American dream of private initiative and success set in a fertile garden world, and with recreation provided in the country club at neighboring Heart’s Haven. Although a site of hard work, Ocean View gives people the chance to work and provide for themselves and their families. St. Cloud’s represents the more saintly ideal of living for the good of others. And these are the two choices facing Homer.

The settings of *Cider House* partly follow and partly break with the model of the Four Classics. As in the three British novels, Homer grows up in the “countryside or [a] provincial town.” But the great change in Homer’s life is moving to an estate in a small town, rather than a big city; in this respect the novel resembles *Jane Eyre* and *Wilhelm Meister* more than Dickens’s novels. But Homer’s move has the same meaning as in the Four Classics, in that he learns about the world in the new place, encounters people from different social classes, and has a number of the other experiences typical of the genre (Sections 4 and 5). Although Ocean View is just a farm in a small town, it nevertheless comes to represent the “other parts of the world” that Dr. Larch contrasts with “here in St. Cloud’s” in his “short history of St. Cloud’s.” These other parts contain a wide variety of people and experiences that contrast sharply with the restrictions of St. Cloud’s. The orphanage, on the other hand, is a smaller, more limited world.

### ***Section 7. Plot***

The plot of *Cider House* spans some 35 years: Chapters 1-9 go from Homer’s birth to his twenty-fifth year, while Chapters 9-11 concern a period of 3-4 months 15 years later, when Homer is about 39 years old. It is slightly tricky to assess the number of pages spent on

various periods in the protagonist's life in this novel because large parts of it concern other people. Disregarding Dr. Larch's biography in chapter 2, the figures are approximately the following:

*Table 36. Relationship between numbers of pages and years in hero's life*

Homer's age	No. of pages	Pages per year
0-19	82	4.3
19-24	167	56.6
39	137	137

82 pages are devoted to the period from birth to Homer's twentieth year. 167 pages concern ages 19 to 24, while the last 137 pages are about his fortieth year. The largest number of pages are spent on the period from 19 to 24. But the number of pages per year is greatest for the month or so around harvest-time when Homer is approximately thirty-nine years old. This last period, however, revolves around a large number of people, and although Homer experiences a profound change in his beliefs, the same is true of several other characters. Angel, Rose Rose, Mr. Rose, Wally and Candy all change as a result of Melony's visit and learning that Rose Rose is pregnant by her father.

I have given *Cider House* points for Feature 64, "Main part of plot about period when protagonist is between 18 and 23 years old," because the period from 19-24 clearly has been singled out for special attention. The long middle part of the book is about these years and the maturing that Homer goes through. But it also has to be recognized that the autumn he is 39 is crucial: The greatest number of pages per time period is spent on these weeks, and Homer experiences what must be called an identity change at this time. The novel thus has a second important focus in addition to the traditional one, as does *The Diviners*.

When Homer is 19 and meets Candy and Wally for the first time, Irving chooses to use all of Chapter 5, entitled "Homer Breaks a Promise," on that one day. There is an hour-by-hour account of the series of strange events that starts with the death of the station master in the morning and ends with Homer driving back to Ocean View with Candy and Wally in the evening. Between these two points, the orphans eat too much jam and get sick, Wilbur Larch tries to autopsy a dead baby, Candy has an abortion, Melony steals Candy's book, and the assistant station master faints after seeing the dead station master and the cut-open baby. This detailed account gives the feeling that time has slowed and that several fateful forces have converged on one point in time. This is apt for a chapter that causes such a complete

turn-around in the lives of not only Homer, but also Melony, Wilbur Larch, Wally, and Candy.

Irving creates the same effect in Chapter 10, "15 Years." Pages 448-487 are spent summarizing what has happened in the fifteen years that have passed since the previous chapter. When we are told about Melony's decision to get a summer job at Ocean View, her imminent arrival is like the hand of fate descending on the apple farm. With her appearance at the orchard, time slows down dramatically. The next 32 pages are spent on the rest of that day, detailing a number of conversations and events that will lead to dramatic change. The culmination is Homer's decision to tell Wally and Angel "everything" and return to St. Cloud's. The day is seen to advance equally slowly at the orphanage. As Homer makes his decision, Larch writes him a letter, begging him to come and take over (518). Chapters 5 and 10 thus stand out because of what Rimmon-Kenan (following Genette) calls *duration* (Rimmon-Kenan 2003, 43-56), that is, the relationship between discourse time and narrative time, or between how long an event takes in real life and the space devoted to it in the text. The novel changes speed often, alternating between summaries, scenes, and descriptions of people and places. These chapters stand out because a few hours are allowed to fill many pages. The chapters mark transitions in the lives of all the important characters, particularly Homer himself. In summary, we may say that the plot of Irving's novel is clearly chronological, although there are great changes in speed, and certain periods, years, and days receive much more weight than others.

*Cider House* has few inserted stories of the type found in the Four Classics. Rather than characters telling their own and other people's stories to the protagonist, their life stories are told by the omniscient narrator. In most cases, Homer never hears them, so they cannot have the didactic function they have in other novels studied. Except for the three women working at the orphanage, Irving traces the life stories of most of the important characters, but these cannot be called inserted narratives. They tend to appear as the characters are introduced, blending seamlessly with the rest of the narrative. *Cider House* even outlines the histories of St. Cloud's, Heart's Haven and Heart's Rock. In this fashion, characters appear as part of a place and community with a history, not as single individuals. That the background of people and places is provided by the omniscient narrator without Homer serving as focalizer gives these parts autonomy. While secondary characters in the Four Classics are subordinate to the main characters and instruments of their *Bildung*, Irving's have a more independent function.

The dramatic turning points in *Cider House* occur late. Until the events in the final two chapters, Homer's life just happens, gradually. Homer is shaped slowly and steadily, making few of the big decisions people usually have to make in life. Instead he postpones them, agreeing with Candy to "wait and see." Little by little he first becomes Candy's lover, then the father of her child, then the live-in friend of Candy and her husband, and later the boss at the apple farm. Taking life as it comes, avoiding conflict, not telling Wally and Angel who Angel's parents are, Candy and Homer defy common moral rules, since Candy is in practice a bigamist. And all the secrecy goes against their own moral sense as well. Nevertheless, there is a sense that Wally, as well as Candy and Wally's parents, know whose child Angel is. Not telling the truth enables everyone to go on as if they do not know the rules are being broken, and therefore can go on breaking them. The two big turning points in Homer's life occur the summer he is 39: The first is Melony's visit and Homer's decision to tell Wally and Angel everything, the second is the abortion he performs on Rose Rose. Both events will be discussed in the identity development section.

*Cider House* is both episodic and tightly structured. In retrospect, there is a clear plotline going from the birth of "the boy who belonged to St. Cloud's," through his apprenticeship outside that little world, and back to St. Cloud's where he belongs. As the author plots his story, Wilbur Larch plots Homer's and St. Cloud's future. Constructing a "revisionist" history of St. Cloud's and making up the identity of Fuzzy Stone for Homer to inhabit, Larch is playing God, directing Homer's life and making other people his more or less conscious co-plotters. Melony is a force that moves through the book, like fate or an avenging spirit, looking for her "sunshine" until that fateful moment when she meets Homer again.

Nevertheless, the novel is also highly episodic and filled with funny, strange, and tragic incidents that seem to be there primarily because they are entertaining or moving, or just because the author has an unquenchable thirst for imaginative storytelling. As they happen, it might be hard to see that the drowning of Homer's third foster parents, the absurd death of the station master, the dead baby from Three Miles Falls, or Melony's relations with her co-workers at the factory can play an important part in the plot (though it is easy to see that they are involved in the thematics of death). But many such incidents turn out to be important in a larger context. Not only do they constitute patterns of imagery or motifs, but they also contribute to the action. Herb Fowler's silly condom jokes, for instance, turn out to be an evil plot to get people accidentally pregnant, as actually happened with Candy. So it is

Herb's nastiness that actually motivates the important plotline that has Candy and Wally meet Homer and take him with them to the coast.

The blending of conscious plotting with the accidental and episodic contributes to the novel's treatment of the themes of control over life, individual free will versus chance, external factors, and other people's power. There is often a sense of fate and fatefulness behind events. In the end, in the case of Homer Wells, all these factors seem to move in the same direction. But there is nevertheless an unresolved tension in Irving's novel. Amanda Waibel thinks that "[i]n Irving's fiction, everyone – no matter whom – is destined for a certain path" (2004, 20). *Cider House*, she finds, "displays a world of determinism" (Waibel 2004, 20). Waibel's interpretation is not disproved by the fact that the plot starts with "the boy who belonged to St. Cloud's" and ends with Homer's return to the place he is "destined" to belong to. Arguments for the importance of free will have to be sought first in Larch's actions and his belief that men must grasp the few chances they get to "play god." Second, Homer's internal development is seen to be in perfect harmony with his "fate." We cannot know whether he might have freely chosen not to return to St. Cloud's.

Homer is allowed an epigrammatic utterance on the last page. Discovering from Larch's "A Brief History of St. Cloud's" that "[t]here is absolutely nothing wrong with Homer's heart," Homer thinks that "there had been very little that was wrong with the heart of Wilbur Larch" (587). But after this, Nurse Edna and Nurse Angela give their own epigrammatic utterance: "[T]here was no fault to be found in the hearts of either Dr. Stone or Dr. Larch, who were – if there ever were – Princes of Maine, Kings of New England" (587). Thus it is the nurses, not Homer, who get the last word, and both their utterances and his concern somebody else's goodness. Irving leaves the reader with the thoughts of three people woven together; all these thoughts have the same wording and do not concern the thinkers themselves. There is a monumental difference between this ending and the ending of Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*: "I know myself," he cried, "but that is all" (1996, 276). Fitzgerald's character is supposed to develop from an "egotist" to a "personage" in the last chapter, but he is alone in the final scene and his focus is himself. Irving's good characters cannot even think in isolation from the others who make up their context and community.

## **Identity Development**

The most salient identity areas for Homer are the familiar ones of occupational, interpersonal (friendship, love and sex roles) and ideological identity. Because of his peculiar upbringing in

an orphanage and abortion clinic, and Dr. Larch's wish that he should become a doctor, the question of abortion is an important aspect of Homer's identity development. Abortion is in turn one aspect of the larger issue of rules and laws and how one should relate to them, fundamental constituents of Homer's world view and moral outlook. A persistent concern in relation to Homer's development is to what extent he and other people are their own masters, or if other forces take precedence over free will.

Although it is difficult to find the exact center of a novel, the middle of my 587-page edition (which starts on page 1) falls around page 293. On page 290 Homer makes his first diagnosis, and Wally says "it seems to me ... you ought to be a doctor. The next page has Homer explain "Doctor Larch wants me to be a doctor, ... But I don't want to be" (291). And on page 293 Homer finds out that dead Fuzzy Stone is supposedly "doing well." At the center of the novel then, is the conflict of wills and Dr. Larch's plotting.

During the first apple harvest at Ocean View, Homer suddenly feels that "[h]e had grown up without noticing when," and wonders if there was "nothing remarkable in the transition?" (315). At this point, at 21, Homer has only been away from St. Cloud's for three or four months, but in that time he feels he has exhausted his new world, having learned and experienced all it has to offer. He is wrong. He has experienced a number of firsts – close friendship, dating, falling in love, various jobs he had never dreamed of, a variety of new people. But he is not yet a grown-up. His life at Ocean View is still just a visit, not a commitment, as it soon will be. The reason he believes he has grown up, is probably partly that he has won his first important victory over Dr. Larch and asserted his liberty and right to determine the course of his life himself.

Only when Wally goes missing in action does Homer start committing himself to the place, lifestyle, and people he has come to love. When Candy gets pregnant he knows what he wants:

Whatever is brought to me, whatever is coming, Homer thought, I will not move out of its way. Life was finally about to happen to him – the journey he proposed making, back to St. Cloud's, was actually going to give him his freedom from St. Cloud's. He would have a baby (if not a wife, too); he would need a job. (410)

At 23, Homer's dream is of a child, a wife, and a job. He knows who he wants to marry and the kind of work he would like to do. After Angel's birth, Dr. Larch tries to persuade Homer to become a doctor, but Homer has made his choice: "I'm a father, and I'm going to be an



apple farmer” (439). Having settled the important questions – work, love, and family – Homer seems to be identity achieved. He has turned away from Larch and found his own way. But Homer experiences another important identity change at age 39, in the final two chapters.

### *Occupational identity*

Homer’s occupational identity develops smoothly, without much doubt or dramatic changes of heart. He is initiated into the medical profession because it is the only education he can get at St. Cloud’s. He has a talent for it, and Dr. Larch likes teaching him. Larch seems to take it for granted that he will be a doctor, but there is no serious reflection on the subject by Homer, until Candy and Wally show up and he tells Larch he does not think he wants to be a doctor. Ocean View is his first experience of a different profession. He gets first-hand experience of all the tasks and skills involved in apple farming, and professional choice now becomes a concrete reality for the first time. Homer soon decides he likes apple farming better than medicine. He adapts to life at the farm, taking the opportunity presented to him. Both medicine and apple farming allow Homer to use his dexterity and talents, but he needs medicine for intellectual stimulation even after deciding not to become a doctor. He is lucky that the two professions most readily available to him were both such a good fit with his talents and interests. Both offer personal fulfillment and satisfaction. Homer’s development seems to be a lucky combination of his personality, chance, having Dr. Larch as teacher and role model. Melony’s lack of a corresponding mentor might partly explain her much more difficult starting point.

When Homer chooses apple farming over medicine, it is not only the occupation itself that motivates his decision, but also the life style and social worlds that go with it. By staying at the apple farm, he can be with people he loves and work with living things, and it is easy to combine the job with marriage to Candy. In addition, he has already started his life at Ocean View and no radical changes are required in order to continue; he can remain a rather passive character.

In the occupational as well as the other two life areas, Homer experiences another sequence of moratorium and achievement at the end of the novel, at age 39. The events surrounding Melony’s appearance bring to the forefront a series of concerns that Homer has repressed and avoided dealing with since he settled in Heart’s Rock. Deciding to take over after Dr. Larch, he reverses his earlier decisions in all three domains, but this does not imply that he was wrong the first time. These are extremely difficult issues, and both solutions are

partly wrong and partly right. Opting for St. Cloud's at 39 is a quite different process from the one that made Homer choose apple farming over being a doctor. At 21, Homer was motivated by personal interest. He chose a life that was pleasant and happy, with people and activities that made him feel emotionally and intellectually fulfilled. When he returns to St. Cloud's he is putting other considerations – social obligation and the good of others – ahead of his personal interests.

Although an orphan, Homer starts from the predicament of Wilhelm Meister: His “father” wants him to enter the “family business” and eventually replace him as a doctor. Homer, however, in the words of Feature 82 of the BRI, “strives for liberation from the people he/she depends upon in childhood, their values, and their plans for his/her future.” But in the late 1930s, Dr. Larch knows intuitively what Wilhelm could not have said aloud in the late eighteenth century: “[T]hat Homer Wells,” or any other young person, “had to have an authentic encounter with society if the boy was going to have a chosen life at all” (117). As Campbell points out, “Here we find the center of the Bildungsroman — Homer leaves St. Cloud's to become his ‘own’ man and to pursue the independent thinking that has caused his rift with Larch, until the day that he returns to St. Cloud's” (Campbell 1998, 117).

### ***Interpersonal development***

Interpersonal development might have posed problems for Homer, since he grows up without parents and thus lacks much of the contact and feedback that makes for healthy psychological development. Nurse Edna and Nurse Angela are caring and loving, but practical circumstances make the usual close bonds between mother and child impossible. Homer takes on the role of big brother to the younger children, but ties at St. Cloud's are temporary, as the aim is for orphans to be adopted as soon as possible. In spite of these adverse circumstances, Homer grows up a compassionate, harmonious, fundamentally moral person.

Irving's first idea for the novel was to write about “a father-son relationship ... between an orphanage physician and an unadoptable orphan” (Irving 1999, 26). This relationship is the basis of the adoption theme, but while Homer lives “at home” at the orphanage, the relationship also helps him develop self-confidence and a variety of skills and positive personal qualities. He learns medicine, of course, but also cooperation and teamwork, loyalty and trust, and Larch is the adult he can discuss his developing opinions with. Larch is a very private person, whose “self-esteem was dependent on his self-control” (209), but this lack of intimacy does not prevent Homer from having a positive emotional and interpersonal starting point. He feels deeply attached to the other adults and children at the orphanage too.

Homer's introduction to boy-girl relationships comes through Melony, whom he later calls "something of a bully. Older than me, and ... stronger than me" (490). It is an unequal relationship, made of necessity – they are the only older adolescents there – and being with each other is slightly better than being alone. The experience teaches Homer what he does not want in the future. He learns that he wants a relationship based on equality and a woman he can talk to. St. Cloud's does not provide him with friends either, and he is delighted to meet Wally: "A boy his own age! A boy his own size!" (199). The similarities between the two illustrate how a rewarding friendship also requires a degree of equality. Although Wally is Homer's "benefactor" (200) and has the experience, wealth and support that Homer lacks, Wally accepts him as an equal. Their relationship starts with the exchange of life stories in the car as they drive towards the coast at night, and it continues to be a mutual give-and-take relationship. Wally lets Homer share his bedroom, his mother, and eventually also the farm that is his inheritance.

*Cider House* is peculiar among the novels studied thus far in not presenting clear contrasts between good and bad friends and lovers, as, for instance, *David Copperfield* does. There is only Melony to supply Homer with the experience of a bad relationship, maybe as friend as well as lover, but Homer always knows she is not the kind of person he wants to live with. The first people his own age that Homer meets, turn out to be perfect friend and perfect wife, just as apple farming, the first alternative to being a doctor, agrees with him totally. In this sense, Homer is very lucky, and unlike many other protagonists, he has little difficulty finding out what he wants and likes in terms of both profession and personal relationships. But Candy is Wally's fiancée. Candy and Wally love each other. And since Candy loves Homer too, merely having found the right people solves nothing. *Cider House* goes beyond the identity issue of finding out what one wants in terms of relationships and profession, to a wider moral issue of whether and when it is right to choose what one wants. This aspect belongs to Homer's ideological development.

### ***Ideological development***

Rules, laws, and authorities feature prominently in Homer's ideological development. He knows he loves Candy, but she loves Wally too, and feels great loyalty to him. She therefore finds it impossible to choose between the two. Wally's disappearance gives Homer and Candy the opportunity to get together, develop their relationship, and have Angel, although this is done secretly in case Wally should turn up. The arrangement only becomes a moral dilemma when Wally returns, paralyzed, and both Homer and Candy must weigh their own love and

happiness against the sorrow, loss, and feeling of desertion they would cause Wally by marrying. Do they follow their own inclinations, or sacrifice their own happiness for Wally's sake? They choose not to choose; Candy marries Wally to make him happy, while continuing her secret relationship with Homer. This means ignoring, in Philip Carey's words, "the policeman around the corner," that is, society's rules. Homer and Candy do what Dr. Larch does with abortion: They break the rules, but hope no one will find out.

The moral dilemmas concerning both abortion and Candy and Homer's relationship are difficult ones, and there is no clear right and wrong. Both positions are partly right and partly wrong. Yet a choice must be made. In "The King of the Novel," Irving says that the lawyer "Jaggers ... in *Great Expectations*, may be our literature's greatest indictment of living by abstract rules" (Irving 1982, vii). Abstract rules are also very important in Irving's novel.

At St. Cloud's, Homer becomes aware of the issue of rules and laws and the possibility of breaking them because of the abortion question. Larch believes he is right to follow social and moral rules to the extent that they are morally defensible to him, and to break them when they are not. So Larch performs illegal abortions, letting the pregnant women themselves decide whether they want to have "an orphan or an abortion" (e.g. 187). His system works because the nurses and Mrs. Grogan help him conceal what is really going on from the Board of Trustees. Although Homer is Larch's apprentice, he comes to disagree with his mentor's stand on abortion. It is a view that takes years to develop. Soon after seeing his first aborted fetus at 13, Homer is introduced to the work done at St. Cloud's Hospital, and Dr. Larch explains about births and abortions, and that neither is wrong. When he is 15, Homer is told by Dr. Larch that he is going to be the older man's assistant and will learn to be a doctor. Larch gives him *Gray's Anatomy* to read, and Homer watches his first live birth (107). For the next few years, Homer learns to deliver babies and assist at abortions, but although Larch wants Homer to perform abortions, he also wants the boy to make up his own mind: "Homer should know something of society before he made the decision, by himself, whether to perform abortions or not" (116).

Homer reaches his conclusion on the same seminal day that he first meets Candy and Wally at St. Cloud's. He is autopsying a baby that had died in the ninth month of pregnancy, and looking up fetuses in *Gray's Anatomy* he discovers "that a fetus, as early as eight weeks, has an *expression*" (168). He has an epiphany: "Homer felt in the presence of what others call a soul" (168). It is this strong personal emotional experience that makes Homer decide:

You can *call* it a fetus, or an embryo, or the products of conception, thought Homer Wells, but whatever you call it, it's alive. And whatever you do to it, Homer thought – and whatever you call what you do – you're killing it. ... It's a baby to me, thought Homer Wells. If Larch has a choice, I have a choice, too. (169)

Homer simultaneously understands that abortion is murder and that there is no absolute truth; Homer has the right to choose what is right to him, as Larch does. For Homer, as for Larch, concrete personal experiences lead to their stand, not abstract rules or principles. Irving explains Homer's position further: "After all, he's an orphan, the only thing his mother gave him was life itself. Homer feels lucky to be alive" (1999, 27). In one of their first arguments over abortion, Homer uses this as an argument to Larch: "I'm an orphan," he says (187). If Homer's mother had wanted an abortion, that is what Larch would have given her, and Homer would not have existed.

Homer's ideological development after leaving St. Cloud's resembles Larch's: As he is immersed in life, in the concrete and specific, he sees more and more that principles, rules and laws are often morally unsound guiding lights for the ethical dilemmas and specific circumstances people find themselves in. Filling in the questionnaire from St. Cloud's Board of Trustees, for instance, Homer has to choose between his own moral sense that it is wrong to lie and the good of the orphanage. Dr. Larch asks him to lie for the sake of the orphanage, and Homer agrees that in this situation it is right to lie. Afterwards he hangs an uncompleted copy of the questionnaire on his wall, where it "occupied a position of ignored authority" (340), similar to the position of the cider house rules for the migrant workers, reminding him that it is sometimes right to ignore rules.

The first big turning point for Homer comes late, when he is about 39 years old. Melony tells him he has been a creep, sleeping with "a poor cripple's wife and pretendin' your own child ain't your own" (497). Homer agrees with her, feeling that "[o]ne hundred seventy-five pounds of truth had struck him in the face and neck and chest" (498). He decides to tell Wally and Angel everything, but Candy makes him promise to wait until after the harvest – by which time a second turning point has taken place: His decision to perform an abortion on Rose Rose.

Emphasizing the interrelationships between characters, Davis and Womack claim that "as with Larch, Homer's feelings about abortion, sex, and procreation become fundamentally altered by his relations with women" (1998, 308). The messy facts of life also work on him. For almost twenty years he follows his moral conviction not to perform abortions because he

considers it murder. But the concrete circumstances of the case – the fact that Rose Rose has been raped by her father – change everything. Homer sees that in this particular case his own moral feelings are less important than Rose’s rights as a human being. Once he has reached this conclusion, the next step is obvious: Having given one woman an abortion, he cannot “play God in the worst sense; if he could operate on Rose Rose, how could he refuse to help a stranger? Only God makes that kind of decision” (568). This is the final link in the chain that brings Homer back to St. Cloud’s as Larch’s successor.

## Conclusion

Regarded as a bildungsroman, *Cider House* is unusual in several ways. One original aspect – caught by several of the index features – is the roles played by secondary characters and their significance in relation to the main character. While the other novels in this study clearly have one main character, Wilbur Larch is nearly as prominent as Homer in Irving’s novel. Homer And many other characters have the reader’s interest and concern as well, particularly Wally and Candy, but also Melony. The crucial role of other characters is underlined by the fact that a number of them are allowed to serve as focalizers. Irving often lets the omniscient narrator give the readers information and scenes to which neither Homer nor Larch is privy, particularly in the case of Melony, and the focalizer shifts quickly and easily. The characters thus have an existence independent of Homer’s.

François Jost distinguishes between *flat*, *round*, and *fresco* novels (1983, 128-130). In a flat novel such as the picaresque, the characters are only loosely related, they meet by chance and drift apart again, and none of them change. In a round novel, such as the bildungsroman, the protagonist is the center of attention, and the other characters are only important through their relationship with him. In round novels, the protagonist changes while other characters do not. Fresco novels, such as Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, have main characters, but focus on a whole group of people. These characters are closely related, interact with one another, and all develop during the book. *Cider House* fits Jost’s definition of a fresco novel, in which “[t]he fate of more than one central personage is at stake; the destiny of all major *dramatis personae* interests the reader, although less than that of the *maxima persona*” (129). We are interested in Homer’s development, but we care about many of the other characters too and want to know what happens to them. There is also a continued focus on interaction between the characters and their influence upon each other. All of them change through their relationships with others.

If the Four Classics are “round novels” portraying the maturation and development of the protagonist as a result of human interaction and being part of a community, *Cider House* goes a step further: Interweaving character’s lives, emotions, and actions, the development of one effects changes in the lives of others. People are catalysts who make things happen in the lives of others, and what happens is not only learning, but radical changes in the directions lives take.

The well-known bildungsroman themes of fate, chance and free will are also prominent in Irving’s novel, and their treatment is both original and familiar. As in *Wilhelm Meister* and Fowles’s *The Magus*, which will be analyzed in Part III, there is a mysterious force behind much of the plot, which is ultimately revealed as one or more characters. In *Cider House* it is Dr. Larch who plots behind the scenes. As Amanda Waibel notes, “*Cider House* depicts Dr. Larch as a God-like human figure who seems to be at the center of, if not the actual driver of, forces of fate” (22). Before Homer even leaves St. Cloud’s, we learn that “[w]hat Larch dreamed of was that Homer would venture out in the world and then choose to come back to St. Cloud’s” (117). Homer resists his mentor for a long time, but through a process involving coincidence as well as free will, Homer is eventually seen to freely choose exactly what Dr. Larch has been trying to bring about for so long. *Cider House* thus ends as paradoxically as *Wilhelm Meister*: Plotting and predetermination influence the outcome, but at the same time, the protagonists freely choose the very same result. In both novels, the plotters are people of flesh and blood, but there is nevertheless a sense that something very like fate has had a hand in the action. As Waibel argues, “Homer’s return is put into motion by a combination of built-up forces, until returning to fulfill Larch’s position is the only choice he really feels he has” (Waibel 2004, 23). From the very first chapter, Homer was “the boy who belonged to St. Cloud’s,” and he was therefore destined to return.

*Cider House* presents an ambiguous view of free will, seeming to insist that making the right choices and taking responsibility are essential for people who want to be good and moral. At the same time, fate is a very real force. Waibel thinks “that John Irving himself believes in fate” (24), a view shared by several critics writing about other works by Irving. Debra Shostak, for instance, finds “a link between psychological and aesthetic determinism” (1995, 52) in the plots of *The World According to Garp* and *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. The same link is also present in *Cider House*.

*Cider House* differs from the British Classics by treating not only identity formation in late adolescence but also identity change in adulthood. The two periods of development are separated in time by 15 years. The first phase is a classic process of identity formation: It

spans an extended period of time, concerns all three main life areas, and is to a large extent a process of liberation followed by new attachments and commitments. Homer liberates himself physically and mentally from St. Cloud's and the influence of Dr. Larch. He finds his own niche in life. Meaning is provided primarily by his work and relations with loved ones, so that his principle values (the ideological domain) are constituted by the occupational and interpersonal domains.

The identity change that takes place when Homer is 39 is very different. St. Cloud's is now seen to descend on him in the form of Melony, Larch's medical bag, and finally Larch's death. Homer's decision this time means a return to the world and ideas he had liberated himself from. He partly has to give up his alternative attachments – at least to the apple farm and Candy – in order to settle in St. Cloud's, although the arrival of Nurse Caroline means his life will not be an exact copy of Dr. Larch's. But choosing to be a doctor at St. Cloud's, Homer gives up family and personal happiness as his prime values, and will instead seek the meaning of his life in “being useful” and doing good to others.

Bildungsroman criticism often makes much of the conflict between the individual and society. Often, the conflict means that people will be inhibited from doing what they would most like to do by social rules and conventions. In *Cider House* the opposition is between social duty and personal will: It is a conflict between two “goods” rather than between a good individual and a bad society. While Wilhelm wonders which profession is right for him, Homer wonders if it is right to keep the profession he feels is right for him personally, when he can be more useful to others in a different one. Of our heroes, Homer is the first to strongly feel the conflict between his personal wish to live a pleasant life at the apple farm and his social conscience, in the form of Dr. Larch, telling him he should sacrifice his personal happiness to help others. While the other heroes and heroines are content to make ordinary good lives for themselves and their nearest and dearest, Homer is forced by Dr. Larch and his conscience to put the welfare of others before his own pleasure.

Although the analyses of Part II end here, I do not want to draw any conclusions about the development of the bildungsroman in the twentieth century until after the two case studies in Part III. The conclusion will discuss the development from the Four Classics through the five twentieth-century novels.



## Interlude: *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)

J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) is included in this study because it is so often regarded as a classic American example of the bildungsroman. But in spite of "*Catcher's* preeminent stature among American Bildungsromane" (Tolchin 2006, 40), it gets a low BRI score. In the following analysis I seek to show that the book has only a limited resemblance to the Four Classics and is better viewed as a reaction to the bildungsroman than as part of the tradition.

In a review in the *New York Times*, August 28, 2005, Jay McInerney claimed that "[i]n its modern form the American bildungsroman (the novel of formation) descends from *The Catcher in the Rye*." This is a common view in the United States, and McInerney makes little distinction between Salinger's novel and "the traditional bildungsroman," in which he includes *Wilhelm Meister* and *The Confusions of Young Torless* by Robert Musil (McInerney 2005). Kenneth Millard (2007) also refers back to *Wilhelm Meister* when he defines the "coming-of-age novel" (3) or "bildungsroman" (2) as a novel about adolescence (1-5), and uses *Huck Finn* and *Catcher* as examples. *The Catcher in the Rye* is commonly taught as a bildungsroman, not only in America. An example is the course "American Innocence," taught at the University of Edinburgh by the abovementioned Millard, author of *Coming of Age in Contemporary American Fiction* (2007). Student help websites such as 123helpme, Cheathouse, SparkNotes and BookRags follow the trend by offering readings of *Catcher* as a bildungsroman. And an online Glossary of Literary Terms at California State University at Sacramento has the following entry for "Bildungsroman:" "a German term which indicates a coming of age story. A classic example is J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*" ("Bildungsroman" 2008a). According to Karen Tolchin, "critics and instructors routinely take the novel as the example *par excellence* of the American coming-of-age novel" (40).

The view that Salinger's classic is also a classic bildungsroman will soon be contradicted by its index results. But it must be pointed out that scoring the book is more complicated than with most novels in this study. *Catcher* can be – and has been – interpreted in widely different ways, and the interpretation one chooses to some extent influences one's view of individual features. Since some colleagues strongly disagreed with my first scoring of the novel, I have chosen to be more "generous" with *Catcher* than with other works.

As I interpret *Catcher*, Holden has an epiphany at the end as he watches his sister Phoebe on the carousel and feels very happy. It is a beautiful moment, and Holden accepts he

cannot keep Phoebe from growing up or getting hurt in the process. He has decided not to run away from home, because he knows it would be wrong to take Phoebe. In telling her what she can and cannot do, he has realized he must follow the same rules himself. Nevertheless, in the institution in California he says that “what school I’m supposed to go to next fall ... doesn’t interest me too much right now” (220). He does not know “whether I’m going to apply myself when I go back to school,” because you cannot “know what you’re going to do till you *do* it” (220). Nor does he know what he thinks about what has happened. I therefore see him as basically undecided and uncommitted, even if he has come to a greater acceptance of reality. He is also, of course, still a 17-year-old, not an adult. This interpretation underlies the scoring of the novel.

The following discussion is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of the novel, but a consideration of *Catcher*’s relationship with the bildungsroman.

### ***The Catcher in the Rye* and the BRI**

With 57 points, *The Catcher in the Rye* scores much lower than the Four Classics. Although it scores more than *Huckleberry Finn*, it has far fewer resemblances with the Classics than *Of Human Bondage* and the other twentieth-century novels in the study. Its score indicates that there is some connection between *Catcher* and the bildungsroman, but that Salinger’s novel does not belong to the genre.

*Table 37. Section scores for Catcher in the Rye. (David Copperfield, and Of Human Bondage are included for comparison)*

Section		Max Points	<i>Catcher</i>	<i>David Copperfield</i>	<i>Bondage</i>
1	Narrative perspective and mode	15	8	15	15
2	Characterization: Protagonist	15	9	15	14
3	Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	17	4	17	17
4	Topical story elements: Protagonist	26	6	26	25
5	Topical story elements: Secondary characters	9	0	8	5
6	Setting	5	3	5	5
7	Plot and Structure	28	12	28	26
8	Generic signals	4	1	3	2
9	Theme, subject matter and motifs	29	14	27	29
	<b>Total score</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>138</b>

The main reason *Catcher* is so often regarded as a bildungsroman is probably the reference to *David Copperfield* in the opening line. As mentioned earlier, such allusions have become a very strong generic marker in twentieth-century bildungsromans, and the name “Caulfield” further strengthens the bond by resembling “Copperfield.” David Copperfield was also “born with a caul” (Dickens 2004, 18). An early reference to a bildungsroman usually means the narrative wants to be considered part of that genre. Here, however, *David Copperfield* is held up as a model not to be emulated but rejected. As Holden says on the first page, all he wants is to “tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas” (5). He intends his story to be very different from David Copperfield’s, which he regards as “crap” (5). It is not “my whole goddam autobiography” (5) that interests him, but a few specific events. The *Catcher* thus alludes to the bildungsroman genre in order to invite comparisons between itself and that genre; but the relation between the two is more often one of opposition than similarity.

In a 1965 article, Eugene McNamara contrasts *Catcher* with *David Copperfield*, finding more differences than similarities (166-170):

Both stories ... are about essentially abandoned boys who go through a series of maturing adventures in a violent and hypocritical adult society. Both boys narrate their own stories. But here the parallel ends, and more striking contrasts become evident. (166)

Of the differences, McNamara mentions that David can assume that his readers are interested in him and his history, while Holden cannot. In *David Copperfield*, there is a “double view” (167), since David appears both as miserable child and “the sympathetic adult looking back” (167), a distinction absent from *Catcher*. *David Copperfield* also differs from *Catcher* in that, although “[a]dult society might present a cruel and hypocritical face now and then, ... entrance into adult society and success within it were still David’s primary concern” (168). Holden, however, “disclaims family tradition, history, a sense of time and [shows] a revulsion for the adult world which surrounds him” (169).

### **Narrative perspective and mode**

The index results show several of the differences mentioned by McNamara and many others. *Catcher* scores low in all sections, and in some it hardly gets any points. “Narrative

perspective and mode” is one of its stronger ones, with 8 points out of 15. It shares with *Huckle Finn* the protagonist focalizer and a first-person tone resembling that of the British bildungsroman narrators, but like Twain’s classic, it lacks the traditional distance between narrator and main character. Salinger evokes the bildungsroman tradition in the set-up of a frame tale and an older narrator looking back on his youth. But he breaks with convention by making the narrator only one year older than in the main narrative – only 17 years old – rather than an adult, and by not distinguishing narrator and protagonist as focalizers. Situated a year after the events, the narrator could potentially offer a different perspective on events than the character. This he does not do. Holden’s opinions generally represent both the character and the narrator, and frequent use of the present tense emphasizes this. For instance, when Holden says “God, how I hate it when somebody yells ‘Good luck!’ at me when I’m leaving somewhere. It’s depressing” (208), this statement covers both his past and present feelings.

Susan Mitchell (1992) shows how Holden monopolizes the story and makes it very difficult for the reader to construe his world differently to how he sees it. She thinks Holden’s unreliability as a narrator is one reason the novel is interpreted in two almost opposite ways by “equally sensitive critics”: “Because Holden avoids investigating deeply, he sees the same story everywhere. Everyone is phony, he insists.” But Holden selects so carefully when he talks about other people that we have virtually no way of checking whether he is telling the truth or not. He is particularly simplistic in his description of his family, Mitchell claims. For instance, he insists that his brother D. B. is corrupt and has abandoned his family, but he still comes to see Holden once a week in the California sanatorium.

What Mitchell is pointing out are the consequences of the lack of distance in the narration of the book. Not only is there no distance between narrator and character – which tends to also increase the bond between character and reader – but Holden’s voice is so persistent that it is hard to see any distance between him and an implied narrator, or Holden’s view and the book’s. The reason “the meaning varies so radically from one critic to the next” (Mitchell 1992) is partly Holden’s voice. Readers must either believe him or not, but if they choose not to believe him, there is so little to go on that a number of different readings become equally plausible. The Four Classics also end quite openly, but they have a clear narrative perspective to guide the reader.

## Characters and events

As a hero, Holden is more untypical of a bildungsroman than Huck Finn. Firstly, he is neither an orphan nor an only child. He has parents, a brother, and a sister whom he loves very much. Neither parent dies in the course of the novel. Secondly, Holden is “an upper-class New York City boy” (Carpenter 1957, 314), as seen in the fact that his family is rich enough to send him to one private prep school after another. Their address in the Upper East side of Manhattan is further evidence that he belongs to the “upper-middle” class (Rowe 1991, 79). When in New York, Holden stays in an expensive hotel, and feels quite comfortable going to a popular jazz club, a matinee on Broadway, and a “very sophisticated” bar at “this sort of swanky hotel” (148). Unlike the older British heroes, Holden is not alone because he is a poor orphan or social outcast.

One thing Holden does have in common with other bildungsroman heroes is innate goodness. Although he lies all the time, he is kind and generous, even to people who do not deserve it. He praises the unlikeable son of a woman he meets on the train, feels sorry for the old bellboy in his hotel, gives money to nuns he runs into, and gives up his escape plans for his sister Phoebe. His sensitivity and lack of sexual drive can be seen as androgynous traits, and according to Stephen Whitfield, an “aura of passivity ... pervades the novel” (1997, 585).

*Catcher* has low scores in Sections 3, 4, and 5, getting only 4 points for “Secondary characters,” 6 out of 26 for “Topical story elements: Affecting protagonist” and no points at all for “Topical story elements: Affecting secondary characters.” In the Four Classics, the people and events of the world provide the protagonist with the emotional, interpersonal, and intellectual experience that promote growth and maturation. *Catcher* has “echoes” of a number of familiar characters and events but distorts them or stops short of giving them their customary significance.

Many secondary characters in the book have the potential of fulfilling the traditional roles, but fail to do so. In this way, the novel evokes and then thwarts the generic expectations of the bildungsroman. There are several teachers, but none are important educators of Holden. The other boys in his school are not friends, and the girls do not become girlfriends. According to McNamara, the book shows “a pattern of disappointing discoveries” (1965, 168): Holden seeks out one person after another who fails to live up to his expectations. After his first disappointment over his brother working in Hollywood, there are “at least seven other significant failures in that world” (168). He feels let down by Spencer the history teacher, Stradlater, the three girls in the restaurant, Maurice, the prostitute, Sally, and finally Mr.

Antolini. Particularly important is the fact that the potential mentors, friends, and girlfriends fail to show the humanity, integrity and moral decency Holden longs for.

While the Four Classics have no close relationships between main characters and siblings, the only person Holden loves is his sister Phoebe. Although Wilhelm Meister has a sister, she is emotionally absent from his life, and Pip's sister fills the role of cruel stepmother. The most important role in *Catcher* is thus one that does not exist in the Classics.

The treatment of secondary characters in the book thus has echoes of the bildungsroman, but in most respects breaks the conventions. The protagonists of the Four Classics discover links to other people and a way of fitting into the social fabric, even if they dislike important aspects of the social order. Taking responsibility for his younger sister is as far as Holden gets in this novel.

I have given *Catcher* points for "Tries on particular role or roles," "Has money problems," and "Is wounded or sick," although these features are quite different from the classical versions. While Pip and David practice being adults with great seriousness, Holden lies and makes up stories and is often rebuffed by his surroundings. He does not succeed at ordering alcohol and fails in his dealings with the prostitute and Maurice. He runs out of money, but could solve the problem by just going home to his parents. He does not get "properly" ill or wounded either; he gets beaten up over the prostitute, and at the end he thinks he has cancer and is going to die because he reads an article about cancer in a magazine.

That *Catcher* lacks most of the topical story elements that affect the principal characters of the Four Classics has a similar effect to the lack of important secondary characters; although Holden moves about in the world and has various experiences, these are negative, if not ironic, versions of what we find in the Four Classics. Until the scene with Phoebe towards the end, Holden's experiences serve more to strengthen his initial prejudices than to teach him things that can make him develop.

## **Sections 6-9**

The settings of Salinger's novel reverse the pattern of the Four Classics. While the classic heroes grow up in small towns, Holden comes from Manhattan. He attends a private boarding school, which means he is sent from the big city to a small town in the "provinces." When he leaves that school it is to return to his native city, although not his home. All in all, setting makes no great difference to Holden; the city is only a little worse than school. He cannot flee

to a better place in order to become what he wants or have the life he wants. He daydreams of going “out west” and pretending he is a deaf mute, so he will not have to “have any goddam stupid useless conversations” (205). The only way out Holden can see is to escape from civilization altogether.

Plot and structure in *Catcher* have little in common with the Four Classics. The novel does not treat Holden’s life from childhood to adulthood, nor does it even mention the age 18-23. Holden’s story takes place when he is sixteen and thus too young to be an adult by the end of the book. While the plots of the Four Classics span many years, *Catcher* starts on a Saturday and ends the following Wednesday. In the Four Classics, the formation process takes at least a year, presumably because in real life it takes more than a few days for a person to develop and change. Critics also tend to regard Holden’s story as one that does not lead to maturity, although the explanations given for the hero’s immaturity vary. Stephen Whitfield, for instance, thinks Holden has a “pronounced resistance to maturation” (1997, 594), while Pamela Hunt Steinle blames “adult apathy and complicity in the construction of a social reality in which the American character cannot develop in any meaningful sense beyond adolescence” (qtd. in Whitfield 1997, 593).

Holden is too young to develop into adulthood and he does not have enough time to do so. He goes through a process of development, but it is of a different nature from the maturation process of the Four Classics. His change (reflected in the title) consists in realizing that growing up is unavoidable, and that children cannot be caught or saved from falling into adulthood. But Holden’s (and the book’s) negative view of American society and adult life persists. It may be objected that the novel does not express the same view as Holden, but as Karen Tolchin points out, there is so little reprieve from Holden’s views that critical readers have almost nothing to go on in trying to construct an alternative interpretation (2007).

I have not given *Catcher* points for the “projected ending” of the bildungsroman, namely that the protagonist finds his place in society. This is a tricky feature to score, because it concerns readers’ expectations, and the expectations will to some extent depend on whether readers sympathize with Holden or not. In addition, Holden is still too young to “find his place.” Given his damning views of his society and the people around him, it is hard to see what kind of environment he could happily be a part of. Whether readers blame Holden or his society, the two are presented as incompatible. The only way out – or into society – is presented by Mr. Antolini, who advises Holden to get through school and go to university, suggesting that as an educated man, Holden could join a community of like-minded people. As Karen Tolchin points out, however, Antolini’s advice comes when Holden is too tired and

frustrated to take it in. In addition, Salinger undercuts the impact of Antolini's advice by placing "'truth' in the mouth of a pedophile" (Tolchin 2007, 35). Although Holden keeps Antolini's note, to remind him that "the immature man ... wants to die nobly for a cause, while ... the mature man ... wants to live humbly for one" (195), there are no indications that Holden has taken this advice.

For readers siding with Holden against society, accommodation – finding one's place in society – would be a disappointment, or even a betrayal of the values of the novel. Stephen Whitfield's 1997 overview of the book's critical reception shows that many critics have interpreted it in this way. According to Whitfield, Carol and Richard Ohmann, for instance, view *Catcher* as an indictment of 1950s bourgeois culture, of "warped social feeling, competitiveness, stunted human possibility," (qtd. in Whitfield 1997, 582). And in Joyce Rowe's view the novel presents a "bleak moral climate which destroys the soul" (1991, 77). If Holden was to find his place in or adapt to such a society, it would be the equivalent of moral suicide.

## **Conclusion**

As already stated, Holden has an epiphany in the penultimate chapter of the novel; he changes and becomes more mature. Yet he is too young to have reached the late adolescent period when identity is developed, and thus cannot develop from youth to adulthood as the protagonists of the Four Classics do. In the area of occupational development, he has not yet reached the stage of being interested. He does not want to be a lawyer like his father, but is not interested in educating himself or finding a profession he might like to pursue. Even at the very end, when it has been decided that he is going back to school, "what school I'm supposed to go to ... does not interest me too much right now" (220). And he does not know whether he is going to "apply myself" (220).

In the interpersonal area Holden is just as uncommitted, but his confusion is more apparent. Being too young for the kind of mutual love and friendship that can develop in late adolescence, Holden is also seen to fail in what should be the developmental tasks of his age group. According to Jane Kroger, Holden is in middle adolescence, the period from 15-17, which marks the onset of sexual maturation, a growth spurt in height, and the beginning of an identity formation based on identification with significant others (Kroger 2007). At this age, "[p]ersonality qualities, physical features, and characteristics of important others are emulated



via the process of identification” (Marcia et al., 1993). This kind of early identity formation is thus more attuned towards others, particularly peers, than late-adolescent identity formation, and the emphasis is more on being included in a group than on fashioning one’s self.

Sexual identity formation is also important at this stage. Kroger explains that

Becoming sexual means becoming an adult; the integration of one’s sexuality into one’s emerging sense of adult identity means leaving the knowns of childhood behind and risking an unknown future in expressing one’s gendered self. This may prove a monumental task for some mid- to late adolescents. (Kroger 2007, 69)

*Catcher* can be read as an adolescent’s struggle with his emerging sexuality, and his fear of, repulsion for, and attraction to the f-word that keeps pursuing him. James Bryan, for instance, interprets Holden’s descent into near-madness as “a frantic need to save his sister from himself,” that is, his own confused sexual attractions (1974, 1068).

*Catcher* does concern identity questions and other issues familiar from the bildungsroman, but it is a story about identity formation at an earlier stage, in middle adolescence. The novel might therefore be more fruitfully placed in the company of other texts dealing with the same subject, such as *Huckleberry Finn*.

The allusion to *David Copperfield* on the first page of *Catcher* alerts the reader to the strategy employed in the novel: To set itself up as antithetical to that genre in most ways. My analysis shows a large number of differences, the result of which is that Holden does not reach maturity or become an adult (which would be unreasonable anyway given his age). McNamara claims that “[i]n rejecting the tradition which *David Copperfield* stands for, he [Holden] actually proclaims his own tradition of the novel” (1965, 166). I agree. Holden’s popularity attests to the book’s ability to strike a chord with 1950s American youth. But Salinger describes a society and a hero that would feel utterly unfamiliar to Pip or David Copperfield. Although the form of alienation in the novel is new, Holden has affinities with earlier non-conformist American heroes such as Huck Finn and Thoreau. It is in its new use of familiar American themes that *Catcher* creates an American youth novel, which in most ways is a reaction to the European bildungsroman. The novel is therefore more fruitfully studied as part of a peculiarly American literary tradition.

In *Part Blood, Part Ketchup* (2007), Karen Tolchin identifies an American literary genre that bears resemblances with the bildungsroman but is also radically different. Tolchin calls this genre the “American Bildungsroman,” but to avoid confusion I shall call it the

“American novel of Jeremiad.” As with Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint* and John Irving’s *The World According to Garp*, *Catcher* overflows with agony and is “a ranting monologue” (Tolchin 2007, 34) of high-pitched “sustained, and unyielding” complaint (37).

The explanation for the differences between this American genre and relatives from other countries, such as *Of Human Bondage*, Tolchin finds in Sacvan Bercovitch’s *The American Jeremiad* (1978). Bercovitch describes an American sermon form, the Puritan jeremiad, which also contained endless complaints, but the complaint stems from “a deeply entrenched optimism” (Tolchin 2007, 38) rather than insupportable pain. Or rather, life is found insupportable because the speaker feels entitled to something much, much better. In the case of Holden, “he still believes in the possibility of utopic relation, and cannot accept repeated failure toward that end” (38). In this light, Holden stands in almost complete opposition to the main characters of bildungsromans studied so far: Rather than accept pain and loss and surmount them by taking responsibility for his own life, Holden immaturely keeps blaming others and the world, and insists, even on the last page, that he cannot know how he himself will act even in the near future.

This does not, of course, devalue the novel as a moving description of a kind of alienation most people go through during their teens.

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## Part III: Two Case Studies

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This third part of the book is an in-depth study of two post-WWII novels that have a clear resemblance with the traditional bildungsroman, although they are also different in important respects. With influences from other genres and pronounced post-modern features, *The Magus* by John Fowles (1965/1977) and Paul Auster's *Moon Palace* (1989) can give an impression of how the genre has developed, almost two centuries after its conception.

Below are the full BRI scores for both novels. Afterward, the two novels will be analyzed in chronological order.

Table 38. Index results for *The Magus* and *Moon Palace*

Features	Sections	Max. Points	<i>The Magus</i>	<i>Moon Palace</i>
	Section 1: Narrative perspective and mode			
1	Focalization shifts between narrator and protagonist. (whether 1 <sup>st</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> person)	3	3	3
2	Access to protagonist's consciousness	2	2	2
3	Retrospective narrative (1st person or omniscient)	2	2	2
4	Narrator understands more than young protagonist	2	2	2
5	Ironic attitude to young protagonist	2	2	2
6	Plot combines action and reflection	2	2	2
7	Verisimilar novel: Portrays existing world realistically	2	2	0
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>
Features	Section 2: Characterization: Protagonist	Max. points	<i>The Magus</i>	<i>Moon Palace</i>
8	One main character	1	1	1
9	Protagonist is a round character, not flat	1	1	1
10	Protagonist is dynamic; changes in the course of the novel	2	2	2
11	Protagonist is an only child	1	1	1
12	Protagonist is an orphan or	2	2	2
13	Fatherless or	or 2	0	0
14	Parent dies in the course of the novel	or 2	0	0
15	Only one or no (known) living relatives	1	1	1
16	Of middle-class background	2	2	2
17	Ordinary (not particularly talented or untalented)	2	2	2
18	Protagonist is basically good and willing to help others	2	0	2
19	Male protagonist: Relatively passive, uncertain about goals, leaves decisions to chance or other people	1	1	1
20	Female protagonist: Relatively active, has strong goals, makes decisions easily	or 1		
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>

Features	Section 3: Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	Max. points	<i>The Magus</i>	<i>Moon Palace</i>
21	Other character(s) essential in making protagonist change and grow	3	3	3
22	Other characters more important in their relationship to protagonist than in their own right	1	1	1
23	Important educator(s)	3	3	3
24	Important companion(s)	2	2	2
25	Important lover(s)	3	3	3
26	Other characters' love relationship as exemplary or as contrast to protagonist	1	1	1
27	Other characters' marriage as exemplary or as contrast	1	0	0
28	At least one important character from lower, middle, and higher social classes	3	3	3
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>
Features	Section 4: Topical story elements: Affecting protagonist	Max. points	<i>The Magus</i>	<i>Moon Palace</i>
29	Experiences poverty	2	0	2
30	Experiences hunger	2	0	2
31	Goes to boarding school	1	1	1
32	Moves to big city or	2	0	2
33	Moves away from home or	or 2	2	0
34	Leaves home to go on journey	or 2	0	0
35	Introduced to new social groups, classes, and professions	1	1	1
36	Learns skills	1	1	1
37	Tries on particular role or roles	1	1	1
38	Falls in love	2	2	2
39	Has money problems	1	1	1
40	Is wounded or sick	1	1	1
41	Nursed back to health by parent substitute or loyal friend	1	0	1
42	Nurses other sick person	1	0	1
43	Adopted parent dies	2	0	2
44	Death of close relative or friend	2	2	2
45	Repents immoral or insensitive action	1	1	1
46	Rescued from emergency or cliffhanger	1	0	1
47	Gets inheritance at the end or	2	0	2
48	Loses prospective inheritance at the end	or 2	0	0
49	Gets engaged or married	1	0	0
50	Has children	1	0	0
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>24</b>
Features	Section 5: Topical story elements: Affecting secondary characters	Max. points	<i>The Magus</i>	<i>Moon Palace</i>
51	Serious crime such as murder	1	1	1
52	Dangerous or disastrous fire	1	1	0
53	Character seriously ill	1	0	1
54	Character becomes an invalid	1	0	1
55	Character ruined financially	1	0	1
56	Character dies (not close relative or close friend)	1	1	1
57	Funeral	1	0	1

58	Identity or family relationship outside protagonist's family revealed	1	1	1
59	Family secret of other family revealed	1	0	1
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>
Fea- tures	Section 6: Setting	Max. points	<i>The Magus</i>	<i>Moon Palace</i>
60	Setting for childhood scenes is countryside or provincial town	2	0	0
61	English-language novels: Setting after school-leaving age is capital or large city	3	0	3
62	German-language novels: Setting after school-leaving age is one or more large houses (other than family home)	or 3		
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
Fea- tures	Section 7: Plot and Structure	Max. points	<i>The Magus</i>	<i>Moon Palace</i>
63	Plot is primarily chronological	2	2	2
64	Main part of plot about period when protagonist is between 18 and 23 years old	3	0	3
65	Story goes from childhood to adulthood (early 20s)	2	0	2
66	Inserted letter(s)	1	1	0
67	Inserted narrative: other character's life story (brief)	1	1	1
68	Inserted narrative: other character's life story (long)	2	2	2
69	Turning point, reversal: Protagonist experiences important defeat or failure	3	3	3
70	Journey toward the end of the book	1	1	1
71	Returns to childhood home after many years	1	0	1
72	Protagonist develops from self-centeredness to compassion and desire to be of use	2	2	2
73	Protagonist discovers tie to his or her family towards end	2	0	2
74	Protagonist learns to "see" at the end	3	3	3
75	Episodic structure that nevertheless forms a pattern at the end	1	1	1
76	Epigrammatic utterance by the protagonist at the end or just before	2	2	2
77	Projected ending: Protagonist finds a place in society (but expectation may not be met)	2	2	2
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>27</b>
Fea- tures	Section 8: Generic signals	Max. points	<i>The Magus</i>	<i>Moon Palace</i>
78	Book title includes the name of the protagonist	1	0	0
79	Book title includes the words "years", "life", "adventures," or "history"	1	0	0
80	Allusions to bildungsromans, typically <i>Jane Eyre</i> , <i>David Copperfield</i> , or <i>Great Expectations</i>	1	1	1
81	Indications from early on that this will be a life story	1	1	1
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
Fea- tures	Section 9: Theme, subject matter and motifs	Max. points	<i>The Magus</i>	<i>Moon Palace</i>
82	The psychological and moral development of the protagonist from youth to adulthood (main	3	3	3

	theme)			
83	Protagonist strives for liberation from the people he/she depends upon in childhood, their values, and their plans for his/her future	2	2	0
84	Search for new commitments, to people and ideas	2	2	2
85	Tension/conflict/discrepancy between inner and outer worlds	2	2	2
86	Protagonist confronted with at least one philosophy or philosophical system	2	2	2
87	Learning through pain and loss	1	1	1
88	Development from false self-perception to self-knowledge	2	2	2
89	False idealism gives way to acceptance of reality	1	1	1
90	Fate and chance	1	1	1
91	Free will	1	1	1
92	Death and grief	3	3	3
93	Love, relationships, and marriage	3	3	3
94	Portrayal of society	2	0	2
95	Social criticism	2	0	2
96	Family becomes at theme at the end	2	0	0
	<b>Section total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>
	<b>Total score</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>133</b>

To give an impression of how these recent novels compare with older ones, the table below compares their section scores with two novels discussed earlier.

Table 39. Section scores for *The Magus*, *Moon Palace*, *David Copperfield* and *The Diviners*.

Section	Section names	Max. points	<i>The Magus</i>	<i>Moon Palace</i>	<i>David Copperfield</i>	<i>The Diviners</i>
1	Narrative perspective and mode	15	15	13	15	10
2	Characterization: Protagonist	15	13	15	15	11
3	Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	17	16	16	17	17
4	Topical story elements: Protagonist	26	13	24	26	25
5	Topical story elements: Secondary characters	9	4	8	8	8
6	Setting	5	0	3	5	5
7	Plot and Structure	28	20	27	28	18
8	Generic signals	4	2	2	3	2
9	Theme, subject matter and motifs	29	23	25	27	27
	<b>Total score</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>123</b>

## CHAPTER 6. *THE MAGUS* (1965/77)

“*The Magus* ... is a novel in which you think you understand the nature of the story that is being told, and then suddenly the context of the story changes entirely, and it becomes an entirely different story. All that you had read before now fits within a different context; it makes the earlier plot meaningful again but in a different way. Several chapters later, the nature of the story has changed again, and again it is an entirely different type of story that integrates everything that has taken place beforehand. It is not a dialectical process that has taken place, but rather a shift in perspective.” (Waterman 1993, 113)

Alan Waterman aptly describes the sometimes dizzying experience of reading John Fowles’s *The Magus*, a book in which the plot, the characters, and the world itself is repeatedly unmasked as something new and different from what the reader had previously assumed. No readily graspable genre conventions guide the reader’s entry into this strange world. Although the book does have numerous parallels with the classic bildungsroman, it also has allusions to and resemblances with a variety of other types of literature, and critics have been more likely to see it as romance than bildungsroman.<sup>47</sup> Deciding the genre within which to read the book thus has major repercussions for interpretation. But the reading experience itself, if not the book’s reception, indicates that this is not a pure specimen of one generic kind.

Approaching Fowles’s novel is further complicated by the fact that there are two versions of it: It was first published in 1965, but in 1977 a revised edition was issued. The second edition features extensive stylistic revision, some new scenes, less focus on the paranormal and mystical, and a more positive ending. This study deals exclusively with the 1977 version.

In both versions, *The Magus* tells the story of Nicholas Urfe, an Oxford graduate turned teacher, who is dissatisfied with himself, his life, and the world. Wanting a change, he takes a job as a teacher at a private boys’ school on the Greek island of Phraxos, but before leaving London he starts a relationship with an Australian girl called Alison. Nicholas is

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<sup>47</sup> For instance Conradi 1982, 16.

afraid of love and intimacy and is relieved to escape to Greece. On the island, however, he spends his first year alone, roaming the beautiful landscape and getting more and more depressed. After a failed suicide attempt, he meets the eccentric Maurice Conchis who engages him in an educational project referred to as “the godgame” and a “psychodrama.” The game involves two beautiful twin sisters, and Nicholas falls in love with the one called “Julie.” The godgame defies all Nicholas’s attempts to understand it and use it to his own advantage, and instead makes him realize some of his deepest flaws: His lack of human warmth, decency, and fellow feeling. Back in England, he decides he loves Alison, and tries to admit this to her. At the end he liberates himself from Conchis and the game and takes responsibility for his own life by deciding to make his own choices.

### **Index Results and Analysis**

*The Magus* gets an overall index score of 106, 33 points lower than *Wilhelm Meister*, and also substantially lower than the other post-WWII novels. It nevertheless falls into a different category than *Huck Finn* and *The Catcher in the Rye*, which score low in all sections. Not only does this novel get a much higher overall score, but very high scores in some sections indicate that it is very close to the bildungsroman tradition in some respects. *The Magus* gets the full score of 15 points in Section 1: “Narrative perspective and mode.” It also gets high scores in Sections 2, 3, and 9, “Characterization: Protagonist,” “Characterization: Secondary characters,” and “Themes.” It receives a low score for Section 4, “Topical story elements: Protagonist,” less than half the score in Section 5, “Topical story elements: Minor characters,” and no points for “Setting.” Two thirds of the points in Section 7 is a relatively high score, while it has only one of the four elements in Section 8: “Generic signals,” but signals generic belonging in other ways. Thematically, *The Magus* is strongly related to the bildungsroman tradition: Its main theme is the growth of the hero into adulthood, and it also shares *Wilhelm Meister*’s strong focus on philosophical questions. I would say we are dealing with a modern bildungsroman with some very unusual aspects.



Table 40. Section scores for *The Magus*, *Of Human Bondage*, *The Diviners*  
and *The Cider House Rules*

Section	Section	Max. Points	<i>The Magus</i>	<i>Of Human Bondage</i>	<i>The Diviners</i>	<i>Cider House</i>
1	Narrative perspective and mode	15	15	15	10	13
2	Characterization: Protagonist	15	13	14	11	12
3	Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	17	16	17	17	16
4	Topical story elements: Protagonist	26	13	25	25	18
5	Topical story elements: Secondary characters	9	4	5	8	7
6	Setting	5	0	5	5	2
7	Plot and Structure	28	20	26	18	26
8	Generic signals	4	2	2	2	2
9	Theme, subject matter and motifs	29	23	29	27	27
	<b>Total score</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>123</b>

## Index Section 1

The score for “Narrative perspective and mode” indicates a perfectly traditional novel in this respect. The focalizer is generally the 25-year-old Nicholas, while the narrator is an older man, looking back on events of his youth with ironic distance. This creates tension between the time of narration and the narrated time, and between character focalizer and narrator. The mature narrator’s views and interpretations are very different from those of the young protagonist. Sometimes the narrator finds himself to have been naive, more often his judgments are harsher: He condemns his younger self for selfishness, shallowness and moral deficiencies. What he felt after leaving Alison, for instance, he now finds odious and revolting (48). This tension is particularly striking in the first few chapters, while the distance gradually diminishes in the course of events on Phraxos. The reader is thus brought closer to the hero, which serves to create more understanding and sympathy.

The effect of the distance between young protagonist and older narrator is at least twofold: Firstly, it helps make it obvious from the beginning that the hero grows and changes in the course of the book, and that he is wiser at the end than at the beginning. The point of view is thus linked to the main theme. Secondly, the fact that the narrator knows more than the focalizer creates suspense, and since the young protagonist is limited in his knowledge (both of himself and of what is really happening on Phraxos), the reader is also kept in the dark throughout. The narrator throws in little tantalizers such as “if only I had known...,” or hints that he did not at the time know the (dangerous) consequences of actions and events. This is a common kind of prolepsis in bildungsromans, which again underlines the temporal

distance. There are things the young character could not possibly know, the older narrator is now wiser, and time and experience change people. The narrative perspective is thus traditional, foregrounding the positive benefits of psychological maturity.

*The Magus* is highly ironic, which is seen already in the portrayal of Nicholas's parents in the first line. They are described as "born in the grotesquely elongated shadow ... of that monstrous dwarf Queen Victoria" (15). And the narrator is equally ironic about himself as a young man, who had "long before made the discovery that I lacked the parents and ancestors I needed" (15). His lack of self-perception and maturity in university comes out in his membership in the circle *Les Hommes Révoltés*, who "argued about being and nothingness"<sup>48</sup> and called a certain kind of inconsequential behaviour 'existentialist'" (17). Distance between main character and narrator is thus achieved by temporal distance, a gap in information, and irony.

As regards the combination of action and reflection, *The Magus* creates a conspicuous pattern in its switching from one to the other. Not only does the story alternate between the two, but his life seems to arrange itself so that whatever issue is foremost in his mind finds practical expression in his life. For instance, Chapter 2 starts off talking about his attitude to girls and relationships, and then offers a practical demonstration in his meeting with Alison and the development of a relationship between them. Here, it might be just Nicholas the narrator who connects contemplation with action, but on Phraxos (the name might be intended to give an association to "praxis"), action seems to respond to the call of his thoughts. After his existential crisis and its culmination in attempted suicide, Nicholas resigns himself to staying alive and waiting for something "to drive me on" (77). Soon afterward, he runs into Conchis, who is ready to become his mentor and drive him on. Conchis even introduces the idea that mystery is a force of energy, and it is the mystery of Bourani that gets Nicholas hooked and makes him happy to be alive. Each of Nicholas's subsequent "sessions" with Conchis starts with a conversation (contemplation) and then moves on to a practical demonstration (action). The first issue they talk about is life and death, and having a choice between the two. As food for thought, Conchis tells Nicholas about his First World War battlefield experiences, and how he chose life over death and decided to run away. There is already a connection here with Nicholas's depression and suicide attempt, but he is now put to another practical test: Conchis makes him stake his life on a throw of a die, and if he loses he has to take a suicide pill. As Nicholas becomes more and more involved with Conchis and

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. the title of a philosophical work by Jean Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant* published 1943, English translation, *Being and Nothingness*, 1956.

what Lily de Seitas later calls “the godgame” (625), this pattern is repeated again and again. Conchis and Nicholas talk about some issue, Conchis adds an illustrative story from his own life, and finally Nicholas has to experience it in “real life.”

*The Magus* places equal emphasis on action and reflection, as does the classic bildungsroman. But there is a slight difference: In *The Magus* both action and reflection are to a large extent choreographed by Conchis, and it is he who insures that Nicholas gets a chance to both reflect and act on each issue. As is the case in several other respects, *The Magus* creates a meta-level in the way it exposes its own constructedness. This problematic will be discussed in greater detail in the conclusion to this analysis.

## **Section 2: Characterization: Protagonist**

The brief summary of Nicholas’s life at the beginning of *The Magus* establishes him as a very traditional bildungsroman hero. He is “the only child of middle-class parents” (15), an orphan with only one living relative (in Rhodesia); he is very ordinary; and he is definitely a round, dynamic character. The only features *The Magus* does not have in this section are “basic goodness” and “androgynous traits.”

It is unusual for a bildungsroman protagonist to be presented as unlikeable, as Nicholas is, especially at the beginning of the book. He does not go out of his way to help others, and until just before the end, his relations with others are based on his own needs and desires rather than reciprocity. The main characters of the Four Classics, by contrast, have relations with a large number of characters simply because they like them and like being with other people. Nicholas often finds people deficient, tires of them, uses them and discards them. He has affairs with women as a kind of sport that he compares with “being good at golf, but despising the game” (21), and he “became almost as neat at ending liaisons as at starting them” (21). Even Alison, whom he has lived with, he treats as a discardable object when he decides to keep her on hold in case he cannot spend the next weekend with “Julie”. That way, “I would have Alison to fall back on. I won either way” (203). On Phraxos he has “little in common” with the other teachers (52), and can only “tolerate” one of them (52). He is unhappy with his students because they do not want to learn English, and despises students and masters alike for their “mole-like blindness to their natural environment” (51). He sees the island in general as “a stale Levantine provincial society” (52). He complains that others do not speak English or French well enough to deserve his time, but on the one occasion when he runs into a Frenchman who wants to talk to him, he finds the man so boring that he runs

away. In short, Nicholas is proud, arrogant, and lacking in empathy. Comparing Nicholas's impressions of the island and the people on it with the real Fowles's diary notes from the Greek island of Spetsai that he says served as an inspiration for *The Magus*, brings out the difference between Nicholas and a "normal" person. Whereas Nicholas talks about other people only to dismiss them, young Fowles takes an interest in everything around him: He talks about Greek history and politics, teachers and students at the school, teaching methods, and many other things (Fowles 1996, 58-68). One senses a loving curiosity in Fowles, while Nicholas exhibits mostly self-interest.

In spite of all his negative qualities, Nicholas comes across as quite sympathetic, because he is likeable as a narrator even though he often is not as a character. The older Nicholas seems honest, openly confessing acts and thoughts that he now finds shameful. We can accept his youthful mistakes because the narrator has seen that they are mistakes and is now sorry for them.

The other missing feature, "androgynous traits," is largely explained above. With his use-and-throw-away attitude to women, Nicholas is old-fashioned, even for his age. While Wilhelm Meister, Pip, and David Copperfield learn to talk to women as equals and have more equal personal and family relationships than what is common in their time, Nicholas treats women solely as sex objects.

When Conchis sets out to "train" or educate Nicholas, his morality (goodness) and attitudes to women are at the forefront. I will return to these issues in connection with themes and identity development.

### **Section 3: Secondary Characters**

*The Magus* scores high in this section too, "lacking" only the exemplary or contrastive love relationship. Other characters are strikingly essential in making Nicholas change and grow; striking perhaps because *The Magus* puts much emphasis on solitude and freedom, and has a much smaller cast of characters than the Four Classics. Nevertheless, it is clear that the other characters are of fundamental importance to Nicholas's development. The novel constitutes a good, maybe even extreme, example of how the other characters are present for the sake of the protagonist rather than for themselves. Alison is in fact the only other "real" character, apart from Kemp and Jojo who appear briefly at the end. Alison is "real" in the sense that she is herself; the others are actors participating in the godgame and playing roles. For the main

part of the book – which takes place in Greece – Conchis and all the other characters are only there to effect a change on Nicholas.

While the novel has a fairly large walk-on cast, the number of important characters is small, consisting of Conchis, Alison, and Julie/Lily, whom I will henceforth call “Julie.” Nicholas does have a companion in his colleague Demetriades, but they are never close. This lack of a close friend constitutes a difference from the classical tradition, especially *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*, where friends play very important parts. There is a brief mention of former university friends, but none actually appear. Even after he returns to England, Nicholas only has contact with women. But there is a change in him, evidenced by his relationships with Kemp and Jojo, which are clear contrasts to his earlier brief affairs.

Conchis is the magus of the title and the mastermind behind everything that happens. He is the main educator in Nicholas’s formation, but he is an unusual one because he is very ambiguous, and his plans and goals are hard to grasp. Part of the tension and excitement of the plot comes from the mystery surrounding Conchis, and until the very end, both readers and Nicholas are kept guessing about his real identity and what he is really up to. Nicholas has various theories, for instance that he is mad (79), or “simply an old queer” (85), but as he discovers more, the mysteries multiply rather than diminish. Nicholas comes to understand that Conchis has mounted an elaborate game or play for him, and that he has some kind of “privileged information” (147) he wants to impart. But as the game progresses, Conchis repeatedly shatters the picture Nicholas has started to form, making him start all over again.

At first, Conchis presents himself as an eccentric millionaire who is willing to be Nicholas’s companion and mentor, teaching through the examples of his own life. He also stages masque scenes with young maidens and various mythic figures. But at the first major turning-point, or shift in perspective, Conchis explains that he is a psychiatrist in charge of a young woman suffering from severe schizophrenia. Later, Conchis is revealed to be a theater aficionado, attempting some very daring experiment. Once Nicholas sees through these illusions, the psychiatrist image persists through the staged trial. Back in London, however, Nicholas finds out that Conchis was lying about his medical background and about having held a chair at the Sorbonne. Nevertheless, it is this picture of Conchis Nicholas and the readers are left with: That he is a highly skilled psychiatrist conducting a psycho-dramatic experiment on a new subject each year. In the end, Nicholas and the other subjects seem to condone what Conchis has done to them because they decide to let the godgame continue. But the question of whether the experiment is morally defensible remains. Conchis also remains a highly ambiguous, problematic character until the end.

Conchis is an extreme case of the mentor figure found in the Four Classics. He is enshrouded in the same sense of mystery that surrounds the Abbé and the Society of the Tower in *Wilhelm Meister* and Miss. Havisham in *Great Expectations*. (Fowles says in the foreword that he toyed with the idea of making Conchis a woman, and that Conchis is partly inspired by Miss. Havisham.) Like Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, Conchis has several functions. While *David Copperfield* meets a variety of characters who teach him different things, and often adopt negative and positive versions of the same character role (such as good and bad teacher), Nicholas has a variety of experiences with Conchis. Conchis incorporates good and bad in one. Various types of mentors are combined in his very complex character. He is both storyteller, Socratic conversationalist, and someone who gives Nicholas practical exercises and tests.

In addition to his mentor role, Conchis personifies power. The kind of power he is seen to embody changes: He appears intermittently as author, director, magician, and psychologist. But as Nicholas recognizes, Conchis's presumed film company, Polymus Films, is only "one misplaced letter" (582) away from spelling Olympus – home of the gods – and Conchis is also a personification of God. This much Fowles admits in the Foreword:

I did intend Conchis to exhibit a series of masks representing human notions of God, from the super-natural to the jargon-ridden scientific; that is, a series of human illusions about something that does not exist in fact, absolute knowledge and absolute power. The destruction of such illusions seems to me still an eminently humanist aim.  
(10)

As an atheist, Fowles does not believe in God, nor, he says here, in "absolute knowledge and absolute power." Who Conchis is and what he is up to is never quite established in the book, but he appears to Nicholas in all the masks Fowles mentions. At times he appears supernatural, having powers of telepathy and mind-control, at other times he is the professional man of medicine, at yet others he seems merely cruel, or a friendly father figure. But what is never in doubt is his power and that Nicholas feels controlled by Conchis and his cast. Conchis appears as an almighty being, time and again outsmarting Nicholas and preempting his actions. Nevertheless, Conchis is no god, but merely a human part of the world and life. He only wields power over Nicholas as long as Nicholas permits him to.

The lover function is divided between Alison, "Julie", and later also "Julie's" twin sister, whom I will call "June." The usual setup in a bildungsroman is at least two lovers who

are very different, one representing the right love and the other what is not good for the principal character. This is also the case here, although Alison and “Julie” are not simply right and wrong respectively.

From the beginning, Alison is described as ambiguous, a composite of two different things. Nicholas’s first impression is that “there was something German, Danish about her – waif-like, yet perversely or immorally so” (23). She gives her flat-mate Margaret an “oddly split look, half guilty and half wary” (23), and Margaret describes her as “very mixed up” (24). Nicholas notices that “she had two voices; one almost Australian, one almost English” (23). This doubleness seems to be partly what attracts Nicholas to her in the beginning.

Later, however, when “Julie” appears on the scene, Alison becomes increasingly deficient in Nicholas’s eyes, and he starts remembering her negative qualities only. “Julie,” on the other hand, takes on a more and more perfect glow, and the two women are established as opposites. Being Australian and English becomes synonymous with a range of other negative and positive qualities respectively. “Julie” is not only English but also upper-middle-class, educated, sophisticated, mysterious, and exotic. Alison, on the other hand, Nicholas tells “Julie,” is Australian, and

‘You know what Australians are like. ... They’re terribly half-baked culturally. They don’t really know who they are, where they belong. Part of her was very ... gauche. Anti-British. Another side ... I suppose I felt sorry for her, basically.’ (207)

In order to keep things simple for himself, Nicholas stops himself without saying what the other side of Alison is, reducing her to her Australian and negative aspects. The fact that “[s]he’s Australian. An air hostess” (206), is supposed to convince “Julie” that he cannot possibly have loved her or have had a serious relationship with her. When “Julie” asks if he does not love Alison any more, he says “it wasn’t that kind of relationship” (207).

When Nicholas meets Alison in Athens, he keeps comparing her to “Julie” and finding her wanting. He disapproves of her dress, her hairstyle, and her lipstick: “I thought of Julie, of lips without lipstick; coolness, mystery, elegance” (250). And walking in Piraeus he “had a vision of ‘Lily’ walking through that street, and silencing everything, purifying everything; not provoking and adding to the vulgarity” (250-251). Alison is too overtly sexual, while “Julie” is both more innocent and more untouchable. Later “Julie” hints that Nicholas might be more “experienced” than her (210), and Nicholas senses “a delicious ghost of innocence, perhaps even of virginity” (210). “Julie’s” presumed virginity is a sharp contrast to the

“Australian” side of Alison, her “perversely or immorally” waif-like quality. Increasingly, “Julie” becomes a madonna as opposed to Alison’s whore.

Both versions of Fowles’s novel were published before Gilbert and Gubar’s influential *The Madwoman in the Attic*, which traces images of women through British literature and finds a persistent split into “angel” and “monster:” “[A] woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of ‘angel’ and ‘monster,’ which male authors have generated for her” (Gilbert and Gubar 1998, 596). They find that an ideal of woman as virgin, mother, goddess and selfless angel competes with the opposite, the assertive and aggressive woman, the scheming witch, and the whore. *The Magus* contains precisely such a split image of women, emphasized by the fact that Nicholas finds both images in Alison. The split, however, is in Nicholas himself, not in Alison, and at the end Nicholas realizes this and constructs a new, composite picture of her. This point is brought up again later, but first the split into good and bad lover must be examined further.

In addition to being English, “Julie” is also very like Nicholas. When they first meet, he discovers that her “voice was completely English. ... I had expected a foreign accent; but I could place this exactly. It was my own; product of boarding school, university” (168). During one of their first prolonged conversations, Nicholas feels he has broken through the armor of “Julie’s” role, and is starting to see her true self: “Everything beneath the surface hinted at a girl from a world and background very like my own: a girl with both an inborn sense of decency and an inborn sense of English irony” (202). At the bitter end, in the apartment in the village and during the trial, Nicholas has to recognize that “Julie” is more like himself than he would have wanted. She is playing a role, just as he is, showing him the side of herself that she wants him to see. In reality she is just as capable of lying, pretending, and deceiving as he is. He has to recognize that all the positive qualities he has ascribed to her are just part of a role and his own wishful thinking.

Alison, on the other hand, regains her full nature at the end, as a composite of good and bad. At their last meeting in London, Nicholas is shocked to see how good she looks, and realizes “that the image, idealized by memory, of a Lily [i.e. “Julie”] always at her best had distorted Alison into what she was only at her worst. ... She was pretty and desirable...” (648). Alison is a real woman, not an idealization, and therefore cannot be reduced to a symbol like madonna or whore. It is only when Nicholas understands the difference between idealization and reality that he is ready to see Alison for what she really is and love her for that.



## Sections 4 and 5: Topical story elements

Section 4 is where *The Magus* scores lowest, only 13 out of 26. By comparison, the Four Classics get between 19 and 26 and *The Catcher in the Rye* only one. 13 points might be seen as a medium score, indicating some bildungsroman elements, but not the typical set of features.

Unlike the three British Classics, *The Magus* does not have any description of the protagonist's childhood. In this respect, it is more like *Wilhelm Meister*. It also shares *Wilhelm Meister's* lack of hunger, poverty, and moving to a big city. Instead of going to a bustling capital with a wealth of different professions and social classes, Nicholas's formative experiences are set in a private villa, which constitutes a world in itself. He is "introduced to new social groups, classes, and professions," but that is not where the importance of Conchis and the other godgame participants lies. Rather, the variety of influences represented by a large cast of characters in other bildungsromans is provided by Conchis, his masque, his stories, and the experiences he subjects Nicholas to. In similar manner, many of the other missing features have equivalents in *The Magus*.

I have followed the principle of awarding and not awarding points to doubtful features equally often. Because there are events in *The Magus* that are similar to the traditional ones and have similar consequences, it is also possible to argue in favor of giving more points. I have given the book points for "Death of close relative or friend" even if Alison does not die, because believing her dead for a long time affects Nicholas much as a real death would have. Likewise, I have given a point for "Is wounded or sick," although Nicholas is not, strictly speaking. Haven given points for these two doubtful features, I do not give points for two other questionable features, "Nursed back to health" and "Nurses other sick person." But for these features too, *The Magus* has equivalents: Towards the end of the novel, Nicholas takes in the young girl Jojo, who brings associations of Mignon in *Wilhelm Meister*. His landlady serves a similar function of taking some responsibility for him when he is at a low ebb and really needs it. I have also not given points for "gets engaged or married." The end of the book leaves this matter undecided, although the evidence points toward Alison and Nicholas staying together.

*The Magus* obviously differs from the Four Classics in its plot, scenes, and individual events, as reflected in the index scores for this section. There are some equivalent experiences, but the originality and artificiality of the plot makes for big differences. I will discuss how this relates to Nicholas's identity development in the thematic section.

*The Magus* gets a fairly low score in section 5 as well, and scoring it, I have dealt with uncertainties by giving and not giving points half the time. There are few dramatic, decisive events relating to secondary characters in the “real” world and present time of the novel; there are no crimes, fires, illnesses, deaths, etc. Many of these events do, however, occur in stories told (especially by Conchis) and also in the masque scenes and the other staged events of the godgame. In traditional bildungsromans, I think such dramatic events have two main purposes: One, to teach the main characters about life and the world, and second, to give them practice in handling a variety of experiences and dealing with them emotionally. Nicholas’s experiences on Phraxos and partly also afterwards in London serve both purposes. As in the case of Section 4, *The Magus* manages to break with bildungsroman tradition, while at the same time achieving similar effects by different means.

The fact that some events and characters occur only in stories (whose truth-value is questionable) or as part of the godgame complicates scoring. Many deaths are of this type. Nicholas hears about deaths in Conchis’s stories, and this has much the same function as events happening to other people. In the Four Classics it is difficult to distinguish between events occurring in narratives and events in the “world” of the novel. In *David Copperfield*, for instance, David is not physically present at most of the dramatic events that happen to Little Emily; he hears about them from other characters. And Wilhelm Meister has some of the most dramatic stories in that book told to him by others. Nicholas is told about death, and a variety of crimes take place in the stories Conchis tells, especially in relation to the German occupation of Phraxos. There is a disastrous fire in the de Deukans story, and Nygaard’s insanity makes him a kind of invalid. De Deukans is ruined financially, and various family relationships are revealed in relation to Mrs. De Seitas towards the end. Outside the stories told, Nicholas is confronted with a large range of dramatic events that he has to deal with practically and emotionally. If it turns out that some of these were not real but “staged,” that does not make much difference to their effect on him. The fear he feels when he encounters the brutal Nazi soldiers in the woods, for instance, is real, even if the soldiers are not.

In the index I have given points for “crime,” “fire,” “death,” and “identity or family relationship revealed” because these events seem to have really happened, even if Nicholas only hears about them at second hand. The other features are not scored. As concerns the features in this section, *The Magus* is partly traditional and partly innovative.

## Section 6: Setting

*The Magus* gets no points in this section: There is no growing up in the countryside or a provincial town, and no subsequent move to a big city. The setting is thus a radical break with the pattern of *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield*, and *Of Human Bondage*. *The Magus* differs less from *Wilhelm Meister* and *Jane Eyre*, since Wilhelm's and Jane's important experiences also take place in houses or on large estates rather than in a metropolis. Treated as a German novel, *The Magus* would have had 3 points out of 5 instead of zero.

*The Magus* does however, have a move from one type of social world to a very different one offering a greater variety of experiences. The settings of *The Magus* are constructed as pairs of contrasts; the dreary grayness of London is contrasted with the dazzling light of the Aegean, the cultured masks people wear in Rome are contrasted with the open, honest faces of Greece, and the north of Phraxos is contrasted with the south.

The most important setting in *The Magus* is the island of Phraxos, particularly Bourani, where Conchis's villa is located. Bourani, which, we are told means "skull," is known by several names in the novel, each bringing different, somewhat paradoxical associations. Conchis's property bears the sign "the waiting room" and it is repeatedly called "the domaine" (134, 242-243, 321, 353, 359, 373). This latter name, with its French spelling, is a reference to Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*, which Fowles says in the Foreword was a major inspiration for *The Magus*. Alain-Fournier's "domaine sans nom," "the nameless domain," is the enchanted chateau the eponymous protagonist chances upon when lost, and then spends the rest of his life searching for. Meaulnes wastes his life in nostalgia for a perfection encountered briefly in his youth that cannot be recovered. Bourani plays a similar role here. It is an enchanted other world that draws Nicholas in and provides the excitement and emotional and intellectual stimuli that are missing from his ordinary life. The mystery, the perfection, the scenery, the weather, and finally the beautiful and mysterious "Julie," all threaten to enrapture Nicholas to the extent that he will be unable to return to the real world. In an afterword to Fournier's novel, Fowles talks about "glimpses down long vistas of the unattainable" (1973, 209), and one meaning of Bourani is as ideal world or paradise. In this capacity it is part of Fowles's development of the theme of reality versus illusion.

The inscription "Salle d'attente," meaning "the waiting room," holds a different but related meaning and is part of the treatment of the themes of God and the meaning of life. As Robert Huffaker points out, Fowles clarifies this metaphor in *Daniel Martin* when he talks about "existence as a waiting room for a train that will never come" (Fowles 1977, 510). In

*The Aristos*, Fowles develops a similar metaphor in the image of human life as a journey on a raft: The people on the raft believe they have left paradise behind and that they are on their way to another paradise (Fowles 1996, 6). Both images contain the idea that what is really meaningful and valuable is not life now but somewhere in the future, maybe after death. And the danger, of course, is that if we see life like this, we do not have much motivation to make much of earthly life. Fowles, on the other hand, claims, in both *The Aristos* and his novels, that real, important life is here and now, on earth, in the real world.

Bourani can also be regarded as the magical world the heroes of myth and folk tales go to in order to be tested. It then takes on a quality of underworld and emergence from it becomes a symbolic rebirth.

In addition to its symbolic functions, Bourani is of course also the concrete setting for at least some of Nicholas's learning experiences. This is where he comes to be with "Julie" and to listen to Conchis's stories with their various lessons. In this third capacity, Bourani functions similarly to Dickens's London, because it is a new place in which Nicholas is confronted with new experiences and people. It is a world that is totally different from the one he comes from. But it is also very different from Dickens's settings because it is more psychological than social.

## **Section 7: Plot and Structure**

*The Magus* gets 18 points out of 26 in this section; compared to 18 for *The Diviners* and 24 for *The Cider House Rules*.

The plot is chronological, but the age of the main character is slightly unusual: Nicholas is not between 18 and 23 years old, but 25 to 26. The plot does not go from childhood to adulthood, but focuses on a period of a year and a half, and childhood and youth are only mentioned briefly. Lacking these two key features might have given the novel the "feel" of not being a bildungsroman, but it partly makes up for it by having the development of the hero from youth to adulthood as its main theme. There is of course a paradox in my scoring here: As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, I have chosen to take the word "adulthood" as referring to physical age in the plot section, while in the theme section I see it as a psychological concept having to do with maturity rather than mere age. Based on his age, Nicholas is an adult, but psychologically he is still an immature youth.

In *The Aristos*, Fowles criticizes "the abrupt way we terminate education at far too young an age" (141). Between the ages of eighteen and thirty, Fowles says, people are still

“pre-adults,” living in a stage of “self-indulgence” (141). Conchis explains to Nicholas that when he himself met de Deukans, he was 25 and therefore

unable to judge him. It is, I think, the most difficult and irritating age of all. Both to be and to behold. One has the intelligence, one is in all ways treated as a grown man. But certain persons reduce one to adolescence, because only experience can understand and assimilate them. (179)

So Fowles has made Nicholas 25, not in order to show an immature adult, but to emphasize that people are not as mature as they and others tend to think at that age. That is presumably also why all the young men brought to Bourani to be re-educated are 25 years old.

“*Adulthood is not an age, but a state of knowledge of self,*” Fowles says in *The Aristos*, (2001, 142). *The Magus* is thus a novel about becoming an adult, even though Nicholas is 25 when the plot starts. He is immature in a number of ways, and his life has been largely without the responsibilities associated with adulthood: Work, a family, long-term commitments vis-à-vis other people. At the beginning of the book, Nicholas is drifting, not knowing who he is or what he wants in life. In short, his identity is not fully developed.

The age of the protagonist, his discovery of family ties (Feature 72), and his return to a childhood home (Feature 74) are the only differences from the tradition in the plot section.

Letters are quoted in full and there are many inserted narratives, long and short. Most of the inserted stories are told by Conchis, and are presented as part of the story of his life. They are told to instruct Nicholas, they parallel important issues in his life, and they also have to do with identity development. Conchis tells his life chronologically, but each phase has a particular importance for Nicholas. During his first weekend visit to Bourani, Conchis relates the early part of his life. As a child, he was a musical prodigy, but later realized he would never be a great musician. This parallels Nicholas’s life-long belief that he was “really” a poet, and his loss of that illusion on the island. Next comes the story of Conchis’s experiences in the Great War, and how he chose to run away in order to live. Nicholas has also been struggling with the issue of life and death, and whether he really wants to live. The next stage of Conchis’s story concerns how he lied about having deserted his family and his fiancée. Nicholas, of course, keeps lying to both Conchis and “Julie” (and maybe also himself) about his feelings for Alison.

As already mentioned, there are several dramatic turning points in Fowles’s novel. In some of them Nicholas’s aspirations are defeated, in others his whole belief system seems to

come crashing down. If loss – not just in the sense of death or of leaving behind an earlier stage, such as childhood, but also in the sense of defeat – is important in the development from youth to maturity, then *The Magus* is a book that brings this out very conspicuously. This topic will be dealt with in detail in the identity development section.

The ending of *The Magus* is open but largely in line with the bildungsroman tradition. All the different episodes come together to form a pattern, which is the education process constituted by the godgame. There is a geographical journey, and although Nicholas does not return to his childhood home, the traditional cyclical structure of going back to the beginning is evoked when he seeks out people connected with Conchis and Bourani, trying to get to the bottom of what was going on. His trip to Italy does not give the answers he seeks, but Lily de Seitas calls him “blind” (601), and then starts elucidating some things for him. At the very end, he does learn to “see.” Seeing (and light) is also used as a metaphor for understanding throughout the book, as in the village scene when Nicholas gets a new explanation of everything from “June”:

The lightning made its [the harbour’s] shuttered façades spring luridly to life, like a stage set ... and what she was beginning to tell me, that too was like that lightning: flashes of seeing all, darkness of still doubting it. But as with the real lightning, illumination began to overcome night. (477).

During his final confrontation with Alison, Nicholas understands a number of things: “[T]he final truth came to me as we stood there... There were no watching eyes.” He realizes “they” – Conchis, his group – have no power over him any longer. He himself has to act, assume responsibility for himself. And he starts seeing in Alison “something I had never seen, or always feared to see,” namely “[a] small step poised, a shattered crystal waiting to be born.” Alison is saying she hates him, but she is actually waiting for him to admit he loves her and treat her accordingly. She is ready to love him, if he will only stop hurting her. And then Nicholas does take the step he has resisted for most of the book. He says: “You can’t hate someone who’s really on his knees. Who’ll never be more than half a human being without you” (655). This is Nicholas’s epigrammatic statement, and the climax of the book. He has finally come to see.

The ending of *The Magus* is open in the sense that it does not definitely resolve the question of whether Alison and Nicholas “get one another.” This is quite usual in bildungsromans, and Dickens achieves a similar effect in the second ending to *Great*

*Expectations*. He first ended the book with Pip and Estella meeting by chance after many years and then saying goodbye forever. But the complaint of his friend Edward Bulwer-Lytton made Dickens change the ending to a more open, positive one, in which it seems likely that the two will get together again. Fowles changed his ending partly because readers complained the 1965 version was too ambiguous. In the Foreword to the 1977 edition he says:

Though its general intent has never seemed to me as obscure as some readers have evidently found it – perhaps because they have not given due weight to the two lines from the *Pervigilium Veneris* that close the book – I accept that I might have declared a preferred aftermath less ambiguously... and now have done so. (7)

What Fowles is referring to here, is that even the first version had a clear direction in spite of the open ending: Nicholas does mature, and he has been moving away from his immature sarcasm and hostility toward integration in society, though on his own terms. In the second version, however, there is more promise that Nicholas and Alison will get together again.

I thus think that *The Magus* has integration into society as its projected ending and as its factual ending. Having resolved his personal problems of hostility to other people and society, Nicholas's acceptance of love is also an acceptance of society and life and a commitment to being a part of it.

## **Section 8: Generic signals**

*The Magus* signals its generic belonging through allusions to other bildungsromans and by starting as a typical life narrative. It also shows a rapport with the genre in a number of other ways, many of which I have already mentioned: The characterization of the protagonist, narrative voice, and ironic and temporal distance between narrator and principal character. The summary of the protagonist's childhood and youth on the first couple of pages is so typical as to be almost parodic: Nicholas presents himself as an orphan, an only child with no relatives, and relates his early attempts to liberate himself from his background.

The revised 1977 version of *The Magus* has a foreword by the author which guides the reader's expectations and responses, also when it comes to generic identity. Although nothing is said explicitly about genre, Fowles runs through his influences and these do much to place the work in a tradition. The three novels Fowles claims most influenced *The Magus* were Alain-Fournier's *Le grand Meaulnes*, Richard Jefferies' *Bevis*, and Dickens's *Great*

*Expectations*. *Great Expectations* is of course a classic English bildungsroman, *Le grand Meaulnes* is a classic French “novel of adolescence” (Fowles 1971, 208), and *Bevis* an English children’s classic. They are all about young men or boys who start making important discoveries concerning themselves and the world around them. Fowles claims not to have been aware of his indebtedness to Dickens until it was pointed out to him by a student years after the first publication of the novel. The student did not know Fowles loved and admired *Great Expectations* and was even teaching it while he wrote *The Magus*. In the revised version Fowles added an allusion to *Great Expectations* in order to explicitly acknowledge this “unseen influence” (7), thus strengthening the bildungsroman connection. There is also an allusion to *Jane Eyre* in the book.

The Foreword contains some additional information that might make the reader think of the bildungsroman. Fowles explains that “in every way except that of mere publishing date, [*The Magus*] is a first novel” (5). Prefaced by the claim that “[n]o writer will happily disclose the deeper biographical influences of his work” (7), Fowles nevertheless gives detailed information on its origin in his own experiences as a teacher on the Greek island of Spetsai in 1951-52. I wonder if this information is coincidental, only three years after Jerome Buckley’s monograph on the English bildungsroman claimed that being a first novel and having strong autobiographical traits are among the prime distinguishing features of the genre. But whether Fowles knew Buckley’s work or not, these statements serve to link his work to the genre. Later he also calls the book “a novel of adolescence,” despite the fact that the hero is 25 years old.

Typical bildungsroman titles like *The Education of Henry Adams* have largely stopped being used in the twentieth century. *The Magus* is in line with other modern bildungsromans in signaling its genre through allusions and starting as a life narrative.

## **Identity Development and Thematic Issues**

*The Magus* is a complex and complicated novel filled with literary allusions and references to classical mythology, and the possibilities for interpretation are virtually endless. William Palmer calls Fowles’s fiction “a literary Disney World enisled in a sea of potential interpretation” (Palmer 1974, 1), presumably because of its miniature reproductions of genres and styles, and its dizzying rides. It is a particularly apt description of this novel, which is a roller-coaster ride from the depths of depression to the heights of romantic love, from the



supernatural to the super-scientific, from the North-Norwegian wilderness to sunny Greece, and from WWI to the 1950s. Reading *The Magus* as a bildungsroman means looking at it as primarily a story about growing up, about becoming an adult. All the other themes in the index are secondary to this one, supplementary, or related to it.

What then, does it mean to become an adult? As I have explained before, Eriksonian developmental psychology perceives adulthood as something achieved through the development of identity. This process normatively takes place in the late teens to early 20s, that is, it is normal or common for people to go through it at that age. James Marcia and others have found, however, that, in reality, many people emerge from late adolescence without being identity achieved. They are then either diffused or have a premature identity based on identification with parents or other role models (foreclosed status). Although the first encounter with identity issues takes place around ages 18-23, both Marcia and Erikson maintain that it is common to experience one or more identity crises later in life. A lost chance can be remedied later, and people who have reached a mature identity in their early 20s will often undergo further cycles of moratorium (exploration) and achievement (called MAMA-cycles), through which the content of their identity changes. The fact that Nicholas is 25 at the beginning of *The Magus* does not therefore mean the book cannot be about development from youth to adulthood.

My contention is that *The Magus* is about Nicholas's road toward a mature identity. The novel is divided into three main parts: The first deals with the period before the appearance of Conchis; the second is the godgame itself; the third treats the period after Nicholas leaves the island. These correspond to the main stages in Nicholas's growth process. In the first part, we see that his first identity formation process has been unsuccessful, trapping him in an unproductive state of opposition to his parents without achieving positive commitments to replace those he has rejected. Moving to Greece makes him analyze himself, and he realizes that his negative identity (Kroger 2004, 21) is false and unsatisfying. The experience of this kind of internal conflict is seen by Marcia, Jane Kroger, and other psychologists as typical of the beginning of an identity transition. In Part II he meets Conchis, and with the start of the "psycho-drama" or "godgame" Nicholas goes into a moratorium, in which he finds himself until Part III, when things start falling into place for him. At the end, Nicholas can be seen as identity achieved in the interpersonal and ideological life areas, to use Marcia's terminology. In plainer language, he has now developed a sense of who he is and what he believes in, which are essential for being an adult.

Chapter 1 of *The Magus* gives a brief summary of Nicholas's first (adolescent) identity formation process. He comes from a strict, conventional English middle-class family, which he rebels against some time in his teens. But not wanting to confront his father openly, the boy develops two identities, a "proper" one for his family, and a rebellious one for school and friends. He even joins the army in order to live up to his parents' expectations.

Erik Erikson sees childhood identities as the result of identification with others, typically parents. A mature identity, on the other hand, is a composite of many identifications, which are evaluated and amalgamated into a new synthesis. Nicholas rejects his parents as worthy objects of identification, substituting, while at Oxford, characters from French existentialist novels. Nicholas the narrator now sees that this wholesale adoption of the outward characteristics of characters intended as metaphors was an immature stance. His college identity was therefore primarily a front, a mask with no face behind it. Basing one's identity on identification, whether with parents or their antithesis, constitutes what Marcia calls foreclosure. This is a premature adoption of an identity without proper exploration of options and alternatives, that is, without a moratorium.

As we meet Nicholas after college, he has completed a year as a teacher at a public school, and is looking for a change. He is vaguely dissatisfied with himself and his life, without knowing why or what he wants instead. In the occupation sphere, he seems diffused: He dreams of being a poet, but does little about it and has no idea what kind of job he might actually enjoy. Interpersonally, he appears shallow, egocentric, and uncaring. He does not have any friends, at least none that he sees regularly, and he starts and ends love relationships as a kind of sport, without offering much of himself and wanting no long-term commitment. The relationship he starts with Alison is on the verge of turning into something deeper, but before it can, Nicholas is off, more relieved to be "free" again than sad to leave somebody who genuinely cares about him.

According to Fowles, *The Magus* and *The Collector* were "both based on more or less disguised existentialist premises" (1968, 90). As Nicholas arrives in Greece, an allusion to Jean-Paul Sartre's novel *La nausée* (1980) (*Nausea*) warns the reader of an imminent existential crisis: "I looked down on my pale London hands. Even they seemed changed, nauseatingly alien, things I should long ago have disowned" (49). In *Nausea* the protagonist's existential crisis starts with a feeling of his hands being alien, and subsequent nausea. To Nicholas too, the experience indicates that he is going to change his perception of himself. After looking at his hands, he notices the Mediterranean light, and experiences this as the beginning of a process of questioning under torture:

It was like being at the beginning of an interrogation under arc-lights; already I could see the table with straps through the open doorway, already *my old self* began to know that it wouldn't be able to hold out. (49, emphasis added)

The interrogation Nicholas is referring to is going to happen to his old self. The point of interrogation is to get the suspect to reveal the truth, everything he knows, and it is this that will happen to Nicholas on the island: His old self will be tortured into seeing itself for what it is, into revealing the truth about itself.

From his arrival on Phraxos in the autumn until May the following year, Nicholas spends most of his time alone, sinking further and further into depression. The only positive factor in his life is the Greek landscape, which he loves passionately and uses for frequent solitary walks. Maybe it is all the time he spends alone in the hills that brings him face to face with the truth about himself: That he is no poet (58). This realization ruins his old self-perception and he suddenly finds himself without an identity. Without poetry, Nicholas has nothing, is nothing, has no existence: "I felt myself filled with nothingness" (58). He tries to commit suicide but finds he cannot. In the course of the attempt he realizes he has been living as though performing for an audience, not caring what his actions meant, only what they looked like: "I had been, and remained, intensely depressed, but I had also been, and always would be, intensely false; in existentialist terms, inauthentic" (62).

This process of introspection that Nicholas has undergone has exposed his old identity as false and unsatisfying. He recognizes its shallowness and inauthenticity and, although he does not know how to change, he is ready to start. Such internal conflict or disequilibrium have been identified as important for the onset of a period of reevaluation and searching, that is, moratorium.<sup>49</sup> Kroger and Green have found certain outward changes, such as moving and changing jobs, to be factors that can help push people towards changing their identity (1996). And in young people, going away to college and university often marks the onset of a period of self-examination and experimentation. In the case of Nicholas, several factors contribute to the collapse of his first, quasi-existentialist identity: The relationship with Alison, which he gradually realizes might have been good for him, his inability to find a job he is happy with, his lack of realistic ambitions, the lack of distractions such as women, and finally the change of lifestyle and scenery, and his loneliness on Phraxos.

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<sup>49</sup> See for instance the discussion between Kroger, Marcia, Berzonsky and others on pp. 222-225 of Kroger, 1993.

The moratorium is maybe the phase that we most easily associate with the concept of *Bildung*, the process of gathering experience, meeting a variety of influences – personal, professional, social, religious, philosophical – and trying out identities, roles, and activities that might or might not become part of the new identity that is under construction. What is useful about Erikson’s and Marcia’s concept of identity formation is that it reminds us that the creation of an identity is complicated and precarious, need not be linear, and may not be successful. The concept of *Bildung* often implies a gradual unfolding of abilities and a steady process of brick-by-brick construction of the person. According to Dilthey, “[a] regular development is observed in the life of the individual: each of the stages has its own intrinsic value and is at the same time the basis for a higher stage” (1985, 390). Erikson’s identity formation takes place between diffusion and identity, and there is always a little bit of both. Although Nicholas’s experiences, thoughts and actions in Part II of *The Magus* are strange and sometimes extreme, they nevertheless provide an insightful picture of an interesting but difficult period in a person’s life. As mentioned earlier, the fact that Nicholas is now in his mid-20s should not distract us from the point that the process of exploration he is going through is still basically the same as it would have been, had it taken place at the more usual, younger age.

As Part II of the novel begins, just before the start of the godgame, Nicholas is basically empty. He feels “in suspension, waiting without fear for some impulse to drive me on” (77). The appearance of Conchis, who compares himself to Prospero in *The Tempest*, is that impulse. Conchis’s godgame consists of three weekend visits to Bourani, followed by a rapid succession of surprises and about-turns which I will call the fourth phase. Part II also includes short interludes in which Nicholas reflects on what is happening, and one long interlude where he goes to Athens and meets Alison again. Conchis’s training has two focuses, which belong to the interpersonal and ideological domains respectively.

### **The interpersonal domain**

Having breakfast with Kemp, his scruffy, intellectual landlady, towards the end of the novel, Nicholas finds himself unable to respond to her outstretched hand, offering support and “a rough temporary motherhood” (608). At that moment he realizes what his life-long problem has been:

They had been wrong, at the trial. It was not that I preyed on girls; but the fact that my only access to normal humanity, to social decency, to any openness of heart, lay through girls, preyed on me. It was in that that I was the real victim. (608)

Nicholas has been emotionally crippled, unable to form any deep long-lasting relationships with either male friends or women. He was never close to his parents, and his college friendships seem to have been shallow. When any woman, Alison, for instance, started breaking through his shell and wanting intimacy, he ran away. He has always been a “lone wolf” (260), and as he says in the above quotation, he has been using girls as the only outlet for his need for human contact.

In the same breakfast scene, Nicholas also discovers why he is the way he is. Thinking about how Kemp represents everything his father hated, he sees in her patting of his hand “more real humanity than I had ever known in my own home. Yet still that home, those years, governed me” (608). “Governed” is a strong word, and Nicholas is admitting that neither leaving home physically nor the death of his parents have liberated him from the influence of his childhood home. The “negative identity” he tried at Oxford, that is, choosing values that “present a diametric contrast to all those of his own heritage” (Kroger 2004, 21) did not free him either. When he starts telling his life story, the book, that is, it is his parents he starts with. His family and background constitute the foundation Nicholas has been built on, and the continued presence in him of what they stood for is the starting point. What Nicholas says of his parents in the first sentence of the novel is that they were “middle-class,” “both English, and born in the shadow ... of ... Queen Victoria” (15). Throughout the story, Englishness, middle-classness, and a Victorian mentality are presented as enemies of authenticity and humanity, which are associated with Europe and particularly Greece.

As a teenager, Nicholas despised his parents’ narrow-mindedness, his father’s emphasis on “externals and petty quotidian things,” and his respect for “capitalized key-words like Discipline and Tradition and Responsibility” (15). Nevertheless, in his mid-20s Nicholas still idealizes certain aspects of English middle-class culture. After he meets “Julie,” he realizes that Alison is inferior because she is not English. It is “Julie’s” Englishness, and the fact that they have the same accent and background, that first makes her attractive to him. The opposition between “Julie” and Alison has been analyzed in some detail in the section on secondary characters, and here I will only mention a few significant factors. We see how shallow Nicholas’s rejection of the English middle class is when he extols “Julie” as having “an inborn sense of decency and an inborn sense of irony” (202). He thinks he and the twins

are better than Conchis because Conchis is “like so many other Europeans [as opposed to the English], quite unable to understand the emotional depths and subtleties of the English attitude to life” (372). On these counts Conchis will prove him wrong again and again. But Nicholas also says that part of being English is being “born with masks and bred to lie” (372). And masks and lies are essentially what Conchis’s godgame is about; it shows a world where everything is lies and masks, and asks Nicholas to find his way in it. In a 1977 interview, Fowles said “games-playing, rarely saying what you truly mean,” is an important part of (middle-class) Englishness (Bragg 1977). Conchis’s games are designed to make Nicholas discover the implications of a life of playing games. He thus hopes to dismantle the English middle-class mentality that is at the bottom of many of Nicholas’s attitudes.

There are various psychoanalytic and critical theories about why and how the godgame in *The Magus* works. Ellen McDaniel, for instance, sees Nicholas progressing through the 21 numbered cards of the Tarot, from number 1, the Magus, to number 21, the Judgment (1980), while Julius Raper thinks Kohut’s psychoanalytic theories can explain the game’s positive effect on Nicholas (1988, 74-82). Avrom Fleishman reads the book as “a retelling of classical myth – the Orpheus legend” (1976, 300), and thinks Nicholas is saved by an educational process modeled on the Eleusinian mysteries (305). Critics have also seen the godgame as a mythological journey to an underworld, along the lines of Joseph Campbell’s model. Lily de Seitas gives a much simpler explanation in Part III: After Nicholas has lied to her about his visit, she says: “You come here telling me lies. You come here for all the wrong reasons. I tell you lies back. I give you wrong reasons back” (589). This statement can explain the behavior of all the characters in the godgame: The godgame is a mirror that shows Nicholas what a world of his own making would be like. Conchis and the girls at Bourani behave towards him as he behaves towards them, which is also the way he has generally treated others, particularly girls. The godgame is a sophisticated illustration of the old Christian tenet that you should treat others as you would have them treat you. Nicholas has always given others, especially women, lies, and he has gone to them for the wrong reasons, wanting only personal gratification. The godgame treats him the same way, forcing him to feel the effect his behavior has on other people. Conchis also uses other methods in his game, such as storytelling, discussion, assigning readings, and masque elements, but the part involving “Julie” and “June”, and that seems real to Nicholas, I think, operates on this principle. It is supposed to hold up a mirror and show Nicholas what he is.

The first time Nicholas meets “Julie” she is impersonating Conchis’s dead girlfriend, Lily Montgomery. Nicholas obviously understands that she is playing a role. He is not playing

a role, he thinks, but in his attempts to get to know “Lily” and crack her mask, he gives away next to nothing about himself and does not allow her to get to know him. Much later, at their third meeting, Nicholas thinks he has broken through her role to the real person beneath. “Julie” provides some evidence that she is who she says she is: Photographs, letters, newspaper cuttings. Although he believes her to be honest, Nicholas does not repay her in kind. When “Julie” and “June” ask about his background, what he gives them is a selective version in the third person:

The third person is apt, because I presented a sort of fictional self to them, a victim of circumstances, a mixture of attractive raffishness and essential inner decency. Alison came up again briefly. I put the main blame there on hazard, on fate, on elective affinity, one’s knowing one sought more. (347-348)

The pronoun “one” here is an ironic signal of his upper-middle-class Englishness and accompanying lack of honesty. He lies repeatedly about Alison, about what their relationship was like, how they split up, and what happened in Athens. He thinks he is playing his hand well, but again and again discovers that Conchis has beaten him at his own game; Conchis always knows the truth, and can manipulate events to fool Nicholas over and over. The main reason he lets himself be fooled is that he does not think “Julie” and “June” capable of the same dissimulation as himself. And, secondly, he does not think women capable of lying with their bodies.

While Nicholas reveals his inadequacies with “Julie” and “June,” Conchis employs various other strategies to bring him to an awareness of his problems. He uses storytelling, dramatizations of myths, assigned readings, and talks to Nicholas much as a psychologist would. Some of the themes Conchis raises – religion, the meaning of life, freedom – concern the ideological domain, but he also tries to make Nicholas aware of a theme in his life that has to do with relationships to others, namely surface versus depth. Conchis explains this theme to Nicholas through the metaphor of water and the wave, and uses the examples of collecting and pornography to link the theme to Nicholas’s relations with women.

The metaphor of the water and the wave appears several times in the novel. Conchis first brings it up as part of the de Deukans story, saying that when his old mentor died, he inherited a note with the Latin words “*Utram bibis? Aquam an undam?*” Which are you drinking? The water or the wave?” (188). The full meaning of this metaphor is not made clear until much later, at the beginning of Nicholas’s fourth visit to Bourani, when he reflects:

“[B]y this characteristically twentieth-century retreat from content into form, from meaning into appearance, from ethics into aesthetics, from *aqua* into *unda*, I dulled the pain of [Alison’s] death” (402). This is the older narrator interpreting the events in retrospect, and the insight is one he has gained by living through the godgame. Water and wave here come to stand for a set of opposing values:

Table 41. Pairs of symbolic opposites

<i>Aqua</i> / water	<i>Unda</i> / wave
Content	Form
Meaning	Appearance
Ethics	Aesthetics

Water is the positive side, while the wave symbolizes the superficial, negative substitutes typical of the twentieth century.

So far in his life, Nicholas has been drinking the wave, focusing on appearance and form rather than content and meaning. He has judged both himself and others primarily on externals. In his own life, this has given him a constant feeling of performing for others, instead of focusing on the content of his actions, why he does them, and their moral implications. He has been what David Riesman called “other directed.” When he found himself unable to commit suicide in the forest on Phraxos, he realized that what he was trying to do was to stage his own death for the benefit of some spectator: “I was trying to commit not a moral action, but a fundamentally aesthetic one; to do something that would end my life sensationally, significantly, consistently. It was a Mercutio death I was looking for, not a real one” (62). Unable to find meaning in life, Nicholas tried to create a death that would *appear* meaningful.

Nicholas has also been quick to judge others on externals, as is seen in the contrast between Alison and “Julie.” We know Alison is a good person who loves him, while “Julie” is only a series of roles, a mask with no real person behind it. Nevertheless Nicholas lets himself be carried away by her beauty, her accent, and other externals. He is also quick to judge Conchis, finding the man much more acceptable when he learns he is half English, very rich, and owns a valuable art collection.

Conchis uses two methods to concretize the water-wave metaphor. The first is the story of his old mentor de Deukans, the second is pornography. De Deukans is presented through *character* rather than *narrative*. This ancient Greek genre “had a great vogue in the earlier seventeenth century” (Abrams 1988, 22), and was “a brief, witty description of a social



or moral type” (“character”). De Deukans exemplifies the character type of the collector. He was very rich, owned a chateau in France and had dedicated his life to building up various collections: Renaissance bronzes, precious old harpsichords, Greek and Roman coins, automatons, paintings, and other objects. He had little contact with others and hated women. One of the automata, the grotesque “Mirabelle, *la Maîtresse-Machine*” (177) brings out the sinister quality of it all: The mechanical doll would lay back, open her legs, and then clasp her ‘lover’ with her arms and legs. Anyone not aware of the lever at the back of her head would be stabbed in the groin by a hidden stiletto, a “device that made it unlikely that she would ever cuckold her owner” (178). For de Deukans, morality was not an issue. The money he used to buy all his objects came from exploiting people in the Congo.

In light of the water-wave metaphor, de Deukans represents the wave, the foam and movement of the top layer, which has little to do with what is in the water below. His collector’s mentality is only concerned with surfaces, aesthetics and owning, not the content of the things themselves, nor his own relationship with them and whether it is ethical. Collecting turns things to stone. Conchis says that “all collecting ... extinguishes the moral instinct. The object finally possesses the possessor” (178). The real value of an object such as a Bonnard painting lies in what Nicholas experiences in Conchis’s house: Looking at the painting he gets in touch with his own emotions, remembers Alison and moments like that depicted in the picture. He discovers that an artwork can alter reality for him: “[I]t set a dense golden halo of light round the most trivial of moments, so that the moment, and all such moments, could never be completely trivial again” (97). And this experience is not affected by the fact that the painting is a forgery, and thus worthless to a collector.

The connection between de Deukans’ and Nicholas’s ways of looking at women is established by Mrs. de Seitas. In Part III Nicholas accuses Conchis and his accomplices of having lured him into falling in love with “Julie,” and she retorts: ““As an unscrupulous collector falls in love with a painting he wants” (601). Nicholas never saw “Julie” as she was. She was only ““a personification of your own selfishness,”” (601) Mrs. de Seitas says. Nicholas has been collecting women, and to show him that, Conchis’s story about de Deukans is interrupted by the appearance of a naked nymph chased by a satyr. Nicholas is shocked: “A huge phallus rose from his loins. ... far too massive to be meant realistically, but it was effectively obscene” (182). Another masque scene shows “Lily’s” twin sister and a man with “the head of an enormous black jackal” (199): “They stood there, the possessor and the possessed, looming death and the frail maiden” (199). The woman is possessed, owned, by the man.

Nicholas is shown various obscene, pornographic materials, such as the book *Beauties of Nature*, filled with pictures of breasts, and *Wild Life in Scandinavia*, which shows Nordic women in sexual poses. Nicholas admits to being shocked, but for the wrong reason: What he should be shocked about is the pornographic mentality which turns people into objects, bits of flesh, body parts, and collectibles. This is an attitude he has himself, but at this point he fails to see parallels between the pornography he is shown and his own behavior.

Toward the end of his second visit to Bourani, Nicholas faces the choice between “Julie” and Alison. He can meet Alison in Rome or stay “faithful” to “Julie” until he can meet her again. Even though he knows “Julie” might just be playing a part, he still prefers her: “[I]f it was her role in the charade to seduce me, I should be seduced. I couldn’t do anything about it. ... I had to drink the wave, once offered” (202). Of course, Nicholas does not know “Julie” at this stage, and what he is attracted to is only an appearance, aesthetical qualities, shown in his own use of the metaphor of the wave for his dreams of her. Alison has the wrong class, profession, nationality, accent, and looks, but is nevertheless the water, the content and meaning of love, the real thing. Nicholas is a collector of women and experiences. He hates the interruption of Alison’s telegram saying she will soon be in Athens, but nevertheless decides to keep her “to fall back on” (203) in case he is not invited to Bourani next weekend. As with de Deukans, his moral instincts are seen to be severely diminished. He has already decided that it is “Julie” he wants, but he nevertheless goes to see Alison. This is a collector’s attitude to experience. Alison and “Julie” are turned into objects to be used and discarded at will.

Nicholas’s most effective encounter with pornography comes during the climax of the godgame, namely the trial. After the verdict itself comes what is called “the final disintoxication.” Nicholas is forced to watch, first, a pornographic film with “Julie” and Joe, Conchis’s black American assistant; then a candid-camera clip of himself and Alison; and finally “Julie” and Joe have live sex on a stage in front of him. The porn movie does not show actual intercourse, but announces its genre through style, setting, and extreme close-ups, in which the identity of the actors is lost in anonymous skin and body parts. What strikes Nicholas about the ‘live sex show’ is that in spite of the public exposure of what should have been private it lacks the marks of pornography:

There was no perversion, no attempt to suggest that I was watching anything else but two people who were in love making love; ... They behaved as if to show that the reality was the very antithesis of the absurd nastiness in the film. (529)

The two scenes with “Julie” and Joe purport to show, and question, the relationship between love and sex. Is it the sex act that makes something obscene and pornographic, or something else, perhaps the participants’ attitude? And how is sex linked to love? The two scenes are placed before and after the clips of Alison and Nicholas, and they pose the question of what had been going on between them. Was it pornography or love? The two sex scenes play with the meaning of reality and performance, private and public, sexual intercourse and love, and ask Nicholas to examine his attitudes.

Nicholas has hitherto assumed sex is proof of love. As he was falling in love with “Julie,” he kept waiting for physical evidence that she was in love with him too. He evaluated her kisses, became very hopeful when they started touching each other in the water during a swim, and saw their love-making in the village as final proof of her love. But his own behavior with Alison in Athens should have made him realize that his logic is faulty. Nicholas tried to convince us that when he made love to Alison on the slope of Mount Parnassus, it was because he was overwhelmed by a feeling of love. Afterward, about the time when they had been caught on candid camera, he admitted to Alison that he was in love with somebody else and would not give her up for Alison. He nevertheless started thinking that “[p]erhaps after all there was a solution; to get her back into the hotel, make love to her, prove to her through the loins that I did love her” (272). But making love could hardly be a solution or proof as long as Nicholas was set on going back to “Julie” rather than staying with Alison.

Nicholas himself is perfectly capable of using his body to say something that is not true, but he does not seem to think women have the same ability. At their secret midnight meeting, “Julie” informs Nicholas that she has told Conchis she trusts Nicholas because “‘certain feelings between people can’t be faked’” (362). She knows this to be a lie, but it is what Nicholas believes about her. He sees their first sexual encounter, while swimming, as proof of her love, “the final barrier between us broken,” and also realizes he now trusts her completely (370). He sees the sex as proof that she is truthful and honest, that she really is who she says she is. He assumes she cannot lie to him and have sex with him: “All was transparent between us” (370). A few chapters later, when “Julie” and Nicholas make love in the village, right before he is taken away for the trial, he likewise interprets this as proof of her honesty and truthfulness. But as we soon see, it is not. Bodies can and do lie repeatedly in this novel. Not lying about how you feel, what the book calls “emotional honesty,” is connected with love, not sex.

Talking to Lily de Seitas about the godgame towards the end of the book, Nicholas asks what would have happened if Alison had come to the island to stay. Mrs. de Seitas

assures him Alison would not have been subjected to the same treatment as Nicholas, because Conchis ““would have recognized at once that she was not a person whose emotional honesty needed to be put to the test”” (628). Nicholas’s emotional honesty, on the other hand, has been tested throughout, and he has usually failed to be honest, both to himself and to others. But there are signs that he is starting to change in this respect after his first two visits to Bourani. He is clearly less than honest with Alison in Athens, but coming down from Mount Parnassus a new feeling comes over him. Maybe because he has decided not to make love to her, he starts feeling other things for her. In the car, driving up the mountain, he tells her about his father, realizing “that she was the only person in the world that I could have been talking like that to” (254). He does not talk like that to “Julie” because he is too concerned with making an impression, with how he appears to her. But with Alison he dares to expose both his background and his true feelings. He sees it as falling back “into something of our old relationship” (254), but this kind of easy intimacy was not something he emphasized when describing their earlier relationship in London. He has progressed since then. As they walk down the mountain together, Nicholas again compares Alison and “Julie” and thinks of all the things he does not like about Alison. He finds that he likes her in spite of this, an indication that there is something between them that is different from what he consciously thinks is most important, such as shared background, elegance, mystery and sophistication. More significantly, as they stop and swim together, he is filled with a need to confess to her everything that has happened at Bourani.

I had chosen the worst of all possible moments to be honest, and like most people who have spent much of their adult life being emotionally dishonest, I overcalculated the sympathy a final being honest would bring ... but love, that need to be understood.  
(269-270)

The confession has dire consequences, but that he actually does it is nevertheless positive. In retrospect, the narrator now knows that he had spent too much of his life being dishonest, but the important feeling at the time was that love made him do it. For the first time he recognizes that love and emotional honesty are connected. He also feels the same need to confess later in the book, after he is told about Alison’s suicide. Then it is “Julie” he wishes to be honest to, but in the end he decides not to. When he does finally tell “June” that Alison killed herself it is part of a strategy rather than emotional honesty.

In Part II we see Nicholas acting dishonestly over and over, but with glimpses of honesty in between. This is characteristic of a process of learning and changing. Learning does not go from not knowing something to knowing it perfectly, but entails in-between stages, leaps and relapses, and this is what is happening to Nicholas. He has started a process of change in the direction of honesty, but he is not yet conscious of this, and his behavior is not consistent. Although occasional, his moments of honesty show him moving in the right direction, toward maturity.

Nicholas's feelings about Englishness is a strong indication that he is changing. In Athens, on his way back to England, he goes to dinner with a group of people connected with the British Council and is overwhelmed by their dishonesty and lack of humanity:

The dinner that evening was dreadful, the epitome of English vacuity. ... Nobody said what they really wanted, what they really thought. Nobody behaved with breadth, with warmth, with naturalness... . The solemn figures of the Old Country, the Queen, the Public School, Oxbridge, the Right Accent, People Like Us, stood around the table like secret police, ready to crush down in an instant on any attempt at an intelligent European humanity.

It was symptomatic that the ubiquitous person of speech was "one" — it was one's view, one's friends, one's servants, one's favorite writer, one's travelling in Greece, until the terrible faceless Avenging God of the British, One, was standing like a soot-blackened obelisk over the whole evening. (559-560)

This description is intensely emotional, and Nicholas puts his finger on the English lack of humanity and openness, which he later talks about in relation to his own upbringing. It is also an indictment of himself, especially in view of how he talked to "Julie" and "June" about "one's knowing one sought more" (347-348), meaning more than Alison, that Australian air-hostess.

Back in England, he feels no connection with the people. A thought-experiment in a restaurant, looking in vain for someone he might want to know better, is

the unneeded confirmation of my loss of Englishness; and it occurred to me that I must be feeling as Alison had so often felt: a mixture, before the English, of irritation and bafflement, of having this same language, same past, so many same things, and yet not belonging to them any more. Being worse than rootless... speciesless. (574)

Greece and the godgame have made Nicholas realize what is wrong with his background. He needs to reject not only the antiquated attitudes of his parents, as he did at Oxford, but deep cultural traits that are more pervasive than a particular age group and cultural clique: Lack of warmth, humanity, and “openness of heart” (608). Later, when Kemp accuses Nicholas of slumming and not seeing her and Jojo and other lower-class people as people, her remark alerts the reader to the fact that he has started doing just that. He has changed, not only in relating to them at all, but in the fact of having a closer relationship with them than he had for instance with “Julie.” He is more honest and shares more of himself. And significantly, Jojo is the first person to hear the true story about him and Alison. His attitude to wealth and class has also changed. He is not as impressed with Lily de Seitas’s house as he was by Conchis’s art objects in Greece, and he sees the goodness in Kemp and Jojo quite apart from their class background and unkempt appearance. He is no longer the snob he was when he arrived at Phraxos.

On Mount Parnassus there were small signs that Nicholas was beginning to harbor new feelings for Alison, feelings not connected to sex, but more to tenderness and intimacy. These are strengthened during the months he spends waiting for her in London. One day he suddenly realizes that “I could have slept with a different girl every night, and still have gone on wanting to see Alison just as much. I wanted something else from her now — and what it was only she could give me” (632-633). Helped by conversations with Lily de Seitas, he is beginning to discover what love is, and the difference between love and sex. He also himself connects these feelings with how he feels about England: “Perhaps it had something to do with my alienation from England and the English, my specieslessness, my sense of exile” (632). England comes to symbolize repression, lack of feelings, and insincerity, something that must be overcome for real love to be possible.

In the meeting with Alison that constitutes the final scene of the novel, it becomes obvious that Nicholas has changed dramatically. The scene may be confusing because both he and Alison act irrationally, both misunderstand the situation and each other, and communication breaks down several times. Nevertheless, we see a complete honesty and emotional nakedness in Nicholas that has never been there before. With “Julie” he was trying to present himself in the best possible light. With Alison, he now reveals everything that could keep her from wanting to be with him:

‘I’m nearly broke. I haven’t got a job, and I’m never going to have a job that means anything. Therefore you’re standing with the worst prospect in London. Now second.

If Lily walked down that path behind us and beckoned to me... I don't know. The fact that I don't know and probably never shall is what I want you to remember. And while you're about it, remember she isn't one girl, but a type of encounter.' (652-653)

This is the naked truth. He has realized he is no poet, he is not going to be great at anything. He is just ordinary. He has also recognized his weaknesses concerning girls, but he has progressed from thinking he is suffering from "a congenital promiscuity" (264) to taking responsibility for his emotions. Now he knows he loves Alison, and he knows this means he has to choose her, and "go on choosing her every day" (641). He also recognizes that in spite of his resolution he is fallible and can give no guarantees about the future.

But the final proof of how much he has changed and of his feelings for Alison is his desperate plea: "I understand the word now, Alison. Your word" (655). The word is of course "love," which Alison has tried to get him to say several times, but which he has been incapable of uttering. Then he goes on: "You can't hate someone who's really on his knees. Who'll never be more than half a human being without you" (655). These words go back to the cryptic crossword clue Alison brought up in Athens: "She's all mixed up, but the better part of Nicholas" (266). The answer – an anagram of six of the eight letters in NICHOLAS – is ALISON. She is the better part of Nicholas because she can bring out his best aspects and teach him what he does not know. We do not know what Alison decides at this crucial moment, but the Latin inscription at the end signals that Nicholas will be all right. If he does not get to love Alison, he will love somebody else. The final quotation means: "Tomorrow let him love who has never loved;/He who has loved, let him love tomorrow." The important thing now is not really whether Nicholas "gets" Alison. The important thing is that he has, in Marcia's terminology, achieved an identity in the interpersonal domain. In more pedestrian terms, we can say that he has reached emotional maturity; he is now capable of mature feelings that will enable him to have a close, emotionally honest relationship in the future.

### **The ideological domain**

The crisis brought on by Nicholas's realization that he is no poet is often seen as an illustration of Fowles's theory of the *nemo*, which he writes about in *The Aristos* (35-41). In Fowles's view, modern-day individuals are haunted by fear of being nothing, either in the sense of dying or in being worthless in relation to other people. Fowles calls this nothingness by the Latin term *nemo* which means 'nobody.' Robert Huffaker, for instance, thinks that "[a]t

the book's beginning, Nick is suffering from his own reaction to the facelessness of modern man" (1980, 51). His *nemo*-defeating strategy is one of conflict with society, expressed through membership in *Les Hommes Révoltés* (51-52).

Viewed as part of Nicholas's identity development, however, his crisis takes on a slightly different cast. Before the crisis, Nicholas has very little ideological identity. Such an identity is constituted by belief systems – religion, world view, a set of moral and ethical beliefs, or political convictions – that help us understand the world and our place in it. All Nicholas has is the belief that he is special and a poet. Believing you are an undiscovered genius or have special talents is a typical compensatory strategy for people with low self-esteem. Losing this belief as well, Nicholas is plunged into a despair that is common among people in identity diffusion. Interpreted according to Marcia's stages, Nicholas's despair at feeling he is nobody is the feeling of a person in identity diffusion. This can be cured if the person manages to move into moratorium and finally identity achievement. This is also what happens in the novel.

In the ideological domain, the godgame works in a different way than in the interpersonal domain. In the latter, the game sought to make Nicholas aware of his attitudes and behavior by mirroring them to him. In the ideological domain, Conchis and the godgame present Nicholas with options and ideas. Many elements contribute to the identity process, and a person in moratorium needs input that can be processed into a new synthesis. Various role models are needed, and situations and roles should be tried out. Nicholas's main problem is that he lacks beliefs. He is empty rather than wrong, and what he needs is sufficient input for a process of moratorium. Conchis confronts him with ideas and moral dilemmas to contemplate, as well as "real" situations in which he has to take a stand. His moratorium thus consists of both reflection and action.

Storytelling is one of Conchis's two main methods for making Nicholas reflect on his values and beliefs. The other is confronting him with a situation that forces him to take a stand and act. (Reading material and masque scenes also play their part). During each weekend visit Conchis tells an installment of his life story, and he explains on the first visit that the reason for telling them is to explain to Nicholas his philosophy of life. The narrative thus illustrates various ideas. Conchis's life story is also a *Bildungs* story, outlining his philosophical maturation, and each installment centers on an epiphany. Nicholas can then use Conchis's life to reflect on religious, philosophical, and ethical questions. Each of Nicholas's four visits has a story and a main theme. De Deukans and the theme of collecting, which are the story and theme of the second visit, have already been dealt with. The other main themes



are life and death, the nature of reality, and finally freedom. Although Conchis chooses to concentrate on certain key issues, there is no single univocal message in his teachings. Conchis and the godgame are often self-contradictory, and Nicholas has to think for himself. He cannot just adopt Conchis's philosophy without digesting it, as he did with existentialism at university.

In *The Magus*, each theme is introduced during one particular visit and elaborated on through an installment of Conchis's life story. But all themes are then brought up repeatedly, developed, expanded on, and related to the other themes. Nicholas takes in what he is told, reacts to the situations he faces, but does not reach any emotional or intellectual clarity until the very end of the novel. The new synthesis he then arrives at is a composite of all the various teaching and experiences he has been subjected to, rather than the adoption of any one specific lesson.

In an interview with Swedish Television, writer Astrid Lindgren said that as very old women, she and her sister would call each other every day. Each conversation started with both of them saying "döden döden" ('death death'), in grave voices, before laughing heartily and going on to talk about something else.<sup>50</sup> The theme of death seems to have a similar function in *The Magus*: It has to be faced up to before the characters can get on with the business of living. Death has to assume its place as what puts life into perspective.

His suicide attempt is the culmination of the year-long process of disequilibrium and doubting that brings Nicholas to Conchis's domain and real moratorium. Life has seemed unreal and he has not really wanted it until the meeting with Conchis creates "a sort of green stir" in him, and he realizes that he "wanted to live again" (102). Wanting to live is also the theme of the first installment of Conchis's life story, which constitutes the first main theme and lesson of the godgame. As a young soldier on the French battlefields, all the death and suffering made Conchis realize that "[n]othing could justify this. It was a thousand times better that England should be a Prussian colony" (124). Conchis is now arguing that life is the greatest value, and that no ideals, nations, or possible future are worth death on that scale. Minutes later, however, he manages to persuade Nicholas that young men need to risk their lives at least once, because having survived is such a wonderful feeling. The old man makes Nicholas agree to throw a die, and if it shows six he promises to take a suicide pill. He throws a six but refuses to take the pill. Afterward, Conchis shows him that the dice is loaded and the pills fake.

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<sup>50</sup> The interview was one of her last, and the expression "döden döden," has become legendary in Sweden, as attested, for instance, by the research report on old people and grief called "Döden, döden ..." (Skoglund 2006).

The dice that always shows six is a metaphor for the young soldiers who knew they were risking their lives, but not that they had no real chance of survival. Conchis now argues against what he said moments earlier: “What you have just decided is precisely what I decided that morning forty years ago at Neuve Chapelle. You have behaved exactly as any intelligent human being should behave. I congratulate you” (126). Nicholas has chosen life over death, as he did when he decided not to shoot himself in the woods, but then the decision seemed to be accidental; maybe he was too cowardly to do it, or maybe it was just the voice of a girl singing in the distance that stopped him. Now, his choice is deliberate, the result of wanting life rather than fearing death. Forcing Nicholas to choose between life and death, Conchis has made him aware of his wish to be alive.

When Conchis continues his story from the First World War, he also elaborates on the theme of life and death with a slightly different focus. He describes how he survived the war by pretending to be dead and hiding in a shell hole, half buried by dead bodies. And it was that night that Conchis had an experience he likens to religious conversion. He thought he had a fever, but

‘what I thought was fever was the fire of existence, the passion to exist. ... *A delirium vivens*. ... To be able to experience, never mind that it was cold and hunger and nausea, was a miracle. ... The word ‘being’ no longer passive and descriptive, but active ... almost imperative.’ (129-130)

For the first time in his life, on the brink of death, Conchis really felt alive. Nicholas understands what he means and is emotionally gripped by the story. He relates it to his own experiences “all those last months. ... The passion to exist: I forgave myself my failure to die” (130). Conchis has managed to transfer some of his own passion for life to Nicholas. And Nicholas also seems to grasp that this passion is discovered and felt in the presence of death.

The words “active” and “passive” in the above quotation are also important. Nicholas has tended to see himself as someone things happen to rather than active and responsible. This is seen for instance in Part III in his thinking about events at Bourani. He thinks of them as something that “happened” (577), not as something he played his part in and partly did himself. But the fact that he is moving toward a view of himself as a more active participant in his own life comes through in his realization that he was “still too sore to accept that something active had taken place” and therefore “thought of ‘done’ in a passive sense” (577). Throughout the game he keeps thinking of himself as a passive victim of Conchis and the

other 'players.' It is only at the very end that he manages to see that he is free to act, and that his life is shaped by his own actions.

When he is "resurrected" in the ruined village after the trial, towards the end of the novel, and finds he has been provided with a loaded gun, Nicholas faces the choice between life and death for the third time in the novel. This time he is immediately determined to reject death. His recent experiences – being emotionally tortured in the village, and then the trial – give Nicholas a very strong sense of having survived, and it feels wonderful. As with Conchis in the shell hole, all physical sensations have become very intense. The ruined village makes Nicholas a symbolic Phoenix, reborn out of the ruins of his old self. The scene fulfills the Eliot quotation Nicholas found on the beach just before "the mysteries began" (63):

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time. (69)*

The godgame, and the explorations Conchis promised, are over. Nicholas is again alone on a hillside with a loaded gun. Symbolically he has arrived where he started, and everything seems different. He does not despair and is able to appreciate existence in itself, what Fowles would call reality, without his own self-absorption and grandiosity standing in the way.

To sum up then, Nicholas's first visit to Bourani revolves around issues of life and death, and Conchis presents existence as a tension between opposites; it is only because there is death that life is so valuable. Death and suffering are necessary to make people conscious of being alive.

The nature of reality is the second major theme of Nicholas's ideological development, and it is approached from different angles at the different visits. Reality is contrasted intermittently with fiction, lies and illusion, and finally with mystery and the irrational. I will start with reality versus illusion and mystery, which are the focus of the Seidevarre story that Conchis tells on Nicholas's third visit.

Before his trip to northern Norway in 1922, Conchis had been a doctor, scientist, and founding member of the Society for Reason. His approach had been "scientific, medical, classifying" (308). Anything that could not be treated in a scientific manner he saw as illusion. But meeting the insane, fanatically religious Henrik Nygaard, Conchis was forced to revise his ideas. He first diagnosed Henrik's madness as "a textbook example of anal

overtraining. With an obsessive father identification” (302). But watching the man at a moment when Henrik thought he was talking to God, Conchis realized that this medical and scientific view had little to do with the reality Henrik lived in. Conchis started doubting his values and prejudices (308). Then, in ““a flash, as of lightning,”” reality changed and expanded for him:

‘all our explanations, all our classifications and derivations, our etiologies, suddenly appeared to me like a thin net. ... reality was no longer dead... It was full of a mysterious vigour. The net was nothing, reality burst through it. Perhaps something telepathic passed between Henrik and myself. I do not know.

‘That simple phrase, I do not know, was my own pillar of fire. For me, too, it revealed a world beyond that in which I lived.’ (308-309)

Conchis lost his own certainty that only the scientific was real. Mystery, whatever he did not understand, was no longer illusion and the antithesis of reality, but another part of reality. Reality was not only what could be encompassed by science. Science was only one of several possible nets with which to capture reality, and any net would always be partial.

This story shows how Conchis came to see mystery as part of reality and the real as sometimes beyond the rational. But it does not posit Henrik’s reality as an alternative to scientific truth. Henrik’s encounter with god made Conchis’s scientific approach appear incomplete and limited, but Conchis nevertheless believes Henrik to have been wrong. Henrik’s belief was an illusion, which Conchis thinks prevented him from seeing “the objective truth, that destiny is hazard” (302). To Conchis, people’s destinies are not mapped out at the beginning, and their course cannot be influenced by prayers or the interference of some god. It was Henrik’s own beliefs that made him the prisoner of an evil god. In reality he was free. Henrik’s religious illusions ruined his own life and those of his wife, brother and children. The story can thus serve as a warning to Nicholas not to let himself become a captive of illusion. But it also warns him not to be so certain of his own way of interpreting the world that he blocks out all alternatives. Conchis creates two pairs of opposites: Reality versus illusion, and rationality versus mystery and imagination. It is clearly dangerous to lose yourself in illusion, but it is equally dangerous not to realize that mystery and imagination are not reality’s opposites but aspects of reality. Rationality should not be the only approach to the world. In *The Magus*, female and male values are associated respectively with healthy and unhealthy attitudes to reality. Alison represents what we might call positive female realism,

associated with various mythical representation of the Earth Mother, such as Astarte and Demeter. This female realism is down-to-earth, open, and honest. Negative masculine rationalism is represented by the collector de Deukans, who is obsessed with owning, classifying, and objects. As Conchis says in his introduction to his fourth and final story, women see relationships, connections between things, while men see individual objects in isolation (413). A viable attitude to reality must take in relations and connections, such as the possibility of wordless understanding between two people, rather than just the outward “facts.”

Conchis connects the Seidevarre story to Nicholas and the present by saying that “[w]hatever happens here now, whatever governs what happens, is partly, no is essentially what happened thirty years ago in that Norwegian forest” (311). This statement is ambiguous and could refer to several things: Henrik’s experience of meeting God, the meeting between two opposite but partial world-views, or Conchis’s recognition that his ideology of scientific rationalism was faulty. Since Nicholas has already understood that the story of de Deukans and Conchis is meant to represent Conchis and himself, the most likely interpretation seems that Conchis in the story also represents Nicholas himself. Nicholas should thus be prepared for a similar experience to the one Conchis had; that is, Nicholas should recognize that his own view of the world is limited, and that his distinctions between reality and illusion need to be revised.

The diagnosis of “excessive father identification” is a link between Conchis and Henrik if the father is seen as a role rather than the physical father. Henrik is fanatically attached to his evil god, while Nicholas let himself be controlled by Conchis. Both could have better lives if they realized that it is their own ideas that keep them captive. Both could find freedom if they dared take responsibility for their own lives. Henrik is beyond help, but Nicholas can still find his way.

The story about Henrik makes it clear that Nicholas’s reading assignments on his second visit were intended as an introduction to the theme of reality. The two pamphlets, the “Manifesto of the Society of Reason,” which stated that “Man can progress only by using his reason” (189), and “On communication with other worlds,” which recommended telepathy (190), are obviously contradictory. Nicholas is a modern, rational individual and does not fall for Conchis’s illusions, ghosts, and talk about being psychic. But the experience of hypnotization disturbs him profoundly. The experience felt intense and real, and Nicholas had his first taste of existence in its pure form. His description makes the “experiment” sound like a state of altered consciousness, such as is achieved in transcendental meditation, yoga and

Buddhist practices. But in spite of enjoying it, Nicholas could not accept it as a valid experience of reality. Conchis's purpose might have been to allow Nicholas to feel the enjoyment of existence he had spoken of in relation with his "conversion" on the battlefield, and to make him question his own assumptions about reality. But Nicholas is not open to something he feels is paranormal, and chooses to see it as manipulation and trickery, rather than a product of his own mind. This is in line with his tendency not to take responsibility for his own actions, preferring to see himself as a passive victim of Conchis's machinations.

Echoes of Seidevarre are also heard at Nicholas's trial. A group of supposed international psychologists psychoanalyze him, classifying him as "semi-intellectual introversion" (508), and his life style as "negative," characterized by "lack of social content" (508). The Freudian diagnosis of an "only partly resolved Oedipal complex" (508) brings to mind Henrik Nygaard's "anal overtraining" and "obsessive father identification" (302). In spite of the parodic use of Freudian and Jungian terminology, the "psychologists" present an interpretation of Nicholas that is accurate on many points. He does have an ambivalent attitude to women, resents authority, and "has preyed sexually and emotionally on a number of young women" (509). It is also true that he avoids social and professional contact. Perhaps apart from the terminology, the "analysis" might have been delivered by a literary critic of *The Magus*. But although basically correct, the style of the analysis is clinical, coldly objective, and dismissive of Nicholas as anything but a research object. He becomes a thing without human value or interest. Whether the analysis is correct or not, it gives a very limited, dehumanized picture of Nicholas. We have seen him to be more than his weaknesses and mistakes. The trip to Mount Parnassus with Alison might not be representative of other affairs he has had, but at that time at least, his feelings do seem deep-felt and sincere, even though he should have been able to stop and think more rationally about whether he was willing to follow through on his implicit promise to Alison.

The scientific view of Nicholas might be true, but it is not the whole truth. Since Conchis believes science and rationality are only limited approaches to reality, he aims to educate Nicholas by non-rational means as well. It is the personal, emotional experiences of the godgame that affect Nicholas most deeply. Conchis not only tells Nicholas about life, but lets him experience fear, loss, grief, elation, and love for himself, as if they were real. In *The Aristos*, Fowles argues that art and science are equally valid approaches to reality, and that both are necessary for human beings (2001, 159). "Feeling' truth" is the term Fowles uses in an interview for "truths that are put across in the artifice of fiction" (Bragg 1977). Conchis

seems to hold similar views. His conversations with Nicholas contain rational argument, but his teaching also takes non-rational forms of story-telling, myths, and dramatization.

The other aspect of the Seidevarre story, truth versus illusion, Conchis makes Nicholas experience directly. This sub-theme is introduced during the second weekend visit, when Conchis tells Nicholas that “Julie,” whom he has started to fall in love with, has schizophrenia and can never be his (233). Even though Conchis sounds like a true expert on psychology, Nicholas decides to trust his own instincts and feelings that “Julie” is not mentally ill. He maintains this belief while he is away in Athens with Alison. On his third visit, before telling the Seidevarre story, Conchis continues the pretence that “Julie” is schizophrenic and he is her doctor. He explains the aim of his treatment method:

‘I wish to bring the poor child to a realization of her own true problem by forcing her to recognize the nature of the artificial situation we are creating together here. She will make her first valid step back towards normality when one day she stops and says, This is not the real world. These are not real relationships.’ (282)

This is probably a reference to the godgame itself and the method Conchis is employing with Nicholas. Nicholas has just started feeling that he has met the real “Julie.” He believes her feelings are as real as his own, and that what is happening at Bourani is real life. But Bourani is a game, and Nicholas can only be cured of his illusions when he recognizes this and understands the value of reality. What Nicholas is asked to question is not only Conchis’s latest story about “Julie” being schizophrenic, but everything that goes on at Bourani, including what “Julie” tells him.

At the same time, the godgame is a metaphor for life, and Nicholas should transfer what he learns to his ordinary life. Conchis has repeatedly advised Nicholas to go back to Alison, who – as Nicholas observes much later – is “cast as Reality” (647). Now Conchis is trying to make him realize the difference between the real life and real love he can have with Alison, and the false life on offer at Bourani. But Nicholas blocks the way from illusion to reality, first by not questioning the reality of “Julie,” and secondly, by continuing his own pretences. Playing his own game of make-believe he partly blocks out the reality of his conduct with Alison and thereby strengthens his own belief in the illusions of Bourani. He is still intent on having the mystery of the illusion rather than mundane real life.

After this third story, Nicholas is plunged into a whirlwind of events that I have earlier referred to as the Fourth Phase of the godgame. Not only is what Nicholas has believed to be

true shown time and again to have been illusion, but he is also taken through a spectrum of emotions we might not have thought him capable of. The symbolic beginning of this process is Nicholas and “Julie” kissing in the dark. Nicholas feels he finally “really knew her” (314), only to discover he has been taken in by an illusion. The girl is really her twin sister “June.” There now comes a brief period that resembles a romantic dream: Nicholas is in love, thinks he knows the truth about the girls, and decides to rescue them from Conchis’s game of playing god with real people. But no sooner does Nicholas think the three of them have made Conchis give up his machinations than he is attacked by “Nazi” soldiers in the woods and tied up with the words ““It. Is. Not. Ended”” (380). Nicholas is secretly glad, but two days later Conchis tells him he has been dismissed from the game. He feels “a stunned plunge of disappointment and bitter anger” (383). As days pass and nothing happens, Nicholas feels he has been taken apart like a machine, and then abandoned without knowing “how one put oneself together again” (387). A few days later, however, a letter from “Julie” asks him back to Bourani for ““the last chapter”” of Conchis’s life (395). Nicholas feels “completely buoyant again” (396), but only until he opens the next letter, which tells him Alison has committed suicide. This news brings out the shock and grief that he failed to feel at the death of his parents. It makes him repent his treatment of Alison, and decide to marry “Julie” and confess to her (399).

Up and down, back and forth; during this phase Nicholas feels what it is like being tossed about by a vengeful god. Reality changes for him every few days, and his emotions have no choice but follow. He is forced to question his assumptions about reality and illusion, as “Julie” and “June” appear to him now as honest, now as Conchis’s co-conspirators. Increasing their controlling behavior and their physical and emotional brutality, the actors in the godgame steadily push Nicholas toward breaking point. He becomes increasingly unfree, and his unfreedom becomes literal, first in the subterranean rooms they call “the Ground,” and later in the ship, his underground prison, and the stone halls of the trial. His anger increases, and he becomes more and more desperate to do something dramatic, like rebelling or taking revenge. Conchis’s intention is probably to subject Nicholas to so much unfreedom that he has to break free. But Nicholas’s dependence on Conchis and the godgame is also great. His liberation does not come until he declares that “there were no watching eyes” in the final scene of the book.

The theme of reality is regarded from two different, slightly contradictory, angles. On the one hand, it is contrasted with the danger of being swept away by illusions, like the great Meaulnes in Henri-Fournier’s book. Nicholas must not get lost in a dream of a Garden of



Eden. On the other hand, there is a warning against too limited a view of reality. Imagination, emotions, and art are important roads to knowledge. Nicholas is invited into a world that is wider, that encompasses more feeling, experience, enjoyment and wonder than he has had before.

As life and death is the main theme of the first visit, collecting of the second, and reality of the third, freedom is the main theme of Nicholas's fourth visit to Bourani. Indeed, freedom is an important thematic concern throughout the Fourth Phase, the tumultuous period that follows the Seidevarre story and lasts until Nicholas leaves the island. The theme is epitomized in Conchis's final and most dramatic story, which took place during WWII. While Phraxos under German occupation, the cruel Colonel Wimmel gave Conchis a difficult choice: If he would club two guerillas to death, 80 captive villagers would be taken to a labor camp instead of being shot on the spot. Logically, Conchis knew he had to choose 80 lives over two, but emotionally he could not. "In a matter of seconds" (434), he realized that the tortured Cretan guerilla was right: Freedom was worth more than life itself. Until that moment, life had been the ultimate good for him: It "was so valuable that it was literally priceless" (434). To the guerilla, "only one thing had the quality of pricelessness. It was *eleutheria* – freedom" (434). When Conchis chose to side with the Cretan, he reversed the decision he had made during the First World War, when life for him had been the ultimate good. Now he found something worth the sacrifice of life, even many lives:

The Cretan became for Conchis a representation of freedom in all its guises:  
He was the final right to deny. To be free to choose. ... He was every freedom, from the very worst to the very best. The freedom to desert on the battlefield of Neuve Chapelle. The freedom to confront a primitive God at Seidevarre. The freedom to disembowel peasant girls and castrate with wire cutters. He was something that passed beyond morality but sprang out of the very essence of things – that comprehended all, the freedom to do all, and stood against only one thing – the prohibition not to do all.  
(434)

Conchis felt he had to choose freedom – that is, not kill the guerilla – because he was the only person present who still had a choice. Killing the Cretan would have been doing as Wimmel wanted, carrying out an order, more than a free choice. Conchis saw it as a moral obligation to exercise the freedom he had, however limited. Limits are indeed an essential part of the whole conception of freedom, because freedom will always be limited. Although Conchis later

learned that the Cretan had been a violent man and a murderer, he still thought he was right to defend his freedom to choose in the face of brute power. Conchis understood that freedom is the ultimate good, not because it is good or bad in itself, but because people must have freedom in order to be able to choose good. Freedom is the presence of choice. Morality is choosing good over evil.

This scene is a powerful illustration of Fowles's view of the nature of freedom. Conchis's situation is a desperate one, might in itself make a man throw up his hands and say life is so awful and unfair that there is no point in even trying to do good. This is what Anton does, and it is a position Conchis totally condemns. He says doing nothing and killing yourself when it is too late is the behavior of a child, basically synonymous with committing murder. Nicholas does not understand this, and finds suicide alluring. Conchis, however, knows that doing nothing, making no choice, is also a choice, and its consequences can be just as fatal as the consequences of a more conscious choice. In *The Aristos*, Fowles refers to what Blaise Pascal called "the bet situation." Pascal compared some situations in life to being in a game of chance, where you have to put your money on one of the options, even though there are no very good reasons to choose one number rather than another: "*Il faut parier*," Pascal said. "*Cela n'est pas volontaire: vous êtes embarqué.*" ("You must bet. You have no choice: you are in the game.") And this is also Conchis's point. Being alive, we have to make choices, even when there is little to recommend one choice over another. Not choosing is an immoral choice, because it means abandoning one's freedom. The choice Conchis was given during the war was a horrible one, created by a horrible, inhuman situation. It was also very limited, and both options were wrong according to normal morality. Conchis was not responsible for that situation and powerless to change it. But once in the situation, it was his duty as a human being to make the best choice he could: You're in the game, you have to bet.

Telling the story, Conchis cannot explain why he still feels his decision was right: "My reason has repeatedly told me I was wrong. Yet my total being still tells me I was right" (435). He did not have time to think before making his decision, and the stress made thinking very difficult anyway. But Conchis used his non-rational faculties, his whole being, when he made his choice. Again, rationality and reason are not the only valid approach to the world.

During his trial, Nicholas finds himself in a climactic scene that he recognizes as a parallel to the one Conchis faced during the occupation. "Julie" has been chosen as scapegoat, and Nicholas is given the freedom to punish Conchis and his cohorts for "the crime of destroying all power of forgiveness in the subject of our experiments" (514). Standing with a heavy whip in front of "Julie's" bare back, Nicholas realizes that "Wimmel was inside me, in

my stiffened, backthrown arm, in all my past; above all in what I had done to Alison. / *The better you understand freedom the less you possess it*" (518). He has come face to face with his own capacity for evil, and in the encounter he recognizes the evil he has already done in his life. He understands that he is facing the choice between doing good and doing evil, and striking represents the evil he has done in the past, particularly to Alison, and the evil he might do in the future. This is freedom in its classic dilemma, and Nicholas must be responsible enough to bear the burden of that freedom and make the right choice:

'And my freedom too was in not striking, whatever the cost, whatever eighty other parts of me must die, whatever the watching eyes might think of me; even though it would seem, as they must have foreseen, that I was forgiving them, that I was indoctrinated; their dupe. ... All Conchis's maneuverings had been to bring me to this; ... and I was standing as he had stood before the guerrilla, unable to beat his brains out.' (518)

Nicholas has felt from the start that the scene has been carefully constructed to make it impossible for him to hit "Julie." Not striking is what the committee expects, and to prove them wrong, Nicholas must do the opposite. Nevertheless, he is also free to choose good over evil, and he must take responsibility for that freedom. He could tell himself he is not responsible, that it is Conchis who created the situation. He might say he is only a victim of circumstances, as he has said repeatedly throughout the book. But the fact remains that in the situation in which he finds himself he has a choice. Nicholas decides not to strike, choosing water – the content and meaning of the deed – over the wave – the surface appearance. He knows the committee of judges will interpret not striking as forgiveness, which it is not. But he manages to disregard that surface interpretation, in order to do what he knows is right. He goes for moral content rather than appearance. After passing this test to his own satisfaction, Nicholas feels a silent understanding pass between him and the others in the room, and also "a dim conviction of having entered some deeper, wiser esoteric society" (519). In other words, he has become one of the elect. The Freudian analysis took Nicholas's humanity away. His own choice restored it.

The themes of freedom and the meaning of life are also evoked through the recurring image of the enigmatic smile. It first appears on Conchis's face when he tricks an octopus into letting itself be captured. Nicholas sees it as a false smile: "Stupidity is lethal, he implied; and

look at me, I have survived” (139). Here the smile has a superior, slightly cruel implication. It signifies survival, but the survival of the cunning at the expense of the stupid.

Later, during Nicholas’s first overnight visit, the smile comes up in relation to the theme of life and death. Telling Nicholas he is far too defeatist and pessimistic, Conchis shows him what he calls “the innermost secret of life” (146). It is a stone head with “a triumphant smile” (146-147). “That is the truth,” Conchis says. “Not the hammer and sickle. Not the stars and stripes. Not the cross. Not the sun. Not gold. Not *yin* and *yang*. But the smile” (147). The truth is not ideologies, religions, riches – the things people live and die for – Conchis claims, but the smile on the stone face. He explains that it is death, wars and tragedies that make people feel they are alive. This is what he discovered on the battlefield, when he realized he might as well not have been alive: “That is the smile: that what might not be, is” (147). This is probably what Conchis meant when he talked about “being elect” and existence as “hazard.” Being alive means you have been chosen, but since Conchis does not believe in God, it can only be chance that has chosen you. The smile is the sign of this fundamental truth about life. And awareness of life itself is the most fundamental of human beliefs, Conchis seems to claim.

Nicholas is uncertain how to interpret this smile, and does not understand what Conchis means. He recognizes the stone smile as “the smile that Conchis sometimes wore;... the smile of dramatic irony, of those who have privileged information” (147). This is the interpretation he holds for most of the novel, and he therefore suspects and dislikes the smile. He resents the feeling that Conchis knows something he does not, and thinks the smile represents a superior attitude, that Conchis is signaling he is better than Nicholas.

In the conversation following the dramatic occupation story, Nicholas says: ““Those years must have strained your philosophy. The smile”” (437). But Conchis replies

‘On the contrary. That experience made me fully realize what humour is. It is a manifestation of freedom. It is because there is freedom that there is the smile. Only a totally predetermined universe could be without it. In the end it is only by becoming the victim that one escapes the ultimate joke — which is precisely to discover that by constantly slipping away one has slipped away. One exists no more, one is no longer free. That is what the great majority of our fellowmen have always to discover. And will have always to discover.’ (437)

This world is clearly not totally predetermined. Therefore there is the smile. Conchis's point is that the unfree and unsmiling are those who see themselves as passive victims. They make their world predetermined. They make themselves unfree in order to avoid the responsibility of making a choice, but simultaneously they also end their real existence. Life without freedom is not life, he claims. The smile is the smile of the person who takes responsibility for making a choice, even if choices are restricted and freedom never absolute. Fowles has said in an interview that power "always kills true thought and feeling. That is why individual action and at least seeming free will are so important" (Vipond 1996, 8). The power of the Nazi Wimmel was a threat to more than life. Because people started thinking they had no choice, their thoughts and feelings became unimportant.

In *The Aristos*, Fowles uses a metaphor to explain his view of freedom. People who do not understand freedom

are like prisoners vainly and laboriously trying to file their way through massive iron bars in order to reach a blue sky in which they could not possibly exist; while all the time, just behind them, their cell waits to be lived in. (Fowles 2001, 186)

People cannot live in limitless freedom, just as they cannot live in the sky. But the fact that freedom is limited does not mean there is no freedom at all. In the aforementioned conversation about the *eleutheria* incident, Conchis also says to Nicholas that "the better you understand [freedom] the less you possess of it" (439). Nicholas does not understand the paradox. He accuses Conchis of having sacrificed 80 villagers for an abstract theory. Conchis says: "For as long as you cherish your present view of freedom, it is you who holds the executioner's gun." Nicholas thinks of Alison, then "suppressed the thought" (439). His present view of freedom is basically doing what he feels like, what feels good to him, for his own egotistical reasons. To Conchis, such an idea will always encroach on the freedom of others. If you understand freedom, you understand that you only possess as much of it as does not hurt others or take away their freedom. This means that you do not have the freedom to do nothing, as Anton did, if that leads to the oppression and captivity of others.

The problem, of course, is that in the situation Conchis was in, anything he did would take away the freedom of others. But in a hopeless situation, you still have to do your best and take responsibility for the remnants of freedom left to you. During the disintoxication part of the trial, Nicholas compares life to a theater performance: "[W]e have no choice of play or role. It is always *Othello*. To be is, immutably, to be Iago" (531). Here he recognizes the basic

restrictions existence imposes on the freedom of human beings. Life is a play in the tragic genre, and everybody is a traitor. But that is no excuse for not making responsible choices.

Nicholas has asserted his freedom in relation to Alison, first by running away from her in London, then by playing with her feelings in Athens. In fact, what he has subjected her to is emotionally similar to his own experiences in the godgame. His signals have been ambiguous, and as soon as he thought Alison knew what to expect, he did something very different. “Julie” betrays him in much the same way that he betrays Alison, making him believe she is in love with him, making passionate love to him, and then abandoning him. Nicholas’s freedom is therefore Alison’s unfreedom. This is another instance of the godgame serving as mirror, making Nicholas feel for himself the emotions he is putting others through.

As Nicholas realizes on encountering Lily de Seitas, the enigmatic smile is carried by all who belong to Conchis’ group of the elect, the Few, who have realized the nature of life and freedom, that most people, the Many, will never grasp. Although Nicholas is set on revenge throughout most of Part III, he cannot avoid recognizing that he has learned and grown because of the godgame. And when the young American who will be his successor at the Lord Byron School seeks him out, Nicholas gives him “a long smile ... that had said more than the occasion warranted” (622). Nicholas had scoffed after the trial when Conchis told him he was one of the elect, but as time goes on “Conchis’s truths, especially the truth he had embodied in Lily, matured in me. Slowly I was learning to smile, and in the special sense that Conchis intended” (646).

As in the interpersonal domain, Nicholas’s progression toward an ideological identity is not linear. Most striking are perhaps the insights he has along the way, but which he then forgets or fails to act upon, only to discover them later as if for the first time, because, as he says at the end, “one can accept, and still not forgive; and one can decide, and still not enact the decision” (646).

Even before meeting Conchis, Nicholas had realized that his suicide attempt was a piece of clever acting, and that his tragedy was living as though he were a character in a fiction, acting for a spectator, assessed by some director or novelist. But this lesson he basically forgets as he is taken in by the godgame, and most of his behavior with Conchis and “Julie” is dictated by his wish to ingratiate himself with them or present himself in a particular light. But once the godgame is over and he has been dismissed from his post at the school, the importance of this realization seizes him with new force:

all my life I had tried to turn life into fiction, to hold reality away; always I had acted as if a third person was watching and listening and giving me marks for good or bad behavior — a god like a novelist, to whom I turned, like a character with the power to please, the sensitivity to feel slighted, the ability to adapt himself to whatever he believed the novelist-god wanted. This leechlike variation of the superego I had created myself, fostered myself, and because of it I had always been incapable of acting freely. It was not my defence; but my despot. And now I saw it, I saw it a death too late. (539)

Here the theme of reality versus illusion is coupled with the theme of freedom. Just as Nicholas has failed to develop his emotions and an authentic social self, he has also been blind to the real world around him. He has wanted to be wave rather than water, and he has wanted reality to have the perfection of a dream or a Garden of Eden. In existentialist terms he has been an inauthentic man in an inauthentic world, not because reality itself has been false, but because he has seen it in false terms. The world has never been good enough for him. The nice accent, elegance, and mystic demeanor of the dream woman “Julie” made Alison boring and unsatisfying. Only a perfection that does not exist in the real world was good enough for him. When Conchis told him he should marry Alison and have a home and family, Nicholas replied that he would rather kill himself.

Waiting for Alison in London, Nicholas gradually manages to reconcile himself to reality and even appreciate it. Although he has been expecting a dramatic grand finale to the godgame and Alison’s “spectacular re-entry,” he realizes, when she finally appears, that “her rising into this most banal of scenes, this most banal of London” (647) is the only way she could reappear. Life is not like fiction, as Fowles has repeatedly reminded his readers by exposing his novel’s fictionality. Giving up his dreams of an ideal *domaine*, and attuning himself to reality, Nicholas is shocked to see, in Alison, that reality is much better than he remembered or expected: “She was mysterious, almost a new woman; one had to go back several steps, and start again; and know the place for the first time. As if what had once been free in her, as accessible as a pot of salt on the table, was now held in a phial, sacrosanct” (650). As the Bonnard nudes once gave Nicholas’s memories of very trivial incidents qualities of beauty and magic, Nicholas is now becoming capable of seeing something meaningful and grand in the ordinary and everyday. This is the Seidevarre epiphany in a different guise: Reality encompasses the mysterious. Nicholas does not awake to the absurdity and meaninglessness of everyday life. On the contrary, what he discovers is the magic of the

quotidian. Choosing Alison is not only evidence of a new capacity for love in Nicholas, but also a new view of the world: The world has become enough.

In the above quotation, Nicholas says he has been “incapable of acting freely” because he has been performing for an audience rather than acting for himself. Although he makes this discovery on Phraxos, it is not until the very last scene in the book that he is able to take the consequences of his decision and act on his belief. Standing with Alison in Regent’s Park, he is again in a situation when he must make an important choice: Whether to tell Alison he wants her back or not. Again he believes himself to be watched by “a god like a novelist.” He thinks Conchis and his cronies are hiding behind the blind windows of Cumberland Terrace, and therefore all his attention is on the script he thinks they have in mind, and how he and Alison might thwart them. The turning point is his realization that that “[t]here were no watching eyes.” The gods of Olympus (or partners in Polymus Films, with its “one misplaced letter” in (582)), have absconded.

Part III starts with a Marquis de Sade quotation that states that the triumph of philosophy would be to explain the workings of providence and then tell people how to interpret them (567). What Nicholas finally discovers is the opposite: Without gods, without providence or any predetermined plan or meaning, man is simultaneously free and responsible. Nicholas feels the kind of freedom he thought Conchis was talking about after the trial, which is a cruel freedom, “because the freedom that makes us at least partly responsible for what we are is cruel. So that the smile was not so much an *attitude* to be taken to life as the *nature* of the cruelty of life, a cruelty we cannot even choose to avoid, since it is human existence” (531).

Nicholas learned two moral imperatives from Lily de Seitas: Firstly, that people who love each other should not lie to one another, and secondly, that you should not hurt people unnecessarily. After realizing how insensitive and cruel he had been acting towards Jojo, even if it was the last thing he wanted, he saw this last rule as “the only truth that mattered, the only morality that mattered” (641). He envisaged “adulthood like a mountain,” and himself “at the foot of this cliff of ice” (641), and reaching adulthood depends on choosing to behave morally towards others. This is a far from easy stand to take, because people cannot avoid causing suffering; making choices will cause suffering, and you must take responsibility for that too. At the end, Nicholas has found a morality to sustain him, he knows what he wants in life, and he knows himself well enough to be able to be responsible, caring, and loving toward another person. It is at this moment that he can finally act and admit to Alison he is only half a person without her.



The final scene of the book makes freedom and choice not only moral obligations, but a philosophy or world view that finally makes sense of the world for Nicholas. Earlier, this same freedom seemed an unwanted burden. At Oxford, freedom had meant “making some abrupt choice and acting on it” (643). Later it was “the freedom to satisfy personal desire, private ambition” (441). Conchis’s freedom was one “that must be responsible for its actions” (441). It was a freedom limited by reality and by other people’s freedom, and in it lies the difference between real life and a kind of waking death, or between responsible adulthood and childhood. When Nicholas understood what Conchis meant, he would rather give back the knowledge:

I could not get off by claiming that I was a historical victim, powerless to be anything else but selfish – or I should not be able to get off from now on. It was as if he had planted a bandillera in my shoulder, or a succubus on my back: a knowledge I did not want. (441)

But in the final scene he wants that knowledge and recognizes that his life depends on the choices he makes and on having decided to make them himself, rather than leaving them to chance, providence, or Conchis. Like the boy in the story “The Prince and the Magician,” Nicholas has become a magician himself.

The final meeting between Alison and Nicholas is a particularly apt conclusion to Nicholas’s learning process, and the book, because it is difficult, tortured, painful. It is as far from the happy ending in which the two lovers run ecstatically into each others’ arms as one can get. There are misunderstandings, “[N]egotiations and love songs,” (which, as Paul Simon tells us, “Are often mistaken for one and the same” (Simon 1983). At times Alison and Nicholas’s future seems to hang on tiny things like a glance thrown at the wrong moment, or a slight movement of the head. Nicholas “had a sense of an abyss between us that was immeasurably deep, yet also absurdly narrow, as narrow as our real distance apart, crossable in one small step” (653). They both have to choose, and yet so much depends on things they cannot control. The first feelings Nicholas manages to express are anger, and the first lines he speaks are riddled with “what the hell” (648). Alison says that being with him is torture, which of course it is, because that is also what love is. Nicholas gives her an ultimatum, the same one she gave him in Athens, that she has to choose between him and the godgame. She cannot know the consequences of each alternative, but nevertheless “‘you’ve got to bet,’” Nicholas says, echoing Pascal (653). Alison says she will return to Australia, thus asserting

her freedom by not taking either of Nicholas's options. Nicholas now slaps her. In the first version of *The Magus*, the slap was part of his plan to act their separation for the spectators he thought were watching, but in the second version he does it for himself, not knowing why, but that it feels necessary. He does not even think it feels like a violation of the moral law not to cause pain. He causes Alison pain quite deliberately, and maybe this juxtaposition of Alison's choice and his slap is an illustration of what their life together has been, and will be, no matter how hard they both try not to hurt one another. Choosing is painful, and every choice will bring pain. And Alison assures him she hates him, which she does, but she also loves him.

Fowles in *The Aristos* and Conchis in *The Magus* both suggest that people are not adults at 25. According to Conchis, 25-year-olds lack the experience to "understand and assimilate" all the people and experiences they encounter (179). At the end of the book, Nicholas has had some powerful experiences and had to deal with some powerful people, and this has enabled him to reassess himself and his relationships with others and the world. In the interpersonal life area, he has learned to open up, to share, and become capable of having a mutual relationship that allows both parties their freedom and subjectivity. In the ideological area he has developed the beginnings of a philosophy of life, which seems to be Fowles's own special brand of existentialism, centered on the idea of freedom.

### ***The Magus* as Bildungsroman**

The most striking difference between *The Magus* and the Four Classics is that it is not just about a period in someone's life, but describes a staged game. Education is the expressed aim, but the book makes clear that the means used in Nicholas's formation process are not real. Both the reader and Nicholas are left to wonder whether "not real" means fiction, invention, something supernatural, or maybe malicious deception. Truth and reality thus become major concerns.

As creative invention, the godgame can be interpreted metaphorically as metafiction – fiction about fiction. In particular, the stories Conchis tells operate in the same way as literature. Nicholas says in Part I that he and his Oxford friends made the mistake of interpreting the heroes of French existentialist novels as role models, "mistaking metaphorical descriptions of complex modes of feeling for straightforward prescriptions of behavior" (17). Nicholas keeps wondering whether Conchis's stories really happened. He often does not understand that they too are intended metaphorically, their importance lying in their meaning

rather than truth value. Conchis's stories work like fiction works. According to Fowles, fictional truth is different from scientific truth in not being verifiable, and in being "feeling truth" rather than literal truth (Bragg 1977). Feeling truth is what matters in the godgame as well, particularly in the stories. In this sense, *The Magus* shows why fiction is important and valuable. Nicholas eventually comes to understand the emotional content of what he has been told, and to understand it emotionally rather than intellectually, as what he has been through ripens in him in London in the autumn, and he discovers the smile of the stone head on his own face.

Not only the stories but everything that happens in the godgame is invented and orchestrated by Conchis, in the same way that an author creates his or her characters and the events in the book. Metaphorically, all bildungsromans are created by an author-magus who invent particular experiences in order to educate or shape their protagonist. The idea of the author as god is probably as old as literature itself, but in *The Magus* it is an important part of the novel's thematic concerns, whose importance lies as much in what it says about life as what it says about literature. Readers are invited to think of Conchis and Nicholas as representatives of God and man, and to reflect upon what life with such a god would be like. Nicholas at first finds it extremely exciting that this god-like character takes such an interest in him, but the situation quickly becomes frightening and sinister, and he wants to escape from Conchis/God. Nicholas keeps wondering whether Conchis's intentions are benign or not. If not, his life could easily develop into Henrik Nygaard's nightmare. Being controlled by a loving, caring father figure, on the other hand, might seem a very pleasant prospect. But even when Nicholas thinks Conchis's intentions are good, he finds it very hard to live with the lack of freedom entailed by Conchis's power over him. The godgame is thus a treatment of a theme that is very important to Fowles, that of whether there is a god, whether it is good or rational to believe in God, and how human freedom depends on an absent or non-existent god.

This theme is also important in most traditional bildungsromans. Goethe's plot and the revelation of the influence of the Society of the Tower bring many of the same associations as Fowles's godgame, with the difference that the supernatural and divine intervention are not ruled out at the end. The differing fates of Wilhelm and the other characters point toward providence having intervened on Wilhelm's behalf. He blunders on and all ends well, while more deserving characters succumb to cruel fates. The philosophical musings and discussions in the book do nothing to change this impression. In *The Magus*, the god-like power Conchis has in the game is contrasted with his statements about chance being the only guiding principle of life. Conchis practices the opposite of what he preaches to bring Nicholas to an

awareness of the consequences of this kind of thinking. The book postulates that existence is governed by what Conchis calls “hazard,” and in Fowles’s world chance or hazard is a kind master because it does not purposely favor one person over another.

In *The Aristos* there is a short sub-chapter called “The Godgame.” Here Fowles describes what he calls “the Divine Predicament” (9):

good governors must govern all equally, and all fairly. But no act of government can be fair to all, in all their different situations, except one. The Divine Solution is to govern by not governing in any sense that the governed can call being governed; that is, to constitute a situation in which the governed must govern themselves. (9)

It is obvious that a personal god, who fulfills personal prayers, cannot be just. Which one should he answer, for instance, if two 100-meter runners both pray to win the same race? The just solution is to not interfere and let the best man win. A just god’s second act after creation should be to make himself disappear, Fowles says (9). That is what happens in *The Magus*. Conchis helps Nicholas develop his own identity, thereby giving him the means to govern himself. Then he disappears. This is to some extent the traditional reading of the story of the Fall, whereby Adam and Eve were granted free choice. The difference between the Christian view of free will and Fowles’s is that Christianity posits a divine will behind the world, so what happens is to some extent the result of God’s plan. This idea is totally rejected in *The Magus*, as seen in Conchis’s reflection on the Great War:

‘I saw that this cataclysm must be an expiation for some barbarous crime of civilization, some terrible human lie. What the lie was, I had too little knowledge of history or science to know then. I know now that it was our believing that we were fulfilling some end, serving some plan — that all would come out well in the end, because there was some great plan over all. Instead of the reality. There is no plan. All is hazard. And the only thing that will preserve us is ourselves.’ (128-129)

The idea of the First World War as “expiation” for a crime might sound like belief in fate, but is in fact just the opposite. If we think there is a plan, we have abdicated responsibility and free will. It is because people did not take responsibility for their own lives, because leaders did not take responsibility for the lives of their countrymen, that that war could happen.

In *The Aristos*, Fowles argues against Pascal's well-known argument for the afterlife: "[O]ne must put one's money on the Christian belief that a recompensatory afterlife exists. If it is not true," Pascal argued, "then one has lost nothing but one's stake. If it is true, one has gained all" (20). Fowles thinks this is a dangerous belief and that we should opt against the afterlife. If there is no afterlife, and no god, this life is all that matters; we are solely responsible for life on earth, and have an incentive to work for the betterment of conditions here. If there turns out to be a god and an afterlife, we have lost nothing. If we have neglected to make the most of our lives now, and there was no afterlife, we have lost all. Whether we are really free or not is less important than what we believe. If we believe we are free, act as though we are free, we have full meaningful lives. If we believe we are slaves, we *are* slaves.

The moral and philosophical implications of the godgame are a major part of the thematics of *The Magus*. But the game is also at the root of several important paradoxes in the novel. The first paradox is that the godgame seems to prove the existence of something Fowles says in the foreword does not exist, that is, "absolute knowledge and absolute power" (10). Fowles also adds that he thinks it important to combat this belief. Conchis represents God, and he is an omnipotent god who plays with human beings. Nicholas calls himself Conchis's "victim" (403) and experiences himself as both powerless and ignorant. Conchis, and later Lily de Seitas, try to make Nicholas discover that in fact he is responsible for himself and has the freedom to influence the game or even leave it. The fact remains that he lacks the knowledge that Conchis and his cohorts have, knowledge of the game, and without this, his actions and choices are virtually meaningless. Although Lily claims that "it is you who make our situation," Nicholas is in a fundamentally different position from her and Conchis, because he does not know that he makes the situation. He does not know the rules according to which he can influence the game. He has no framework within which to interpret what happens to him at Bourani, and that is the reason "reality" radically changes for him over and over again.

If we interpret the parallels between Conchis-God and Nicholas-human beings as sustained until the end of the book, the implications are seemingly in opposition to Fowles's views on God and religion. Because the game works, Nicholas grudgingly has to admit to himself that his ordeal has made him develop and that it has made him a better human being. If Conchis is God, the book seems to support the Christian belief that people should deliver themselves into the hands of God and trust in His judgment. If there is a god who plays with human beings as Conchis plays with Nicholas, then there is nothing much to fear, and no particular reason why people should choose freedom instead.

Perhaps this interpretation is unfair, in that it leaves out the very last twist in the plot: The fact that Nicholas realizes nobody is watching him and Alison – which symbolically means there is no god – and goes on to make his own choices and live in freedom. In this way, Conchis’s godgame is an analogy of the godgame Fowles describes in *The Aristos*, and its lesson is that a just god must leave people to govern themselves.

A second important paradox is that the godgame seems to support a morality and an ideology that both Fowles and Conchis are against; the book says one thing and does another. Because the game works, Nicholas is educated, matures, and learns to be a responsible adult. But the means of his formation is repressive, at times deliberately cruel. Conchis’s methods resemble systems of thought that both Fowles and Conchis find oppressive and expressly condemn, such as Nazism. As Peter Conradi has said, Conchis’s “totalitarian yet benign fantasy is paradoxically to educate the protagonist into a ... sense of his own freedom” (1982, 15). The godgame uses totalitarian means to teach freedom and immoral means to teach morality.

The question a reader of *The Magus* can hardly avoid is whether it is morally defensible to subject a human being to such experiences, whatever good might come of it in the end. Listening with mounting anger to the supposed psychologists at the mock trial, Nicholas thinks that “nothing could justify such a public analysis” (511). And this psychological humiliation is not even the worst he has to put up with: Falling in love with “Julie,” only to have her reveal it was all a game and meant nothing to her; believing Alison was dead for months, when she was not; not to mention all the potentially violent, dangerous situations, like thinking he was being told to take a suicide pill, thinking he was attacked by armed strangers in the night, being handed a whip and told he could beat another person within an inch of her life. Is it permissible to play with other people’s emotions like this, even for a noble cause? In making the game work, the book’s answer seems to be yes; Nicholas becomes a better person, and when the chance arises to prevent the next victim from going to Phraxos, he does not. He does not want to spoil the man’s experience, and thereby condones Conchis’s treatment of himself.

Apart from the godgame there is at least one other major difference between *The Magus* and the Four Classics that leads to unresolved paradoxes, namely the small setting and limited cast of characters. Whereas the British Classics tend to operate with pairs of opposites, Fowles combines positive and negative features in one setting and single characters. Bourani, Conchis, and “Julie” all represent several opposing values. They are both good and bad, which makes them harder to interpret.

The setting in *The Magus* is small, in contrast to the bustling cities of Dickens. As mentioned in the index discussion, *The Magus* is closer to *Wilhelm Meister* and *Jane Eyre* in this respect. But it also differs from these two in having one major setting, Bourani, which is paradoxical in itself, rather than a contrast between two or more houses as in Goethe and Brontë. Bourani is both an arena for learning and an ideal dream world much like Alain-Fournier's *domaine sans nom*. As a school of life, Bourani is important to Nicholas's development, and he should stay there to profit from it. As a dream world, it represents what Nicholas should shun, and he should escape from it to achieve real happiness in a real world. But he cannot do both. The sessions with Conchis are the means by which Nicholas is ideologically educated. He has few values, and needs an identity in the ideological domain. Thus, escape would cut short the learning process. "Julie" represents an ideal dream woman in contrast to Alison, the real love. But "Julie" also has important lessons to convey: The difference between love and sex, his problem with honesty, and his emotional shortcomings. Should I stay or should I go? That is Nicholas's dilemma. And the book seems to say yes, both. He has to stay to learn, and he has to go to prove that he has learned. This paradox is perhaps resolved in Nicholas's staying for the duration of the game, then choosing to leave at a point when Conchis has scheduled him to leave. He has learned, and he has discovered his own freedom and acted on it. The problem that then remains is Conchis and his status as supreme authority. Is Nicholas really free if Conchis has manipulated him into choosing freedom?

Conchis's various roles have been discussed earlier, but what is paradoxical about him is that he is both a (seemingly) caring teacher and a ruthless dictator and mind controller. Although the teachers and mentors in the Four Classics, such as Jane Eyre's teacher Miss Temple and Dr. Strong in *David Copperfield*, are good, moral individuals, there is an inherent danger in the teacher role which comes from the difference in power and authority between teacher and student. Conchis's double role thus serves to point out an implicit danger in the teaching situation and in all *bildungsromans*: There is always the risk that the teacher might gain too much power, abuse his or her power over the student, or teach untrue or dangerous lessons. Sting's song "I'll be watching you" contains this same ambiguity: I'll watch you because I love you, but you are living under surveillance. This sinister aspect is also felt in *Wilhelm Meister* when it is revealed that the Society of the Tower have been keeping an eye on Wilhelm for a long time. As long as their intentions are good and their teachings healthy, all is well, but nobody knows what would happen if the acolyte started disagreeing with the teachers and challenging their authority.

There are also some other paradoxes in *The Magus* that serve to bring out paradoxes of the bildungsroman itself.

I have said in the analysis above (in the section on secondary characters) that other characters are strikingly essential in making Nicholas change and grow. That secondary characters have this purpose is self-evident in the bildungsroman, since the primary thematic focus is the formation of the main character. In *The Magus* it becomes striking because the whole action of the book has been staged for the benefit of the hero, and minor characters are there only for that purpose. There are times when both Nicholas and the reader are made to think he is just a pawn in a game that exists for some other purpose, but in the end, the ‘truth’ seems to be that educating Nicholas was the whole aim of the godgame. The influence of others is a bildungsroman trait with both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, Nicholas and other bildungsroman protagonists come to realize that other people are essential to them and that development takes place in interaction with others, not in solitude. Even a lone wolf like Nicholas, created by an author who says he “need[s] other people less than most” (Bragg 1977, 7), comes to feel that he is only half a person without Alison. Although the bildungsroman is often criticized for being over-individualistic, it is really a social genre, emphasizing the importance of others in the life of an individual.

On the other hand, secondary characters are reduced to their functions in relation to the main characters. They are not important as individuals, only in how they influence the main character. In *The Magus*, we know that Conchis, “Julie,” and the other “cast” have lives outside the game they participate in. In the Four Classics, however, many people are reduced to their functions as adjuncts to the story of the development of the protagonist. If Wilhelm Meister, for instance, is going to have the experiences he undergoes in the book, other characters have to take part in them, and their involvement is real, not just part of a game. These characters invest themselves, real money, and real emotions, and suffer very real consequences of Wilhelm’s and their own actions. Wilhelm eventually learns he was wrong about his first love, Mariane. But only he lives to realize his mistake and amend his behavior. Marianne herself dies in misery. Wilhelm rescues Mignon and learns a lot about his own emotions and nurturing abilities as a result, but Mignon also dies unhappy in the end. The prominence of the main character thus makes others secondary, and the result is that their independence and individuality are sacrificed. People become props in a play staged for the advantage of the young protagonist. If the object of the bildungsroman is to promote subjectivity, there is a paradox in this reduction of characters to objects.



Ethically there is a dilemma in demoting minor characters to this ancillary function, since it might imply that a higher-class person such as Wilhelm Meister is worth the sacrifice of lower-class characters such as Mariane and Mignon. Early in the novel, Wilhelm thinks bitterly that self-development might be only for noblemen. He experiences that this is not so; a burgher like himself also has considerable freedom. Whether choice and social mobility are available to people from lower classes is a question the book does not answer. The sad end that many of the lower-class characters undeservedly come to might be an indication that some people are just less fortunate than others.

The role of experience in the bildungsroman can also be questioned. Everything that happens in *The Magus* is important as a spur to Nicholas's growth. All the stories he is told, the masque scenes, and conversations with Conchis and "Lily" are staged with the purpose of affecting him in particular ways. The primary function of experience is to instruct the hero. Although Nicholas takes the experience as a unique adventure, the point of it is change. And as emphasized above, the education of Nicholas is successful only to the extent that he can leave the game voluntarily and progress to a mature level where he can use what he has learned.



## CHAPTER 7. *MOON PALACE* (1989)<sup>51</sup>

Paul Auster began his writing career in the 1970s as a poet, translator and reviewer of poetry.<sup>52</sup> Apart from a pseudonymous detective novel written in the mid-70s, the memoir *The Invention of Solitude* (1982) was his first prose work. His breakthrough as a novelist came with the three short “metaphysical mystery” novels (Olson 1985) of *The New York Trilogy*, published in 1985 and 1986. The *Trilogy* was seen to be about “linguistic, philosophical absences” and “metaphysical longings” (Malin 1987, 255), and it established Auster as a postmodern writer, interested in chance, the indeterminacies of postmodern identities, and how books arise out of other books. Malcolm Bradbury describes Auster’s books as “postmodern in the sense that they are clearly reflexive fictions about fiction” (1992, 259).

When *Moon Palace* was published in 1989, its reception was strongly marked by the critical view of the *Trilogy*. Monica Michlin’s is a good example of the prevailing view:

All readers are sensitive to *MP* as a remarkable instance of post-modern literature, ‘post-modern’ meaning literature which has ceased to consider reality as stable, and whose sole reference is literature itself. How could one not admire the obvious play on the arbitrary nature of signs in the novel? (Michlin 1996, 217)

Andrew Billen, in contrast, thinks Auster’s “books have been getting less tricky and more heartfelt ever since” *The New York Trilogy* (2005). I side with Billen, and I will argue that the reference of *Moon Palace* is not “literature itself” but human concerns such as morality and social and psychological issues. Auster’s novel receives special attention in this study because it has been associated with postmodern ideas that seem almost diametrically opposed to those of the traditional bildungsroman, even as it has a number of striking resemblances to the three classical nineteenth-century British bildungsromans. This last fact has received very little critical attention. *Moon Palace* is therefore interesting as a test case for the fate of the bildungsroman almost 100 years after its presumed death.

Like Fowles’s *The Magus*, *Moon Palace* abounds with interpretative possibilities. Auster started it in 1969 and worked on it intermittently for almost two decades. According to

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<sup>51</sup> A small part of this chapter has been published in Iversen (2005).

<sup>52</sup> Auster’s poetry collections are *Wall Writing* (1976), *Facing the Music* (1980) and *White Spaces* (1980).

the author, the material grew in all directions, was almost overwhelmed by historical material, and was eventually divided between many novels (Chénétier 1996a, 13-14). The wide scope, the stories-within-the-story, and historical and literary references might be the reason the novel has inspired a large body of criticism focused on quite different aspects, from genealogy and asceticism, to moon imagery, painting, and travel. This analysis will concentrate on what Auster says “is really the issue of the novel: Learning how to be an adult” (Rey 1992, 26; my translation).

*Moon Palace* follows Marco Stanley Fogg from childhood to just before his twenty-fifth birthday, with the main emphasis on the last three of this period. Marco undergoes great changes in the course of the novel, from being a more or less normal eighteen-year-old student through absolute despair and isolation, to positive commitment, before he takes another downward turn. The book also takes him on an inner journey of discovery, into unknown parts of his own family history as well as his own thoughts and feelings.

## Index results and analysis

The BRI score for Auster’s *Moon Palace* is extremely high, particularly for a novel which is usually regarded as postmodern and more often associated with the picaresque than with the bildungsroman. It gets the full score for “Characterization: Protagonist,” and in the other sections it is only one or two points behind the classics.

Table 42. Section results for Moon Palace

Section	Section name	Max. Points	<i>Moon Palace</i>
1	Narrative perspective and mode	15	13
2	Characterization: Protagonist	15	15
3	Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	17	16
4	Topical story elements: Protagonist	26	24
5	Topical story elements: Secondary characters	9	8
6	Setting	5	3
7	Plot and Structure	28	27
8	Generic signals	4	2
9	Theme, subject matter and motifs	29	25
<b>Sum</b>	<b>Total score</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>133</b>

## Index Section 1: Narrative perspective and mode

In the first section, *Moon Palace* has all the features except “realism.” The book is in the first person, with the usual temporal and ironic narrative distance, and it combines action and reflection.

Table 43. *Moon Palace*, section 1

Features	Section 1. Narrative perspective and mode	Max. Points	<i>Moon Palace</i>
1	Focalization shifts between narrator and protagonist. (whether 1 <sup>st</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> person)	3	3
2	Access to protagonist’s consciousness	2	2
3	Retrospective narrative (1st person or omniscient)	2	2
4	Narrator understands more than young protagonist	2	2
5	Ironic attitude to young protagonist	2	2
6	Plot combines action and reflection	2	2
7	Verisimilar novel: Portrays existing world realistically	2	0
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>

Although the focalization is primarily through young Marco, the older narrator is strongly present. The summary on the first page gives us both the narrative situation and the subject matter: We know that the speaker will tell the story of his youth, that many years separate those years from the present, and that even though he “did not believe there would ever be a future” (1), the present narrative proves him wrong. The narrator comments on his younger self throughout, often critically, sometimes harshly condemning his past actions and thoughts. It is obvious from the outset that the hero has changed dramatically between the time of his story and the present. The narrator strongly controls his narrative. The frequent shifts in perspective, analepses and prolepses show his ordering mind, and his style is usually self-consciously literary.

Although I myself think *Moon Palace* is no less verisimilar than Dickens’s or Maugham’s books, my scoring reflects the common critical opinion that it is “non-realistic.” As Jean-François Chassay says, “Auster is sometimes reproached for giving too much room to coincidence in his work, which does not seem sufficiently ‘realist’ to some” (1995, 215; my translation). Sven Birkerts is one of these, claiming that in *Moon Palace*, “the drama hinges upon a series of recognitions as outlandish as anything in Dickens” (Birkerts 1992: 345-346). Arguing that “[c]hance is a part of reality,” Auster says he considers himself “a realist” (McCaffery and Gregory 1992, 277). In a number of interviews he has emphasized that he wants “to write fiction as strange as the world I live in” (McCaffery and Gregory 1992, 278). The problem then is partly one of literary conventions: because plausibility has become a

main defining feature of realistic or verisimilar literature, and coincidence by definition detracts from plausibility, it is difficult to explore chance realistically. As Marc Chénétier explains,

chance, in Paul Auster's work, is an integral part of his desire to account realistically for the way things happen. Paradoxically, against the most solid tenets of the 'realist' novel, Auster holds that the type of reality conveyed by the latter is so doctored that it has very loose links with the way raw reality constitutes itself: '[People] are so immersed in the conventions of so-called realistic fiction that their sense of reality has been distorted...'" (Chénétier 1996b, 29; qtd. from Auster 1993, 278 ).

Realist fiction, though usually seen as a great leap forward in verisimilitude, is still pervaded with coincidence. It is telling that what Birkerts uses as an example of fiction riddled with "outlandish" coincidences is Dickens, the great British Realist. Chance features strongly in Goethe's, Brontë's and to some extent, even Maugham's books. Often its function is to reveal who someone really is or to uncover a surprising, unsuspected family relationship. This is also the case in *Moon Palace*. The novel has one major improbable coincidence from which the others spring, namely that the old man Fogg starts working for turns out to be his grandfather. This leads to his finding out who his father is and how he was conceived, and finally he gets an inheritance from both his father and his grandfather. This type of coincidence is maybe outmoded in the post-WWII realistic novel, but it is part and parcel of the nineteenth-century bildungsroman. The emphasis on family, generations, and inheritance ties in with the thematic concerns of the genre.

## **Sections 2 and 3: Characterization**

The result of 15 out of 15 points in this section indicates that Marco is a classic bildungsroman hero. He is an orphan and only child, who has no living relatives after the death of his uncle. His paternal origin is unknown, an element also found, for instance, in Wieland's *Agathon* and Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street* (1913). He is of middle-class background, not particularly talented or untalented, and generally a kind and good person. Marco is very passive in the first part of the book, and takes to new heights the uncertainty about the future that we find in many male bildungsroman protagonists. In addition, he has other psychologically androgynous traits. In his relationship with Kitty, for instance, he takes

on the role of home-maker. He is also the one who desperately wants the child when she becomes pregnant, while Kitty thinks of her education and career and wants an abortion.

Table 44. Moon Palace, section 2

Features	Section 2. Characterization: Protagonist	Max. points	<i>Moon Palace</i>
8	One main character	1	1
9	Protagonist is a round character, not flat	1	1
10	Protagonist is dynamic; changes in the course of the novel	2	2
11	Protagonist is an only child	1	1
12	Protagonist is an orphan or	2	2
13	Fatherless or	or 2	0
14	Parent dies in the course of the novel	or 2	0
15	Only one or no (known) living relatives	1	1
16	Of middle-class background	2	2
17	Ordinary (not particularly talented or untalented)	2	2
18	Protagonist is basically good and willing to help others	2	2
19	Male protagonist: Relatively passive, uncertain about goals, leaves decisions to chance or other people	1	1
20	Female protagonist: Relatively active, has strong goals, makes decisions easily	or 1	
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>

*Moon Palace* is both extremely concerned with the main character and a book that gives a large place to the role of others. It resembles *The Diviners* more than *The Cider House Rules* and the Dickens books in the way Marco's voice and thoughts dominate the narrative and in its lack of the sprawling plethora of different people that these other novels afford. On the other hand, *Moon Palace* devotes almost two whole chapters – close to 100 pages – to Effing's life story. Along with the Beautiful Soul's story in *Wilhelm Meister* and the life of Wilbur Larch in *The Cider House Rules*, Effing's story and Barber's "science-fiction Western" are the longest inserted narratives in the works studied. Barber, and particularly Effing, play such important parts that they almost cannot be regarded as secondary characters. Although Effing's and Barber's stories come to the reader through Fogg, Marco does not say much about the effect they have on him. As in Irving's novel, the stories of other characters are thematically essential, but we are not told directly whether or how they influence the main character.

Table 45. Moon Palace, section 3

Features	Section 3. Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions	Max. points	<i>Moon Palace</i>
21	Other character(s) essential in making protagonist change and grow	3	3
22	Other characters more important in their relationship to protagonist than in their own right	1	1
23	Important educator(s)	3	3
24	Important companion(s)	2	2
25	Important lover(s)	3	3
26	Other characters' love relationship as exemplary or as contrast to protagonist	1	1
27	Other characters' marriage as exemplary or as contrast	1	0
28	At least one important character from lower, middle, and higher social classes	3	3
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>

*Moon Palace* shares with *The Magus* a small cast of characters. The central figures are Zimmer, Kitty, Effing, Solomon Barber, and to some extent Mrs. Hume. The novel nevertheless includes the staple roles of the genre. In adolescence Marco finds a loyal friend in David Zimmer, who acts both as a supportive figure and a voice of reason providing sensible advice. Effing becomes both mentor and father substitute, and there is a prominent lover, Kitty.

Effing's ambiguity and contradictory character are accentuated from the very first meeting between him and Marco. During that curious job interview, Marco's first impression is of a being who is "walled off, remote, sphinxlike in its impenetrability" (99). Then Effing changes and becomes "all sinew and attention, a seething mass of resurrected strength" (101). Marco does not know what to make of him, and throughout their relationship, Effing remains enigmatic: Passive and aggressive, weak and strong, victim as well as master. Effing resembles Fowles's Conchis in his ambiguity, and in the way he synthesizes different types of secondary characters common in bildungsromans, such as teacher, mentor and parent substitute. Like Conchis, Effing uses his own life story to educate his apprentice and illustrate issues Marco needs to come to terms with.

As *Moon Palace* employs a small number of multi-faceted, complex secondary characters rather than many characters representing different types, psychological make-ups, professions, and philosophies of life, the novel conveys a sense of the complexity of human beings. You cannot avoid evil by simply distancing yourself from bad people, as David Copperfield can with Steerforth. You have to take the bad with the good in each individual. Marco both loves and hates Effing, who is simultaneously lovable and unbearable, and he also



comes to hate Kitty, even as he loves her. Coping with this kind of ambiguity is one of the difficult aspects of psychological development toward adulthood.

Although Marco has fallen in love before and has had various brief romances, Kitty is his first significant relationship. She is the first woman he wants to share his life with and even have children with, and in the novel, she is the only representative of the lover function. There is no opposition between right and wrong lover.

Other characters are essential to the progress of Marco's growth, a fact he recognizes himself. It is particularly to Zimmer and Kitty that he credits his "return to the land of the living" (96). Indeed, his growth is to some extent based on the discovery of the importance of others in his life.

*Moon Palace* gets points for love relationship in Feature 26 but not marriage in Feature 27. There are some love relationships in the novel, but all in all it is marked by a lack of well-functioning relationships, which might partly explain the difficulties Marco and Kitty have: Neither has any successful models when they set up house together. They are thus free to invent their relationship from scratch, but they also lack strategies for dealing with problems, as evidenced by their break-up. Both have been raised in one-adult households, and lack first-hand knowledge of intimate, caring, and respectful marriage. And strikingly, *Moon Palace* does not offer any other successful man-woman relationships either: Dora and Marco's uncle were opposites who did not get along; Zimmer has a painful relationship behind him; Effing had a loveless marriage before ending up a life-long bachelor; his assistant, Pavel Shum, never married; Mrs. Hume and her brother are single; and finally, Barber is a bachelor. The book is filled with lonely characters longing for love.

## **Sections 4 and 5: Topical story elements**

Twenty-four out of 26 points in section 4 is a very high result, especially since some of these events, notably hunger and poverty, would have been more likely to occur to a nineteenth-century English orphan than a middle-class American in the 1950s and 60s. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, *Pip*, and *David Copperfield*, who suffer poverty in childhood, Marco is almost an adult when he has he first experiences poverty, and unlike the earlier heroes, he brings it on himself. Poverty does not play the same role of social criticism here as it does in the nineteenth-century British novel, but has a symbolic, existential function, which I will return to in the identity development section.

Table 46. Moon Palace, section 4

Features	Section 4. Topical story elements: Affecting protagonist	Max. points	<i>Moon Palace</i>
29	Experiences poverty	2	2
30	Experiences hunger	2	2
31	Goes to boarding school	1	1
32	Moves to big city or	2	2
33	Moves away from home or	or 2	0
34	Leaves home to go on journey	or 2	0
35	Introduced to new social groups, classes, and professions	1	1
36	Learns skills	1	1
37	Tries on particular role or roles	1	1
38	Falls in love	2	2
39	Has money problems	1	1
40	Is wounded or sick	1	1
41	Nursed back to health by parent substitute or loyal friend	1	1
42	Nurses other sick person	1	1
43	Adopted parent dies	2	2
44	Death of close relative or friend	2	2
45	Repents immoral or insensitive action	1	1
46	Rescued from emergency or cliffhanger	1	1
47	Gets inheritance at the end or	2	2
48	Loses prospective inheritance at the end	or 2	0
49	Gets engaged or married	1	0
50	Has children	1	0
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>

Both Jane Eyre and Marco Fogg are rescued from acute misery and hunger, an experience of fundamental importance in their psychological development. Feeling loved, as well as experiencing that chance events can suddenly and dramatically change everything for the *better*, give them renewed hope and faith in life itself as well a belief in other people. There are two significant “immoral or insensitive actions” that bother Marco’s conscience in the book: The first is the hunger project, the second his behavior towards Kitty when she is pregnant. But he also contributes to the deaths of his father and grandfather. Marco is the only protagonist to both receive an inheritance and lose it, but novels can only receive points for one of these two features.

In section 5, *Moon Palace* scores 8 out of 9 points. As in the Four Classics and other books discussed above, many of the events that happen to other characters serve to give the protagonist a fuller picture of life. When Marco experiences the tragedy of his uncle’s death, he is wholly unprepared. But later he learns that tragedy is quite common. Crime, illness, accidents, financial ruin, and death, although horrible, are normal aspects of life, and have to be faced up to and accepted.

Table 47. Moon Palace, section 5

Features	Section 5. Topical story elements: Affecting secondary characters	Max. points	<i>Moon Palace</i>
51	Serious crime such as murder	1	1
52	Dangerous or disastrous fire	1	0
53	Character seriously ill	1	1
54	Character becomes an invalid	1	1
55	Character ruined financially	1	1
56	Character dies (not close relative or close friend)	1	1
57	Funeral	1	1
58	Identity or family relationship outside protagonist's family revealed	1	1
59	Family secret of other family revealed	1	1
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>

Many of the events in Section 5 take place in stories-within-the-story (as is the case in *The Magus* too). There are several serious crimes, for instance, in Effing's story, such as Scoresby's attack on Byrne in the desert, and Effing killing the Gresham brothers and taking their money. It is also in this story that Effing becomes an invalid, is financially ruined, and has a (loveless) marriage which serves as a contrast to the relationship between Kitty and Marco. But, as noted in my analysis of *The Magus*, it is not unusual for the events in section 5 to be narrated rather than experienced in the Four Classics. The marriages and relationships in *Wilhelm Meister*, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* are, for instance, often presented through conversation. David can see Barkis flirting with Peggotty, but he is not present at their wedding, and what he knows about their relationship he finds out from talking to Peggotty.

Apart from various negative life events, Marco also learns about the strange secrets people carry around. The secrets of his mother, uncle, father, and grandfather have kept a large part of his own history out of Marco's reach.

## Section 6: Setting

In its use of setting, *Moon Palace* is partly traditional and partly innovative. Marco does originally come from a small town in the Midwest, and most of the book is set in New York, but he also spends most of his childhood in Chicago. I have chosen a strict interpretation here, and have given points for Feature 61 but not for Feature 60.

Table 48. Moon Palace, section 6

Features	Section 6. Setting	Max. points	<i>Moon Palace</i>
60	Setting for childhood scenes is countryside or provincial town	2	0
61	English-language novels: Setting after school-leaving age is capital or large city	3	3
62	German-language novels: Setting after school-leaving age is one or more large houses (other than family home)	or 3	
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>

Chicago cannot be dubbed a “provincial town,” but the contrast between West and East that we see in *Moon Palace* is a familiar one in American fiction, and partly corresponds to the province-London distinction in British fiction. New York is the primary setting for Marco’s story, while the (“wild”) West features prominently in Effing’s, and also appears in other contexts throughout the book. The West takes on a symbolic importance as a contrast to the great eastern city, in addition to the fact that Auster builds on centuries-old American beliefs and myths about the West. The province-city distinction in Britain tends to portray the small town or countryside as backward and culturally limited, while London – although it has many negative aspects – also offers freedom, new impulses, and new opportunities. In American culture, the East – although the location of the principal city – is also connected to the Old World (Europe) and symbolizes the past, the restricted, and the artificial. The West is associated with the new, the future, and limitless possibilities. Like *The Great Gatsby*, *Moon Palace* plays around with these conceptions and oppositions, but Auster challenges rather than confirms the national mythology.

It is in the Mid-West that Barber and Emily Fogg have their lives restricted forever by small-minded prejudice, but this is also where Barber later finds the freedom to be an eccentric fat professor who wears hats. And for Effing, the West is the place of death, violence, and tragedy, as well as solitary illumination and the opportunity to start again with a new identity. The West is the virgin land of Blakelock’s moon-light paintings, an image of a harmonious Garden of Eden where “men can live comfortably in their surroundings” (139), but also a symbol of conquest and man’s domination of nature, as suggested when Marco finds that the enormous Lake Powell dam has covered up Effing’s hermit cave.

*Moon Palace* is also interesting in the way it couples various types of space with feelings of isolation or community. In the short summary of his childhood, Marco’s memories of closeness to his uncle and mother take place inside rooms or in dark cinemas. When his uncle sets out for the West, going into the great wide open, he starts the process that leads to

his premature death in a small hired room. Effing also wanted to experience the open spaces of the West when he started on this youthful journey, but ended up totally isolated in a cave. Marco first saw living in New York as an adventure – a chance to meet a lot of new people and acquaint himself with new ideas. Yet, he ended up totally isolated in his room. After being rescued, he experiences friendship and closeness with Zimmer and Kitty in the former's small apartment. And later, his relationship with Effing is set either in Effing's study or on the streets of New York. Effing and Marco's final walk, on which they share an intense feeling of freedom, is what leads to Effing's death. And later Marco and Barber's journey West leads to the latter's fall into an open grave (also a cave of sorts) and subsequent death.

In *Moon Palace*, venturing out, into spaces traditionally associated with freedom, often leads to some form of imprisonment, isolation, or even death. There is a paradoxical back-and-forth movement between the two that changes and complicates the associations of each, and the settings of the novel serve to question the conventional country vs. city and East vs. West dichotomies of British and American fiction. Setting contributes to a larger thematic of growth and change, which is of long standing in the genre, but is given an original and particularly American twist by Auster.

## **Section 7: Plot and Structure**

*Moon Palace* has almost all the traditional plot elements, but like *The Diviners*, adds some unusual elements to the traditional repertoire. These additional elements may have partly masked the novel's close bonds to the classical bildungsroman.

The plot is basically chronological, but whereas a book like *Jane Eyre* might anticipate a particular future event in a line or two, Auster almost obsessively summarizes most of the action before narrating it "properly" in scene and dialogue. The summary of the whole action of the novel on the first page is a good example. This may seem like a departure from the tradition, but in fact it underlines the difference between the bildungsroman and a genre like the picaresque: Whereas in the latter the main question for the reader, the one that drives the plot, is "what happened?," in *Moon Palace* we know the basic story from the start, and the principal question is "how did these events affect the main character?" People and events are not primarily significant in themselves, but in their function as *experience*, as forces that change the main character and help him develop.

Table 49. Moon Palace, section 7

Features	Section 7. Plot and Structure	Max. points	<i>Moon Palace</i>
63	Plot is primarily chronological	2	2
64	Main part of plot about period when protagonist is between 18 and 23 years old	3	3
65	Story goes from childhood to adulthood (early 20s)	2	2
66	Inserted letter(s)	1	0
67	Inserted narrative: Other character's life story (brief)	1	1
68	Inserted narrative: Other character's life story (long)	2	2
69	Turning point, reversal: Protagonist experiences important defeat or failure	3	3
70	Journey toward the end of the book	1	1
71	Returns to childhood home after many years	1	1
72	Protagonist develops from self-centeredness to compassion and desire to be of use	2	2
73	Protagonist discovers tie to his or her family towards end	2	2
74	Protagonist learns to “see” at the end	3	3
75	Episodic structure that nevertheless forms a pattern at the end	1	1
76	Epigrammatic utterance by the protagonist at the end or just before	2	2
77	Projected ending: Protagonist finds a place in society (but expectation may not be met)	2	2
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>

*Moon Palace* cites no letters in full, but phone calls and letters are summarized and sometimes play central roles. It is a phone call that informs Marco of Uncle Victor’s death, his contact with Barber is established through letters, and an unanswered letter is the reason Marco gives for not having known about his father as a boy. When Barber had enquired about Emily Fogg, Victor became afraid “that the real father would come and take Marco away from him.” He therefore left Saint Paul with Marco without replying (249). As an adult, Marco is torn apart by the story, thinking that “if Victor had answered Barber’s second letter ..., I might have discovered who my father was as far back as 1959” (249). Commenting that “[n]o one was to blame for what happened” (249), Marco mourns the “missed connections, bad timing, blundering [... and ...] lost chances” (249). While chance is often a positive force for the protagonists of the Four Classics, here it is as often disastrous.

We have seen that inserted stories in the bildungsroman tend to present the hero with examples of ways of life, ideologies, beliefs and professions, in short, ways of solving the identity issues the main character is facing. In *Moon Palace* as well, other stories serve to enlighten Marco on his own situation. Auster’s use of inserted stories may seem untraditional, particularly because one story is so long. But we must not forget that Goethe’s prototype devotes an entire “Book” to the story of the “Beautiful Soul.” In *Moon Palace* the longest

inserted story is a Western told by the old man Effing, which takes up about 50 pages of the 307-page novel.

A clue to the meaning of Effing's story is found in the structure of the book. Auster says in an interview that "I have never written a book with an even number of chapters, and the reason is that you need an odd number to have a center" (Chénetier 1996a, 9). *Moon Palace* has seven chapters, so the fourth chapter is the middle one. It is also in this chapter that the exact middle of the book falls in terms of page numbers.<sup>53</sup> With 307 pages (an uneven number) the center of the book is on page 153. This is some way into Effing's narrative, and he is talking about what his young traveling companion Teddy Byrne told him the night before they started their trip on horseback:

Byrne told me that you can't fix your exact position on the earth without reference to some point in the sky. Something to do with triangulation, the technique of measurement, I forget the details. The crux was compelling to me, though, it's never left me since. A man can't know where he is on the earth except in relation to the moon or a star. Astronomy comes first; land maps follow because of it. Just the opposite of what you'd expect. If you think about it long enough, it will turn your brain inside-out. A here exists only in relation to a there, not the other way around. There's this only because there's that; if we don't look up, we'll never know what's down. Think of it boy. We find ourselves only by looking to what we're not. You can't put your feet on the ground until you've touched the sky. (153-154)

This brief story can serve as a manual for understanding the story Effing is about to tell Marco: It is a story about someone he is not, and Marco can use it to find himself. Looking at this other man, he can put his own youth in perspective, evaluate what he has done right, what he has done wrong, and which direction he ought to follow. The story is also a hint to the reader about how Auster understands identity development: "We find ourselves only by looking to what we're not. You can't put your feet on the ground until you've touched the sky." We have to understand others before we can understand ourselves. Other people play an essential role in discovering and fashioning one's identity. This is also in line with Erikson's thinking, in which society and mutuality are seen as essential in identity formation.

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<sup>53</sup> This is probably why Auster's novels (at least the editions I have seen), always start on page 1: It is then easy to see how many pages there are and where the center is. His non-fictional books, however, such as *The Invention of Solitude*, *The Art of Hunger*, and the film scripts, do not start on page 1.

According to Sean O'Hagan, a "layering of narrative upon narrative, each one somehow interlinked with the other, and crucial to the novel's underlying themes as well as its overarching structure, is a typical Auster conceit" (2004). This is an apt description of how Effing's story works: Basically a story of *Bildung*, like Fogg's, Effing's life story is a mirror for Fogg to see himself in. But the story does much more than that. It brings up a number of themes that are prominent in the novel as a whole, such as fate and chance, America and the idea of progress, the Westward movement in American history and the moon voyages as a continuation of America's "destiny." It further serves to create a link between personal and national history. As Jean-François Chassay says, there is "a discourse of and on American history" in *Moon Palace* (1995, 216; my translation), and an essential element of this discourse forms part of Effing's story. Moreover, Effing is Fogg's grandfather, so that his story is also part of Fogg's personal history.

Turning points or reversals appear so many times in this novel that it borders on the parodic. In the primary narrative there is Marco's near-death experience and subsequent rescue, his traumatic break-up with Kitty, the discovery of who his father and grandfather are, Barber's fall and subsequent death, and the two inheritances that Marco first gains and then loses. Effing's inserted narrative consists of little but reversals. Auster talks of them as "accidents" (Cortanze 1995, 21; my translation). In the everyday sense of the word, there are car accidents, for instance. But the word also has a philosophic meaning; "an accident is not foreseeable" (Cortanze 1995, 21; my translation). Auster's characters, particularly Effing, have repeated and violent encounters with the unforeseeable that change their lives' direction. Barber's life is very strongly marked by the accidental discovery of himself and Emily Fogg in bed together.

The final part of *Moon Palace* contains the traditional elements such as a journey, and the end combines openness with a clear sense of a development having come full circle. Marco's time with the dying Barber shows how strongly he has developed from "self-centeredness to compassion" (Feature 72). Indeed, his reaction to the three deaths in the book is a good indication of his psychological growth. When Uncle Victor died, he became overwhelmed with self-pity and basically gave up on life. Everything came to revolve around himself, and he cut himself off from others. With Effing he became much less self-centered and self-pitying, and thought more about Effing than about himself. With Barber he manages to devote himself completely to caring for his father until he dies.

What Marco comes to "see" in the end will be discussed in the thematic section, but it basically has to do with acceptance: He goes from wanting to spit on the world for not



conforming to his expectations, to accepting illness, death, and accidents, and wanting to live in spite of them. Seeing, light, and eyes are persistent motifs and metaphors for understanding in *Moon Palace*. The first paragraph of the novel uses the word “see” or “saw” three times, about expectations for the future, about past experience, and about the learning that came from that experience. There are also three instances of seeing in the last paragraph, if we count “looked” and “kept my eyes on.” The ending is in fact mostly about light and seeing: Marco “looked down the curve of the coast,” “saw the lights of the houses being turned on,” and when the moon appears he kept his “eyes on it as it rose into the night sky” (306-307).

I was in doubt about whether to award points for epigrammatic utterance, especially since I could see a need to balance this score against the doubt concerning “chronological plot” (which I gave points for although it is debatable). But there is good reason to interpret two statements in the third-last and penultimate paragraphs as epigrammatic. The first is: “I had only to keep walking to know that I had left myself behind, that I was no longer the person I had once been” (306). This statement aptly sums up what happened to Marco after the death of Barber, but it can also be taken as a more metaphorical interpretation of the whole book. Towards the end, Marco walks, day after day, and his walking produces a change in him. Likewise, it is his decision to pick himself up and get on with his life after his rescue from Central Park that wrought the first major change in him. Going on has changed everything. In one sense, his walk to the west coast of America might seem like a reenactment of the old American frontier myth – that it is possible to go west, leave your old self behind, and reinvent yourself in new surroundings. But Marco’s story is far from this classic, optimistic American myth.

The second statement is perhaps even more epigrammatic: “This is where I start, I said to myself, this is where my life begins” (306). Here Marco picks up the theme of the first page, where he said he remembers “those days” that the book deals with as “the beginning of my life” (1).

The ending of Auster’s novel is not the happy ending of *Wilhelm Meister* or *Jane Eyre*: There is no marriage, children, or fulfillment of the main character’s every wish. There is a sense of loss that cannot quite outweigh the gains, and there is no summary of later events (as in *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield*) to assure the reader that Marco will get what he wants in life. That I nevertheless think the “projected ending” is that Marco “finds a place in society”, it is because of the clear development of inner strength and optimism that has now made him fit for life. As Susan Gohlman says, he is ready to say “I think I can live with it

now” (1990, 25), meaning life, society, and other people. There is also the book he has written to assure us that he has accomplished something and found a niche for himself.

I will now turn to a more detailed study of Marco’s identity development. As with *The Magus* and most of the other novels in this study, the thematic features of Section 9 will only be discussed in relation to the first one, the theme of development.

### **Thematic Analysis: Identity Development**

Reading *Moon Palace* as a bildungsroman, emphasizing the psychological and moral development of the hero from youth to adulthood, I am breaking with much of the criticism on the novel. An interpretation like the following by Aliko Varvogli is more typical: To him, *Moon Palace* demonstrates that, in Linda Hutcheon’s words “the interaction of the historiographic and the metafictional foregrounds the rejection of the claims of both ‘authentic’ representation and ‘inauthentic’ copy alike, and the very meaning of artistic originality is as forcefully challenged as is the transparency of historical referentiality” (qtd. in Varvogli 2001, 121). It is not so much that I disagree with this statement, but rather than being the main point of *Moon Palace*, I see this conclusion merely as a point of departure, a given. While early postmodernist works might have aimed to question absolute truth and “grand narratives” – and these are notable themes in *The New York Trilogy* – *Moon Palace* and the rest of Auster’s later fiction merely take such knowledge for granted, and then move on to other issues. These later novels acknowledge that ultimate truth is impossible and that personal and communal histories come to us in narrative (interpreted) form. But with that acknowledged, these novels move on to tackle moral, emotional, psychological, and political problems of real people in the real world.

Auster does not describe Marco Fogg’s development in the way a novelist situated within the context of Realism or psychological realism would. Yet the psychological and moral development of the hero from youth to adulthood is one, if not *the*, main theme of the novel. Admitting to a great interest in youth and how people become themselves, Auster thinks that “may be why many of my books are connected with what in Germany is called novels of formation” (Cortanze 1995, 20).

*Moon Palace* begins with a portrayal of Marco’s overwhelming grief and despair on the death of Uncle Victor. Marco then starts a process of disintegration, in the course of which he almost loses his self. Next comes a period of recovery, after which Marco starts

committing himself to other people and rebuilding an identity for himself. This is followed by another period of loss, at the end of which Marco seems to realize that he can manage to go on in spite of all the losses and reversals life entails. In the following I will outline the phases of Marco's development, focusing on the process of change. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Auster's particular use of the bildungsroman tradition: *Moon Palace* combines the familiar features of the genre with particularly American themes of personal and national identity development.

### **Childhood through early adolescence**

Like Nicholas in *The Magus*, Marco Fogg sums up his childhood quickly and without much detail at the start of his book. In contrast to almost all the protagonists in this study, however, Marco's childhood seems to have been largely positive, in spite of the relatively early loss of his mother, and his somewhat unusual family situation. There is nothing to suggest that the pre-adolescent stages in Erikson's model (described in Chapter 3, above) have not been resolved normally. Marco does not have the suspicion and fear of other people or the world that comes from basic mistrust. He is autonomous enough to manage at a boarding school and later at university, and has the initiative to find his own apartment and new friends. And he is clearly industrious: He works hard at his studies so that he can dazzle others with his erudition. He knows that it pays to work hard, and as shown by his successful graduation, he is fully capable of working at a long-term project until his goal is achieved. Indeed, the picture we get of Marco as a boy and adolescent is quite normal. Losing a parent is, of course, very traumatic for any child, but otherwise there is no evidence that Marco does not have a relatively normal basis on which to build his identity in adolescence.

Marco's account of his childhood shows two characteristics that are to mark him later in life. The first is his imagination, which is seen in his ability to develop a family history for himself based on very little information. Throughout his childhood he knew nothing about his father because his mother refused to talk about him: "For want of something to cling to, I imagined him as a dark-haired version of Buck Rogers, a space traveler who had passed into the fourth dimension and could not find his way back" (4). Marco's imagination develops further under the influence of Uncle Victor, who "loved to concoct elaborate, nonsensical theories about things" (6). A second characteristic of the child Marco is that he was very perceptive of others' feelings. He remembers his mother's sadness and thought "she was battling against some vast and internal disarray" (4), a very mature interpretation for a child of

less than 11. As a 14-year-old it “pained [him] to notice that [his] new aunt did not laugh very readily at Victor’s jokes, and [he] wondered if that might not indicate a certain obtuseness on her part, a lack of mental agility that boded ill for the prospects of the marriage” (9). The language in these quotations belongs to the adult narrator, but the thoughts are presented as young Marco’s.

When he goes to New York to study in the autumn of 1965, Marco is thus a sensitive young man with a strong imagination, but with an emotional security that comes from being loved and knowing where he comes from.

### **Late adolescence through Uncle Victor’s death: Moratorium**

Enrolling at Columbia in the fall of 1965 marks the start of a time of exploration for Marco, which lasts until the spring of 1967 when his uncle dies. Marco describes himself as “young” (15), and most of the information he gives about himself is typical of adolescence: He wants simultaneously to fit in and to have a unique individuality; he dresses weirdly and monitors his behavior in order to have a particular effect on others; and he changes between studying hard and partying wildly. He was, he says in retrospect, “a grotesque amalgam of timidity and arrogance, alternating between long, awkward silences and blazing fits of rambunctiousness” (15). All quite normal and typical, according to Kimmel and Weiner, who claim that “identity formation requires an active effort to examine types of work, friends, potential mates, and philosophies of life carefully before choosing among them. Successful young people typically vacillate for a time in what they like to do and with whom” (Kimmel and Weiner 1985, 388). The identity Marco is trying out at this stage is that of an intellectual.

The intellectualism and active imagination mentioned earlier are strengthened during this period, and Marco appears split between a private and a public identity, between emotions and intellect. Outwardly, he wants to project an image of the aloof intellectual, dressing fittingly in his uncle’s old tweed suit, and “quoting verses from minor sixteenth-century poets.” But he does not let on to his friends that he wears the suit for sentimental reasons: “Under my nonconformist posturing, I was also satisfying the desire to have my uncle near me” (16). This pattern of posturing and hiding his emotions will become more marked in the next phase of his development.

That Marco is going through a moratorium is indicated by the fact that he is uncommitted but searching. He is getting a college education and trying out various part-time jobs, but has not settled on a career for the future. He is not religiously active, and his lack of

interest in spiritual matters marks him as diffused in this area. He is against the Vietnam War and is a member of various student organizations, but politics are not a very important part of his life. He is, however, intellectually curious, reads voraciously, and enjoys taking part in discussions with other students. In the fall of 1966 he “threw [him]self into a hectic round of late-night drinking with Zimmer and [his] friends, of amorous pursuits, and long, utterly silent binges of reading and studying” (17). Only much later did he understand “how fertile that time had been” (17). He is searching intellectually through his studies, discussions and reading literature, and thus (without being aware of it) preparing for a career as a novelist. He is also experimenting in the interpersonal arena through friendships and love relationships.

The most salient identity domain for Marco at this time is related to career, although it has more to do with roles and lifestyles than with a specific profession: He is experimenting with the intellectual role, rather than concretely aiming for a particular job. The interpersonal area is also prominent: He has a secure and quite close relationship with his adopted father (Uncle Victor) and is getting experience in the areas of friendship and love. Although he has much contact with friends, at least one of whom is described as close (Zimmer), these relations are not fully mature because they are strongly marked by Marco’s concern with others’ perceptions of him. He is preoccupied with projecting a particular image, that of an intellectual outsider, while also feeling emotionally insecure and wanting to fit in. His relations with women are also typical of adolescent exploration rather than commitment. He has short-term relationships with several girls, and spends the summer of 1967 “falling in and out of love with a girl named Cynthia” (17). So in the interpersonal arena, he can also be described as searching.

To sum up, then, Marco’s identity status as a student of 20, before his uncle’s death, can be described as moratorium, a period of little commitment and much exploration. All of this changes on his uncle’s death. Marco decides to give up. He stops exploring and his only commitment becomes his project of “refus[ing] even to lift a finger” (20).

### **Crisis: Diffusion**

In the spring of 1967, After his uncle’s death Marco, Marco changes his life dramatically as he dedicates himself to his project of doing nothing: He decides to keep his promise to his uncle that he would graduate, but otherwise “my action would consist of a militant refusal to take any action at all” (20). Starting an extreme scheme of economizing, Marco changes his

appearance and behavior, and divests himself of most of his belongings. Over time, he finds his thoughts and emotions and even his identity to have changed too.

The first signs of change are in his apartment. Having constructed his furniture out of the book boxes he inherited, Marco's apartment grows increasingly empty as he sells off Victor's books:

I had only to look at my room to know what was happening. The room was a machine that measured my condition: how much of me remained, how much of me was no longer there. ... Piece by piece I was watching myself disappear. (24)

Although the writer and creator of this metaphor, Marco is here taking on the reader's and critic's job of interpretation. Making a room or house stand for the person in it is a familiar metaphor from dream interpretation, as psychologist Joe Griffin notes in his discussion of one of Jung's dreams: "The house, as Jung saw clearly, is a metaphor for the psyche" (2007). Marco reads his own life as though it were a dream, or a text, and the emptying of the room becomes a metaphor for the emptying of the self. The passage also foreshadows the later development whereby Marco's personality and identity diminish to the point of disappearance.

As Marco now embarks on his do-nothing project, he first changes his appearance away from his former intellectual look. This time he is not trying out a new look or role, but merely dressing in a cheap and practical manner: "My friends were startled by this transformation," Marco says, but "what they thought was finally the least of my concerns" (25). His behavior changes in that he gives up doing anything that costs money, including activities with friends. Then, "[b]ecause I did not want anyone to know how hard up I was," (26) he starts lying and making up strange stories to explain away his odd behavior and reluctance to pay for anything. Marco hides the truth of what he is doing behind jokes and does not show his friends his real self or his true thoughts and feelings. He starts playacting, leading one life in private, while playing the role of an invented character in public and with other people. But spending more and more time alone, Marco also becomes increasingly hidden and inaccessible as a person, even to himself.

From the autumn of 1968, Marco has virtually nothing to live on, and as his physical condition worsens, the project starts affecting his thoughts and feelings as well. Eating too little and spending all his time alone, he starts to lose contact with reality. In an attempt to get rid of the feeling of hunger, he tries to separate himself from his body: "In order to rise above

my circumstances, I had to convince myself that I was no longer real, and the result was that all reality began to waver for me” (30). As Auster says about Hamsun’s *Hunger*, “[h]istorical time is obliterated in favor of inner duration” (1993 , 10). Marco experiences hallucinations and black-outs, and is eventually unable to take in a word of what he reads in Uncle Victor’s books. Like Hamsun’s hero, he has days of ecstatic happiness only to be plunged into “a new period of desolation” (33). During his “highs” he is in a state of altered consciousness, almost as if on a drug drip. He has strange thoughts, “clusters of wild associations, a rambling circuit of reveries – but at the time they felt terribly significant” (32). For the last few weeks he spends in his apartment, Marco is barely present in the normal sense. As he later tells the army doctor, he “thought that by abandoning myself to the chaos of the world, the world might ultimately reveal some secret harmony to me” (80). This does not happen. Nothing at all is revealed to him in his solitude.

During the Central-Park phase of his project, Marco’s develops his own philosophy, which is a form of magical thinking. It starts when he finds a ten-dollar bill, and, “persuaded myself that something profoundly important had just happened: a religious event, and out-and-out miracle” (51). Magical thinking denotes the belief that thoughts can have real effects in the world. If a child’s mother dies, for instance, it is quite common for the child to believe he caused it by previously having thought “I wish she was dead.” Marco now starts believing that if something happens in the world, it is not accidental, but has a particular meaning for him. And, conversely, that what he himself does and thinks can affect people and events in the real world: “If I was able to maintain the proper balance between desire and indifference, I felt that I could somehow will the universe to respond to me” (58). As with the “revelations” he had in his apartment, what momentarily feels like progress is more akin to madness.

The death of Uncle Victor and Marco’s decision to “do nothing” thus mark the beginning of a dramatic change in Marco, expressed in appearance, behavior, and finally thoughts and feelings. The reason for the change is given by Marco himself:

[I]n the spring of 1967, Uncle Victor died. This death was a terrible blow for me; in many ways it was the worst blow I had ever had. Not only was Uncle Victor the person I had loved most in the world, he was my only relative, my one link to something larger than myself. Without him I felt bereft, utterly scorched by fate. ... [A]t that point my life began to change, I began to vanish into another world. (3)

Marco brings up the death three times in the first chapter, as if to impress its importance on the reader. In the above quotation, we see three slightly different aspects of it that help explain the tremendous impact the event had on Marco.

Firstly, Uncle Victor's death is the second dramatic loss in Marco's life. He lost his mother when he was only eleven, and this was particularly traumatic because she was a single parent. She had told Marco that his father was dead, and his only other relative was her brother in Chicago. Luckily for the young orphan, Uncle Victor proved a good and loving substitute father. But when Victor died as well, that loss was likely to affect him even more than losing his mother. This may seem illogical, since he was a child when he lost his mother, and 18 when his uncle died. But as John Bowlby has found, such a loss, at whatever age, brings back the pain and fear of the first, childhood, loss, and is thus likely to be felt even harder (1991).

Secondly, Victor's death leaves an emotional hole in Marco's life. He says that his uncle was "the person I had loved most in the world," and, in addition, "he was my only relative" (3). Marco has not yet started a family of his own, and his friendships, although Zimmer seems very loyal, are not intimate enough to constitute a substitute for the unconditional love and feeling of secure base that a family can provide. So the loss of uncle Victor is the loss of an important outlet for Marco's need for intimacy. And Victor was "my one link to something larger than myself," Marco says. His death thus also requires an existential rearrangement; if his life is to have meaning, Marco has to find some other link to society and other people. He has to find a place where he can fit into a larger scheme, and have a function that seems important to him.

Thirdly, Marco says he felt "scorched by fate," which implies a more existential loss. Losing his only parent at the age of eleven, and then his adopted father, his only relatives, must have formed ample proof that there is no limit to the disasters that the world can bestow upon him. It opens up the possibility that Marco has absolutely no control over what matters. The nature of life and the world, or fate, if you like, might be that people are no more than powerless vessels on a stormy sea, at the complete mercy of ruthless elements. And in the face of such dismal evidence it is maybe not strange that Marco should wish to "give up the struggle" (80).

So, to recapitulate, this transition from a period of youthful exploration (moratorium) to aimlessness and depression caused by the death of uncle Victor, which in addition to being a devastating emotional blow also forces Marco to reevaluate his assumptions about life and his own place in the world.



Marcia first expected a change in identity status out of moratorium to be to the higher stage of identity achievement, but his empirical work has shown that regression is also common (Marcia 1976; Kroger 2007, 151).<sup>54</sup> Exploration can be followed by identity diffusion, that is, a state of neither commitment nor exploration, or even by a kind of foreclosure. After the “terrible blow” (3) of Victor’s death, Marco deliberately chooses to go into what looks very like diffusion. As his do-nothing project runs its course, his lack of direction and unconcern about the future become more and more ingrained, until he eventually becomes incapable of making decisions or even thinking about the future: “I had lost the ability to think ahead, and no matter how hard I tried to imagine the future, I could not see it” (41). Time seems to dissolve, to become a string of present moments, and “at each moment the future stood before me as a blank, a white page of uncertainty” (41). This “white page of uncertainty” points back to Uncle Victor’s statement that “life was a story ... and each man was the author of his own story” (41-42). Marco might have been the author of his do-nothing project, but at this point he is not a writer anymore; he has lost control and becomes totally passive.

Marcia finds the “outstanding characteristic” of people in identity diffusion to be “a lack of commitment and a corresponding lack of concern about their uncommittedness” (Marcia 1989, 289). Kimmel and Wiener add that “they cope with problems by deferring action, and they deal with decisions by putting off making them” (Kimmel and Wiener: 401). All these descriptions fit Marco at this time (apart from his dedication to doing nothing). Even when he knows he will be evicted, he does not plan ahead, not even as far as the next day: “When I left my apartment on the first morning, I simply started walking, going wherever my steps directed me. If I had any thought at all, it was to let chance determine what happened” (51). In retrospect, it seems incredible that he could ignore the problem of where he was going to sleep at night, but such thought and behavior is typical of people in identity diffusion; they suppress their problems as long as possible, and forced to decide, choose the first option that comes to mind. Marco ends up sleeping in Central Park, but “only because I was too exhausted to think of anything else” (55). Later, he embraces a kind of magical thinking that implies his needs will be met only if he does not wish for them to be met: “If my wants could be answered only by not thinking about them, then all thoughts about my situation were necessarily counterproductive” (59). Getting what you want only by not wanting it and not

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<sup>54</sup> Indeed, of 7 moratorium individuals in Marcia’s study, only 3 went on to identity achievement while 4 regressed to foreclosure or diffusion (1976, 148).

doing anything to get it is a perfect philosophy for someone who wants to be totally passive. It is identity diffusion with a philosophical underpinning.

Marco's lack of exploration in all identity areas and lack of commitment to either people, a job, or religious and political beliefs make his situation typical of identity diffusion. Curiously, though, his indecisiveness involves a high degree of commitment – a commitment to being uncommitted. Marco is almost fanatically dedicated to his goal of doing nothing. He has created his own particular version of identity diffusion, which fits his imaginative and highly intellectual nature.<sup>55</sup> Also, the project resembles anorexia nervosa in giving a feeling of control along with a high degree of predictability and order, which helps hide the loss of control from the sufferer.<sup>56</sup>

Grief and despair at his uncle's death seem the obvious causes of Marco's regression to identity diffusion, but saying he "invented countless reasons" for his behavior "at the time" (20), Marco also suggest other causes. He mentions testing life, protesting against America, the problem of the draft, and the general social climate. But these rationalizations are cancelled out by the mania of the project:

All kinds of options were available to people in my situation – scholarships, loans, work-study programs – but once I began to think about them, I found myself stricken with disgust. ... I wanted no part of those things, I realized, and therefore I rejected them all – stubbornly, contemptuously, knowing full well that I had just sabotaged my only hope of surviving the crisis. (20)

In spite of his assurances to the army psychologist "that [i]t wasn't because I wanted to kill myself," (80), there are many indications that the projected conclusion to Marco's project is in fact death. In the second sentence of the book, Marco admitted he "did not believe there would ever be a future" (1); and later in the first chapter, he says that the summer of 1969 "seemed almost certain to be the last summer I spent on earth" (28). After breaking his eggs and going to the Chinese restaurant to eat, he tells himself this was "a last meal, the food they serve up to a condemned man before they drag him off to the gallows" (43). Even at the start of the project, he uses very dramatic words about the end of it: "[D]oom," "total eclipse"

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<sup>55</sup> "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," Leo Tolstoy says in the opening line of *Anna Karenina*. To some extent, the same seems to be true of people, since Marcia only has one type of identity achievement while diffusion is differentiated into several different types. Marcia distinguishes five different types of diffusion (1989), while others have suggested further, different, subdivisions.

<sup>56</sup> According to Lindsay George, anorexic patients use control of food intake and the body to compensate for lack of control in other aspects of life (1997, 900).

(twice), “darkness,” “the moon would block the sun” and “I would vanish.” The project resembles a very elaborate, slow suicide attempt, which might of course be a cry for help rather than a real desire for death.

The psychological reason for Marco’s regression to a lower identity status is that moratorium is a very demanding project that is hard to handle without help and emotional support. If adolescents “lack the secure base of operations that family attachment can provide,” Kimmel and Weiner claim, they may not want to risk moratorium: “Fearful and uneasy about exploring uncharted territory without an adequate fall-back position, they may choose not to do so at all – and thereby remain in identity diffusion” (1985, 404). When he loses his uncle, Marco loses the secure basis that Victor’s suit had embodied. Marco had seen the suit – a symbol of Uncle Victor – as a “second skin,” as protection. Lacking a secure base of operation and a fall-back position, moratorium may have become too demanding.

Uncle Victor’s death is too much for Marco to handle. He needs a break before he can take in what has happened and go through a mourning process. Marco therefore “gets off” the moratorium, and regresses to an earlier stage that is less challenging psychologically and emotionally. Diffusion and the do-nothing project accomplish two things at the same time: He no longer has to worry about the future or make difficult choices. At the same time, the project gives his life an amount of order and control that will often be lacking in diffusion, so for a while, at least, life feels bearable.

### **Convalescence: Transition**

After his rescue, Marco stays with his friend Zimmer for a period of convalescence. This is a transition during which he rebuilds his health, tries to shed his old personality, and demonstrates both the persistence of old identity traits and the emergence of new ones. When he moves out of Zimmer’s apartment he is ready to take on new responsibilities and start making commitments to other people.

The first part of his stay with Zimmer is characterized by little outward action and intense self-analysis. Condemning his behavior over the past two years, he decides to become a new man:

More than anything else, I felt a need to purify myself, to repent for all my excesses of self-involvement. From total selfishness, I resolved to achieve a state of total selflessness. I would think of others before I thought of myself, consciously striving to

undo the damage I had done, and in that way perhaps I would begin to accomplish something in the world. ... I was desperate for a certainty, and I was prepared to do anything to find it. (73-74)

Desperate is a key word here, because even as Marco rejects what he has been and avows to change his ways, his mind still operates in extremes and opposites, as it did during his hunger project. His judgments of the past couple of years are harsh and categorical. It should not be difficult for him to find reasons and excuses for his behavior after Uncle Victor's death: Losing his uncle, not having a single relative in the world at such a young age, the general madness of the late 60s, depression, despair. But instead Marco chooses to interpret his past actions in the worst possible light, as "excess of self-involvement" and "total selfishness." He "had thought [he] was acting out of courage," but when he realizes that he had not, he jumps to the opposite interpretation, "the most abject form of cowardice." He sees Zimmer's "badgering as a form of justice, as a richly deserved punishment for my sins" (87-88). In his own eyes, Marco's mistakes are not just mistakes, like those any human being will make from time to time, but unpardonable sins. And such grave transgressions must be "atoned for" in a radical way. The solution Marco comes up with is yet another extreme project, which resembles the first only in his dedication to it. He is obviously a young man of extremes, who thinks in sharp black-and-white contrasts. Such lack of flexibility is typical of the lower identity statuses, diffusion and foreclosure.

There are other signs of continued identity diffusion as well. Marco's thoughts at the beginning of his convalescence are riddled with religious vocabulary. He regards his past mistakes as "sins," and wants to "purify" himself, "repent" and become a "saint" (73-74). His new ambition is evidence of a need to obliterate his old self, recreate himself from scratch, in the manner of both religious saints and a number of American icons, from Benjamin Franklin to Jay Gatsby. He wants "a state of total selflessness," which might mean dedicating his life to others, but may also involve obliteration of what is uniquely individual – his identity. Thinking back on his do-nothing project, Marco finds it "increasingly difficult ... to make sense of the disaster I had created" (73). The last couple of years take on an unreal, enigmatic character, and Marco gives the impression of not quite knowing himself or recognizing himself from one time in his personal history to another. He does not manage to go back and find the causes leading to subsequent effects. This lack of a sense of continuity and understanding of his own actions is also a sign of a lack of a proper sense of identity.

As his stay with Zimmer proceeds, however, there are also signs of change in Marco. His reaction to the letter from the draft board is interesting in its combination of new and old patterns of thought and behavior. His first thoughts upon finding the long-forgotten letter are worst-case scenarios:

In that one instant, everything closed in on me again. I was probably a fugitive from justice, I thought. If I had missed the physical, the government would already have issued a warrant for my arrest – and that meant that there would be hell to pay, consequences I could not even imagine. (74)

The consequences could hardly be worse than the hunger and hardship he has just put himself through, and his reaction thus seems too extreme. But Marco realizes that he has repeated his old habit of not thinking about the future: “I had done nothing to prepare myself for the moment of truth ... inertia had got the better of me, and I had steadfastly shut the problem out of my mind” (75). Not thinking about the future and avoiding necessary decisions are old characteristics, but now that he has discovered his mistakes, he decides to act rather than let the inertia continue. He goes to the examination, resolved to tell the truth: “There was no question of telling him lies,” Marco says. “I had already entered my new period of potential sainthood, and the last thing I wanted was to do something I would regret later” (78). This is an ironic statement, since Marco fails to realize that the truth will be much more effective at getting him out of the draft than any invention might have been. His behavior during the examination shows the same irony. Marco wants to be honest and show his real self, but his words and actions nevertheless appear as “a horrible botch” (80). When Marco was a student in the grip of his obsession, not even Zimmer saw through his clowning and lies. Now, however, his honesty is met with incredulity.

Lack of self-insight is also apparent in the way Marco fails to notice Kitty Wu is in love with him. It is Zimmer who explains that Kitty is afraid to force herself on Marco in case he does not want her. “What are you trying to say?” Marco asks, and Zimmer answers “[t]hat it’s up to you, Fogg. You’re the one who has to make the next move” (84). This conversation is an eye-opener in several ways. In spite of his expressed desire to “achieve a state of total selflessness” and “think of others before I thought of myself,” Marco has continued to be too self-engrossed to notice Kitty’s feelings. He has done nothing to get to know her or even thank her for saving his life. He is astonished to learn that she is in love with him and that he has been too self-concerned to even notice. Marco has also remained fundamentally passive.

His do-nothing project had been a turn to total passivity, and his survival was insured by others. Marco has been trusting his fate to chance, other people, the world, or anything but himself. He has merely responded to whatever has been happening to him or around him. Zimmer's call to action requires a profound attitude change in Marco. He is now asked to resume the role of author of his own story, or hero in his own life.

The first action Marco now takes is to decide to get a job so he can start paying for his room and board and pay back what Zimmer has spent on him. He takes on a difficult translation, and struggling with it he feels "for the first time in months" that his life has a purpose (90). He finally plucks up the courage to ask Kitty back to Zimmer's place for coffee, but only after running into her by chance, and he needs her initiative to dare reveal his feelings. In his description of their first day and night together, Marco emphasizes how it is Kitty who enables him to act and respond: "My desires were very strong, overpowering in fact, but it was only because of Kitty that they were given a chance to express themselves. Everything hinged on her responses" (94). What Marco experiences with Kitty is mutuality. It is the give and take between them that creates what feels to him almost like magic. He thinks of Uncle Victor's baseball analogy: "[A] conversation is like having a catch with someone. A good partner tosses the ball directly into your glove, making it almost impossible for you to miss it" (92). Talking openly with and then making love to Kitty that day is described as one of the most valuable events in Marco's life so far:

Without question it was one of the most memorable things that ever happened to me, and in the end I believe I was fundamentally altered by it. I am not just talking about sex or the permutations of desire, but some dramatic crumbling of inner walls, an earthquake in the heart of my solitude.

What makes the experience so significant is that Kitty manages to get inside Marco in a way nobody has been able to before, and that Marco manages to respond by opening up in a way he did not know he could. Inner walls crumble because Kitty surmounts them. This is Marco's first strong adult experience of intimacy. In Erikson's eight-stage model of human development, intimacy is the sixth stage, following the development of identity.<sup>57</sup> But the beginning of intimacy is also an essential part of identity development. As Marco's

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<sup>57</sup> See chart on page 73.

experience shows, increased knowledge of another can increase one's knowledge of oneself as well.

Marco has now had two positive life-altering experiences: Firstly, being saved in Central Park, and secondly, starting a mutually loving relationship with Kitty. The rescue has taught him some important existential lessons. While the death of his uncle made him aware of the total unpredictability of life, being rescued taught him that life can also be unpredictable in a positive way, changing everything for the better when it is least expected. It thus served to reverse some of the fundamental doubt introduced by his uncle's death.

His rescue further taught him a new lesson about love and the importance of others. He describes it in the following terms:

I had jumped off the edge of a cliff, and then, just as I was about to hit bottom, an extraordinary event took place: I learned that there were people who loved me. To be loved like that makes all the difference. ... I had jumped off the edge, and then, at the very last moment, something reached out and caught me in midair. That something is what I define as love. It is the one thing that can stop a man from falling, the one thing powerful enough to negate the laws of gravity. (50)

If his uncle's death showed Marco life's hidden cruelty and unpredictability, then the rescue proved the opposite; namely that human beings can counter those negative forces. The period with Zimmer continues this lesson. In *The Invention of Solitude* Auster explains how his father managed to stay "on the surface of himself" by living alone. Marriage does not allow this. "Your existence is confined to a narrow space in which you are constantly forced to reveal yourself – and therefore, constantly obliged to look into yourself, to examine your own depths" (15). Marco's do-nothing project gave him the opportunity to be alone, with no commitments and no obligation to be anything to anybody else. Living with Zimmer forces him out of himself, makes him reveal himself and examine himself in a new way. This experience is probably partly what makes him ready to share love with Kitty.

The month Marco spends with Zimmer is a transition from one kind of life to another, and from one identity status to another. It is therefore difficult to say which of Marcia's identity statuses Marco belongs in at this time. Marcia's paradigm is intended primarily for describing stages of a development, rather than the transition from one stage to another. And in Chapter 3, Marco is in transition, wavering between statuses, showing contradictory characteristics and changing attitudes and ideas. At the beginning we see evidence of identity

diffusion as he ignores the future, thinks in black-and-white extremes, and fails to take initiative. But he also starts reacting and doing things when necessary, and his reevaluations of the past and his own character indicate that he is entering a new phase of moratorium. He thinks about moral issues, how he should behave toward others, and gradually even starts thinking about the future. First, his thoughts are only of earning money, so he can pay back Zimmer. But the next step is deciding that he has to find a job so he can support himself and find a place to live. Emotionally there is quite a change, as Marco is forced to acknowledge what he has put himself and others through. He has to deal with Zimmer's judgment that he had "acted like an imbecile" and that nearly killing himself was "inexcusable," "grotesque" and "unhinged" (73). But most importantly, Marco discovers that he has it in him to love and be loved. He starts unlearning his ingrown habits of hiding his thoughts and feelings, and begins to open up to Kitty.

### **Commitment: Moratorium toward achievement**

At the end of Chapter 3, Kitty and Marco start a relationship, and at the beginning of the following chapter, Marco takes the job as Thomas Effing's live-in companion. In the space of a few weeks he has committed himself in three different life areas: Inter-personally (relationships with others), in the area of work, and I think we may also say ideologically. Marco has not found religion or new political beliefs, but he has exchanged the belief that the world's whims, fate, or other mysterious forces dictate his life for a belief in his own and other people's responsibility for their own lives and others'. His newfound independence and commitment to life is demonstrated by his moving out of Zimmer's place and becoming financially independent. Interestingly, after this change, his narrative is largely concerned with others. Only at the very end of the book does he revert to writing and thinking about himself.

Commitment is the prime characteristic of the status Marcia calls identity achievement, that is, having developed a full, well-functioning identity. In Marco's case, however, the commitments are preliminary, stepping stones on the way to identity achievement, rather than a sign of a fully completed identity process. The long period with Effing is a valuable learning period, during which Marco develops his identity in the three abovementioned life areas through the commitments he has made. This period is in fact a new moratorium, but a more serious and contemplative one than his student days. It is with Effing and Kitty that Marco has many of the experiences that comprise Sections 4 and 5 of the BRI,



the “topical story elements,” that serve to introduce the main character of the bildungsroman to life in all its variety: He gets a new home, starts new relationships, learns skills, tries on different roles, becomes a care-giver and care-taker, and achieves insight into a variety of other lives, all very different from his own.

The “job interview” that marks the start of Marco’s new life at Effing’s has some interesting literary and generic echoes that point in quite different directions. Effing’s riddles and the battle of words between the two are reminiscent of fairy tales in which the hero has to pass a test or answer a riddle before being allowed to continue to the great adventure. This suggests that Marco’s new job might be the beginning of a plot of the quest type. Secondly, the scene resembles the opening of Beckett’s play *Endgame* in which an old man sits in a wheelchair with patches over his eyes looking dead. The resemblance is very likely intended, since Auster knew Beckett’s work well. Early in his career, “the influence of Beckett was so strong that I couldn’t see my way beyond it,” Auster has admitted in an interview (Mallia 1992, 265). Beckett’s play holds many interpretative possibilities, but it is common to see in it three generations approaching the end of their lives. It is a humorously depressing, pessimistic play in which there seems to be no hope for the future. Life is just a meaningless waiting for death. The “job interview” thus points in two directions: Either toward an adventure, a test, and rebirth into a new life, or a Beckett-like world of death and gloom. In fact, both possibilities are present; It is up to Marco what he wants to make of what happens to him, and how he wants to interpret it.

Occupational development is less central than the other identity domains in *Moon Palace*, but during the Effing period, it does play a part. The job with Effing is short-term for Marco; he puts the question of what he is going to do with his life on hold, and is thinking primarily about earning his living and managing on his own. Nevertheless, Marco learns a variety of useful skills and develops in ways that will help him in his future career as a writer. Indeed, many of his activities with Effing seem like a perfect training program for a young author. Ostensibly, Effing is getting Marco ready to write his “obituary” or life story, but the training might also have enabled him to write what he calls “this book” (106), presumably referring to the novel *Moon Palace*.

One part of the training takes place on the walks the two take through the city every day. Effing wants Marco to describe everything he sees so that he can picture it for himself, but this is no straightforward task, Marco discovers: “To get what he wanted, Effing should have hired Flaubert to push him around the streets – but even Flaubert worked slowly ... I not only had to describe things accurately, I had to do it within a matter of seconds” (121).

Eventually, Marco does get it right, as he works out that what he has to do is to make Effing “see the things for himself,” not to “exhaust him with lengthy catalogues” (123). He wants to allow the old man “to do the crucial work on his own: to construct an image on the basis of a few hints” (123). This method, of course, also stands as a description of Auster’s own fiction, which has very little detailed description. Marco thus finds a method he can use in his writing.

Marco’s second main task is to read to Effing. The selection of books seems strange, consisting largely of travel narratives and stories of Indians and the American West. After reading contemporary newspaper obituaries for a while, however, it becomes clear that Effing is initiating both himself and Marco into the genres they will need for Effing’s life story. This is thus also part of the creative writing course: Reading other writers is essential to a young author, and knowledge of genres indispensable. Travel narratives, the Western, and stories of exploration also form part of the generic repertoire of *Moon Palace*, and thus serve as valuable background to Marco’s future career as a writer. As this period of Marco’s life ends with Effing’s death, Marco has not yet reached a decision on what to do with his life. Effing’s money gives him a period of financial security, in which he reads, writes a journal, and writes little essays inspired by Montaigne. Kitty thinks he will be a writer, and Marco seems to be heading in that direction.

Marco’s ideological development is also at the forefront during his period with Effing. Twice, Marco compares himself with a monk: His new room is small, bare, and “no larger than a monk’s cell” (107). It has one picture, a part of Thomas Cole’s series about the rise and fall of the New World, and Marco has brought one book: Pascal’s *Pensées*. He says of his task of describing the world to Effing, that “I no longer saw it as an aesthetic activity but as a moral one... I was a monk seeking illumination” (123). The monk imagery indicates interiority, patience, goodliness, and a slow search for a knowledge that is not clearly known before it is achieved. Marco gradually learns to adopt the right attitude to receive the knowledge that is available to him. And as with the teaching of religious and mystical knowledge, the lessons are often in the form of riddles or stories whose points are allegorical or hard to grasp.

Marco’s excursion to the Brooklyn Museum has the feel of mystical initiation, but exactly what he is supposed to learn is left unsaid. Effing’s instructions for the excursion are extremely precise: Which subway to take, what to think about during the ride, not to talk to anyone, how to look at the painting and for how long. It takes Marco a long time to begin to make sense of the dark little painting, which shows a round moon in a dark green sky, over a dark green landscape. Then he reaches an interpretation:

I wondered if Blakelock hadn't painted his sky green in order to emphasize this harmony, to make a point of showing the connection between heaven and earth. If men can live comfortably in their surroundings, he seemed to be saying, if they can learn to feel themselves a part of the things around them, then perhaps life on earth becomes imbued with a feeling of holiness. ... It struck me that Blakelock was painting an American idyll, the world the Indians had inhabited before the white men came to destroy it. ... Perhaps, I thought to myself, this picture was meant to stand for everything we had lost. It was not a landscape, it was a memorial, a death song for a vanished world. (139)

This painting introduces Marco not only to the painter who inspired Effing's trip to the West, but to a whole range of themes that will be central in his own identity development: How to relate to the past, nostalgia, the connection between personal development and the development of America, innocence and experience, inner and outer landscapes, the connection between people and their world. Marco's interpretation of the painting reflects a common interpretation of American history, one that is repeatedly played with and challenged in the course of *Moon Palace*.

Effing's story was touched upon in the BRI analysis, but it also needs to be discussed in relation to Marco's development toward his own world view. Blakelock's painting *Moonlight* introduces themes relating to the meaning of life and America: It shows an American idyll of heaven and earth as one, when people were comfortable in their surroundings, and progress and expansion were not the key to happiness. Effing's life story continues these themes. Effing made the mythological American journey, from East to West, to the Frontier, to become a new person. When Byrne died, Effing realized he could pretend to be dead too, thereby avoiding responsibility for the young man's death. The cave in the desert and the death of the old man gave him a chance to take a new identity, to kill his old self, and show up in California under a fictive name and with an invented life story. He delighted in this freedom, changing his story frequently, and pretending to be whoever he felt like being. Effing is thus another version of "the American, this new man," as Crèvecoeur called him, reborn in the American West.

As a metaphor of American history, however, Effing's story is ambiguous and conflicting. Loss and gain run side by side, and each step forward is accompanied by loss. The technical advances that have taken place in Effing's lifetime – electricity, engineering, the revolution in communications – have done away with the landscape of the American West as

well as the peace and harmony Marco finds in the painting *Moonlight*. Effing's journey West gave him the opportunity to develop into an artistic genius, but it also broke his link with his past and the art world so that his art never made it into the world. In addition, the paintings were lost, and Effing then gave up painting, so that nothing seems to have come of his illumination. Effing gained his freedom from a stifling marriage, but simultaneously cut himself off from his son and grandson, and came to spend most of his life in relative isolation. If we see individualism as freedom and the relational individualism of the bildungsroman as two different stages, Effing only reached the first phase, that of freedom.

Staying with Effing during his final illness and in fact helping him commit a kind of prolonged suicide, Marco encounters death again, but in a very different form than the sudden, premature deaths of his mother and Uncle Victor. This is death as it "should" be, in the sense that Effing is old and his life is coming to its natural end. Marco understands this, and tackles the experience with warmth and understanding. Close encounters with death have featured in all the novels studied, and in fact, *Jane Eyre*, *Pip*, *Philip* and *Morag* are all present at the deathbed of someone close to them. Randolph Shaffner sees coming to terms with death and one's own mortality as a final apprenticeship in the bildungsroman: "A third step even loftier than the heightening of life's inherent values encompasses the metaphysical world of death" (1984, 109). Effing's death helps Marco come to terms with death and accept it as a natural stage.

Effing's "suicide" is also central in Marco's development of responsibility and the ability to act and choose even in very difficult circumstances. He now says that "not a day has gone by when I have not regretted the decision I made that night, but at the time it seemed to make sense" (213). Marco's dilemma has a lot in common with those faced by Conchis and Nicholas in *The Magus*. Like Fowles's characters, Marco is faced with a moral choice that has no correct answer, only the possibility of making a choice, accepting responsibility for making it, and living with the consequences.

In the interpersonal life area, working for Effing offers Marco an opportunity to expand his knowledge of people and to practice being in close relationships that are quite different from any he has had before. Mrs. Hume becomes a model for dealing with Effing, offering an example of accepting, selfless love. Marco says that: "Mrs. Hume was a rock. When it comes right down to it, no one has ever taught me as much as she did" (116). Mrs. Hume influences him with her goodness, and it is probably her open, accepting attitude that, soon after his arrival, makes Marco show a side of himself we have not really seen before. During a meal with Mrs. Hume and Effing, Marco says of the death of his mother: "[T]he

whole business hit me hard. I was only eleven when it happened, and I went on missing my mother for a long time after that. To be perfectly honest, I still miss her now” (110). This is by no means a dramatic revelation, but it shows a new kind of honesty and openness. It is also an indication that Marco has started to change.

In spite of Marco’s claim about Mrs. Hume, it is Effing who provides Marco with the greatest opportunity for learning. Effing’s persistent ambiguity is a challenge to Marco’s penchant for dichotomous thinking, seeing the world and other people in terms of the stark opposites of good or bad. As mentioned above, Effing is a complex mixture of positive and negative qualities: He is both passive and aggressive, weak and strong, victim as well as master. Marco learns that a person can be good and bad at once: “If this good side of Effing was genuine, however, why didn’t he allow it to come out more often? Was it merely an aberration of his true self, or was it in fact the essence of who he really was? ... Effing was both things at once. He was a monster, but at the same time he had it in him to be a good man” (117). Particularly at the beginning, Marco finds this ambiguity hard to understand and accept, as he finds it hard to accept the contradictions in himself. This is seen for instance in his harsh attitudes to his old self during his convalescence, and his decision to be not merely good, but a saint. With Effing, Marco learns to accept that others, as well as himself, are composed of many, different, and sometimes contradictory and despicable aspects. He learns that each person has many roles. His relationship with Effing combines the professional and personal, and both play different parts: At times Marco takes on a mothering role, while at other times he seems to have become Effing’s adopted son, and the only reason for his being there is so that Effing can teach him things. Marco commits himself to the job, and gradually also to Effing as a person, but the demands this commitment places on him are constantly changing.

The relationship between Effing and Marco is complex and difficult for most of their time together, but it changes after Marco assists the old man in the project that leads to his death – “I had made the ultimate gesture of validating his freedom” (213) – and that is why Effing starts loving him. His decision to help Effing is described as a critical turning point for Marco. As when he first made love with Kitty Wu, the experience makes him feel he has crossed an internal border: “It was as though I had crossed some mysterious boundary deep within myself, crawling through a trapdoor that led to the innermost chambers of Effing’s heart” (213). The image is paradoxical in that the boundary is inside Marco, but crossing it leads to Effing’s heart. A similar idea appears several times in *Moon Palace*, starting on page 1, when Marco talks of “saving myself through the minds of others” (1). These images

establish a close connection between personal growth and relations to others. Here and elsewhere Marco is seen to mature as a result of relations with other people, but it is also necessary for him to change, to open up, in order to make it possible for others to have that effect on him.

During Effing's final illness, Marco and the old man have a close and open relationship. Marco spends almost all his time by Effing's bed, and Effing seems quite changed, behaving "with remarkable gentleness" (216). Marco now tells him about his former life, his mother, his uncle, and his collapse and rescue. And Marco says that Effing "now doted on me as if I were his own flesh and blood" (216). At this stage, neither has any idea that they are related, but the relationship between them shows that intimacy is not only possible between family members. Quite naturally, because of what they have gone through together, Marco and Effing start treating each other as the grandfather and grandson they in fact are.

Marco's relationship with Kitty continues throughout this period, giving him a better grasp of intimacy and making it increasingly clear to him what kind of relationship he wants in the future. Setting up house together, Marco and Kitty establish gender roles that break with what is common at the time: Kitty takes a job for the summer, while Marco stays at home, shopping and doing the housework. He says that he "fell into it naturally, without any second thoughts" (231), and that he and Kitty "began to suspect that we were heading toward marriage" (231). Marco's new friendship with Effing's son, Solomon Barber, quickly becomes close and intimate: "We talked freely almost from the beginning..., and because he was not someone who was afraid of the truth, I was able to talk about his father without censoring myself" (250). Their friendship fosters a new openness in both of them, and Barber tells Marco things he has never told anyone else.

According to James Marcia, "[i]dentity achievement persons have undergone significant exploration and have made commitments in most interview areas" (1994, 73). Marco has clearly undergone exploration and made several commitments. Marcia distinguishes between the temporary commitments of moratorium and those of identity achievement by how easily they may be changed. Marco's commitments now are of different types. His commitment to Kitty is long-term, a relationship he aims to make last. He knows he wants his own family, and he is willing to work to achieve it. This commitment seems of a mature, achieved type. In the area of work, however, Marco has not made a long-term choice. The job with Effing is temporary, not an integral part of his identity in the way it is for Mrs.

Hume. Marco nevertheless becomes committed to the man on a personal basis, even helping Effing prepare for death.

During his time with Effing, and up to the break between him and Kitty, Marco develops a firmer sense of identity and comes closer to finding out what kind of future he wants. He has developed a new form of intimacy, which is also a sign of identity achievement.

## **Changes and loss**

When Marco leaves Effing's house after the old man's death, 200 of the book's 300 pages are also over. After this the tempo speeds up. There is more outward action, and the focus shifts back to Marco again, although there are also long passages about Solomon Barber, his father. Marco's life now takes one dramatic turn after the other, and many of these involve serious losses. At the end of the book Marco has seemingly lost everything he had gained so far: His girlfriend (whom he thought he was going to marry), his father, his grandfather, and the inheritances left to him by Effing and Barber. Nevertheless, all these losses do not make Marco decide to give up and "spit on the world" (20), as Uncle Victor's death did, and the final scene is one of hope that Marco will manage to build a life for himself. I will now take a closer look at each loss, and Marco's reactions to them to see how his identity develops throughout the remainder of the book.

Effing's death does not have the dramatic effects on Marco that Victor's death did. This might be partly due to the fact that Marco had time to prepare for it. Besides, Effing was very old, rather than "a fifty-two-year-old man whose health has always been good" (3), and Marco was present throughout the process, offering all the help and support he could. He also has his relationship to Kitty to sustain him, and Effing's death gives him a new freedom: "Effing's death had released me from my bondage to him, but at the same time, Effing had released me from my bondage to the world" (228). Echoing what happened to Auster when his father died, Marco's inheritance from Effing makes it possible for him to write. He does not have to earn money for a while. This first loss is what makes possible a new period in Marco's life; something is gained as something is lost.

The next loss is much more devastating: His break-up with Kitty leaves Marco feeling "that my whole life had been taken away from me" (281). This is the only serious loss in the book that is not caused by death, but by Marco himself moving out. The problems between Marco and Kitty start when she becomes pregnant, and the couple realize that they want

different things: He wants her to have the child, while she wants to have an abortion and start a family later, when they are ready for it. For Kitty the pregnancy and the question of how to deal with it are practical concerns that can be discussed rationally. She does want children; she just thinks it is not the right time. She wants to finish her studies and become a dancer first. Marco, however, reacts in a purely emotional manner, and it is impossible for him to understand her way of looking at the problem. The possibility of becoming a father opens up a whole complex of raw emotions from his childhood, and he reacts in ways that he can neither control nor understand: "I shut myself up in a stubborn irrationality," he says, "more and more shocked by my own vehemence, but powerless to do anything about it" (279).

This kind of overwhelming, "irrational" emotional reaction is a clear sign that the issue of the pregnancy has touched a nerve in Marco, something he is especially sensitive to, and that is more related to him and his past experiences than the issue in front of him:

The baby was my chance to undo the loneliness of my childhood, to be part of a family, to belong to something that was more than just myself, and because I had not been aware of this desire until then, it came rushing out of me in huge, inarticulate bursts of desperation. (280)

The baby offers Marco the chance to give his own child the family that he did not have. And because the issue is related to something buried way back in his childhood, his reactions are also those of a child: He is totally inflexible. In the end, he nevertheless has to go along with her decision to have an abortion, while still feeling bitter and angry at Kitty. He wants to punish her for killing his baby, and discovering his own potential for harshness and cruelty makes him feel he is losing himself as well. This is the reason he gives for finally leaving her, even though Kitty "actually went down on her knees and begged [him] not to go" (281-282). Having lost the relationship, their baby, and his money, Marco feels that "everything was gone" (281).

Staying with Barber, Marco goes on loving Kitty as much as ever. He becomes obsessed by her absence, and feels he has lost part of his identity: "Kitty's body was a part of my body, and without her there beside me, I did not feel that I was myself anymore. I felt that I had been mutilated" (284). He also feels that "my life had come to a dead end" (289), and that is why he goes along with Barber's plans to go looking for Effing's cave in Utah. What appeals to him is "the idea of a useless quest," "a journey that was doomed to failure" (288). Seeing the expedition as "the leap into emptiness I had always dreamed of" (288), Marco



reasons much like he did after the death of Uncle Victor. His feelings of depression and dejection are again very strong. There are, however several significant differences between his reactions now and his earlier do-nothing project. Firstly, he is not doing this alone. When disaster strikes, he goes to Barber for help rather than isolate himself with his grief. He also takes care of his material needs by getting a job, even though he does not like it. Thirdly, this project is not half as dangerous as the first one, and it is not likely to cost him his life. So although depressed and feeling life is over, Marco does go on with the business of living.

Although Marco feels he has nothing more to lose after Kitty is gone, it turns out that he has. Watching Barber's face in the cemetery and realizing that he is his father, Marco's first reaction is intense anger and disgust. He starts shouting abuse at Barber and pushing him, making Barber stagger backward until he falls into the open grave. Marco is not angry because he dislikes Barber or because he does not want him to be his father. His reaction is caused by a combination of shock and distress at having to change so many things he has formerly believed about himself and the world: "Barber had loved my mother. From this single, incontestable fact, everything else began to move, to totter, to fall apart – the whole world began to rearrange itself before my eyes" (292). Marco is emotionally overwhelmed, and because he does not know what to do, he gets angry.

The scene at his mother's grave has an unreal quality about it, and the pervasive heat and sunshine bring to mind Albert Camus' *The Stranger*. Not only does the sun figure prominently in that book, but its central events concern the funeral of a mother and a killing. When Marco and Barber first leave the car, they feel "the broiling summer heat" (290). A little later "[t]he sun was at the top of the sky . . . , and the whole cemetery was shimmering with a strange, pulsing glare, as if the light had grown too strong to be real" (293). At the funeral of his mother, the protagonist of *The Stranger* reflects: "[T]oday, with the sun bearing down, making the whole landscape shimmer with heat, it was inhuman and oppressive (Camus 1989, 15). The possible allusion to *The Stranger* brings in the themes of human motivation, chance, responsibility, and the question whether life is absurd.

Barber's death differs from Uncle Victor's in that Marco is present, and from Effing's in that Marco knows about the familial bond between himself and the dying man. He faces the same task Pip did with Magwitch, having to come to terms with the totally unexpected bond between himself and the older man:

For twenty-four years, I had lived with an unanswerable question, and little by little I had come to embrace that enigma as a central fact about myself. My origins were a

mystery, and I would never know where I had come from. This was what defined me... Now that I had found him, the inner disruption was so great that my first impulse was to deny it. Barber was not the cause of the denial, it was the situation itself. (295)

What should have been a positive experience and a gain is described as a loss: Finding his father means losing his old sense of who he is, and Marco thus experiences a “blow” or “shock” (295); he has to change his identity to incorporate having a father. Acceptance comes when the physical resemblances between himself and Barber become apparent: “We looked like each other ... I was Barber’s son, and I knew it now beyond a shadow of a doubt” (296). At the same time, Marco also has to start accepting that Barber will die. He cannot, however, allow himself to do this fully either, because he wants to be strong to support his father as much as he can at the end. He thus ends up feeling “numb” (297), and it is only when he is overwhelmed by despair at not getting chicken pot pie in the canteen that he realizes “how fragile my world had become” (298). Marco himself has become equally fragile. The effort of coping with all that is happening to him is too much for him, and it seems only a matter of time before he has to suffer some form of breakdown.

Barber’s death is related in a few, simple lines: “Barber died on September fourth, just three days after the incident in the restaurant. He weighed only 210 pounds at the time, and it was as though half of him had already disappeared, as though once the process had been set in motion, it was inevitable that the rest of him should disappear as well” (298). The funeral is described in more detail than the death itself, but as with Uncle Victor’s funeral, Marco’s feelings are largely absent. We get to know that he is not “up to spending the day with strangers” (301), and then that the Rabbi presiding at the funeral considered him insane. Rabbi Green’s advice echoes the words of the building superintendent when Marco is evicted at the beginning of the book:<sup>58</sup> “‘you’re a very disturbed young man,’ he said. ‘If you want my advice, I think you should go to a doctor’” (301). What Marco does, however, is to go back to the motel room and wreck it. He punches holes in the walls, smashes the furniture, “destroy[s] the place from top to bottom” (302). Marco describes this as happening “for no apparent reason,” and as an experiment to find out how flimsy the room and the objects in it

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<sup>58</sup> “You sound like a fuck-up to me. A smart college boy fuck-up. ... If I was you, I’d go see a doctor,” said Fernandez, suddenly showing some sympathy. “I mean, just look at you. It’s pretty sad, man. There ain’t nothing there no more. Just a lot of bones” (46).

really are, but anger seems a much more likely cause. It also repeats his violent reaction to finding out that Barber was his father.

Barber's death makes Marco call Kitty. It is as though the loss of a loved one forces him to search for somebody else to love. Reaching out for what he needs is a positive, constructive reaction. There have been no indications that Marco has been thinking about going back to Kitty since leaving New York, but now he suddenly admits that he "can't stand being without [her] any more" (299). "I tried to do it, but I can't," (299) he tells her. Kitty, however, has been hurt too badly to try again, and the way the call ends leaves the impression that it is their last conversation. Marco drives away from Chicago feeling "hypnotized by my own loneliness" (302). He has no relatives, no close friends, no girlfriend, no job, and no cause to believe in. What gives him back a sense of direction is deciding to continue the senseless project he had embarked on with Solomon Barber – looking for Effing's cave in the desert: "[K]nowing that I had a purpose, that I was not running away from something as much as going toward it, gave me the courage to admit to myself that I did not in fact want to be dead" (203). Marco says he knows from the beginning that he is not going to find the cave. Nevertheless, discovering that the cave has been flooded by Lake Powell leaves him feeling crushed. Again he has to face the question of what to do now: "It was an old problem for me by then, but my sense of defeat was so enormous that I failed to think of anything" (205).

The final blow comes when his car gets stolen along with the 10,000 dollars that constituted his inheritance from Barber. Again Marco reacts with anger, shouting curses at the cars that do not stop when he tries to hitch a ride. After his first night of sleeping out in the open he concludes that "the theft had not been committed by men. It was a prank of the gods, an act of divine malice whose only object was to crush me" (305). Marco's anger continues, and as he starts walking westward he is both dazed and crushed: "For the next two weeks I, was like someone who had been struck by lightning. I thundered inside myself, I wept, I howled like a madman" (306). He finds himself in a similar situation to Effing after Byrne's death. Effing had also been lost in the desert, where "he howled almost constantly for three days" (165).

As when Uncle Victor died, Marco feels he has lost everything. The difference is that this time he keeps walking. He manages to go on, even though he feels he cannot. He starts talking to people again and even lets himself be seduced by a waitress in Valentine, Arizona. As he approaches the Pacific, he is "borne along by a growing sense of happiness" (306). On reaching the ocean, he seems confident and at ease, and the lines he says to himself are full of hope: "This is where I start ... this is where my life begins" (306). The last image we are left

with is also one of hope. Marco sees the sun disappear, watches the lights being turned on in the houses, and then sees the moon come up. As we have been told twice in this novel, “[t]he sun is the past, the earth is the present, the moon is the future” (97, 233).

The book opens with Marco recalling his youth, when he “did not believe there would ever be a future” (1). It closes on a luminous symbol of the future filling the night sky. Recent events have not given Marco much reason to be hopeful, but internal changes have liberated him from his dependence on external factors. He has grown so that he is no longer crushed by external circumstances, but is able to go on. He has proven to himself that he can manage. He can take care of himself, and he can accept help from others. Although Marco is uncommitted interpersonally and occupationally, he has developed a philosophy of life that prepares him for future commitment. As Auster said in an interview, Marco “only reaches the beginning, the brink of his adult life. And that’s where we leave him – getting ready to begin” (McCaffery and Gregory 1992, 318).

### **Maturity: The time of writing**

Apart from the few remarks concerning his accidental meeting with Zimmer in the street in 1982 (106), Fogg says nothing about his life at the time he is writing the book. There is no summary of the period between the end of the story and the present time. We know he survived the events related in *Moon Palace*, and we know he became a writer (of at least one book, because we are reading it). We also know he made it back to the East, because his meeting with Zimmer took place on Manhattan. All we can know about Fogg the adult has to be inferred from his attitude to the story he is telling, from the style of his narrative, and the ordering of the plot. The narrator’s direct intrusions are few and far between. Looking for evidence of the adult Fogg’s attitudes and feelings is generally a search for tiny markers, an “impossible” here and a “tragic” there.

Fogg the narrator sometimes comments on the thoughts and actions of his younger self; he passes moral judgments, and finds that he was immature, self-centered, posing, lacking in courage, etc. His criticism is often clad in irony, as when he says he started using the signature “MS Fogg” at 15, “pretentiously echoing the gods of modern literature” (7). Looking back, he is ashamed of the persona he put on as a student: “It almost makes me blush to remember the ridiculous poses I struck back then” (15). But he also shows compassion and understanding for his younger self, and tries to explain how he felt and why he acted as he did. It is the mature narrator who explains Uncle Victor’s death as “the worst blow I had ever

had” (5) and sees that “he was my only relative, my one link to something larger than myself” (5). Young Marco could probably not have given this explanation, and for the reader, it serves to explain why Marco reacted in such a desperate, illogical way. It also serves to undermine the rationalizations and philosophical explanations young Marco provides later.

Fogg’s attitude to the events he relates is often tinged by nostalgia and regret. On the one hand, he thinks of the love and the good things of his past and misses them. On the other hand, thinking about his past brings up a lot of sadness; sadness about both things that went wrong and things he himself should have done differently. “Even now,” he says, “I cannot think of Barber without being overwhelmed by pity” (235). He blames himself for some of his actions and decisions, and for not understanding things, such as not noticing his uncle’s failing health.

Sometimes, what Fogg feels about his old self is incomprehension: “God knows why I behaved like that” (20), he says about his decision not to seek financial help after his uncle’s death. And he is quite baffled that he did not worry about where to sleep when he had to leave his apartment: “Remarkable as it seems to me now, I had not given any serious thought to this problem” (54). The narrator’s comments and evaluations thus make it clear that there is a substantial difference between who he is now and who he was in the story he is telling. However, he does not give enough information for the reader to ascertain exactly who he has become. He has matured, but the end of his story is as open as that of *Wilhelm Meister* and *Great Expectations*.

Fogg’s overall interpretation of the story he is telling is present from the first page, in the way he juxtaposes his youthful apocalyptic outlook with his present view of the time as “the beginning of my life” (1). We thus know from the start that the story is told to convey that interpretation – something he thought was going to end in disaster, in fact turned out to get him ready for life. It is thus a story of growth.

### ***Moon Palace* as Bildungsroman**

Auster himself suggested a link to the bildungsroman when he called *Moon Palace* “a story about families and generations, a kind of *David Copperfield* novel” (Mallia 1992, 276).

Based on the BRI analysis of *Moon Palace*, it makes sense to regard it as part of the bildungsroman tradition.<sup>59</sup> In fact, Auster's novel conforms to the model of the Four Classics on so many points that its total score is just four below *Great Expectations*. The score suggests a completely traditional bildungsroman, which, of course, is not the case. But the manner in which *Moon Palace* differs from the older novels is not easily detected from the index.

In its treatment of identity development, *Moon Palace* – along with *David Copperfield* and *The Magus* – downplays the occupational sphere and puts more emphasis on interpersonal identity and beliefs. Marco is seen to grow in his appreciation of other people, and his relationships become increasingly intimate and mature. Although he sees life and the world as cruel and capricious – both after losing his Uncle Victor and after his car is stolen in the desert – he nevertheless comes to appreciate that chance can also play a positive role. An analysis of the phases in Marco's development shows that the book makes much of the *process* of change. Although Auster's hero is moving in a positive direction, the process is a complicated one, with a serious regression and two long, intermediate stages. And although critics disagree about the novel's realism, Fogg's development is psychologically motivated and understandable. Auster says of *Mr. Vertigo* that it "is a realist novel" (20). Apart from Walt's levitation, "everything is true: the psychology of the people, the historical references, everything" (20). The same, in my opinion, goes for *Moon Palace*.

A difference between *Moon Palace* and the other novels in this study is that, although many have very open endings, none leave the protagonist with so little to show for his efforts. I have argued that Marco has come a long way by the end of the book and that he has a much clearer sense of his own identity. It would, however, also be possible to argue that he is not identity achieved. To the extent that maturity is measured in commitment, Marco could be regarded as uncommitted in all identity areas. When I argue otherwise, it is because Marco knows what he values; he knows what kind of love relationship he wants, he knows he wants to be a father, he can be a good friend, and close relationships will be important for him in the future. Although he is uninterested in having a career in the traditional sense, he likes creative work, particularly writing. He has yet to make concrete commitments to people and projects, but he is ready to do so.

The fact that Marco has, in a sense, lost everything by the end of the novel is part of its treatment of loss and defeat, which runs through many levels of the text, and receives even

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<sup>59</sup> *Moon Palace* can, of course, still, and simultaneously, participate in other genres as well.

more weight here than in the earlier books. After hearing the story of Barber's life, Marco concludes: "That's what the story boils down to, I think. A series of lost chances" (249). The same holds for *Moon Palace* as a whole. Although chance plays a major role in the book, it is the lost chances that matter most. Lost chances feature strongly in Marco's story, as in those of his father and grandfather. Lost chances also tie these personal life stories to the larger (hi)story of America.

What Marco most regrets toward the end is that he did not get to know his father when he was a boy. Not only might he "have discovered who my father was as far back as 1959" (249), but other chances to form positive bonds and create functioning families were also lost: Effing deprived his son of the chance to know him and grow up with at least one loving parent; Marco's mother refused to forgive Barber or tell Marco who his father was; and Marco and Kitty together destroy the potential of a family when Kitty chooses to have an abortion and Marco refuses to forgive her and continue their relationship.

In the case of America, the idea of lost chances finds a powerful symbolic representation in Blakelock's painting *Moonlight*. Stephen Weisenburger finds Marco/Auster's interpretation<sup>60</sup> of the painting to be the "ideological center of *Moon Palace*" (7), and suggests that "[w]hat most troubles him (and Auster) is the loss of a unique chance ... for innovative cultural contact" (7). Neither Auster nor Marco mention cultural contact, but they both see Blakelock's painting as a painfully nostalgic image of "everything we had lost," "the world the Indians had inhabited before the white men came to destroy it" (Auster 1989, 139; Auster 1987, 105). What had been lost was a chance for people to "live comfortably in their surroundings" and "feel themselves a part of the things around them" (Auster 1989, 139; Auster 1987, 105).

America's westward expansion and relentless technological progress link Blakelock's painting and the Apollo moon landing that opens the narrative. Like the nineteenth-century painters "who showed Americans what the West looked like" (149), thereby fuelling the drive westward, the astronauts represent another stage in American conquest. As Effing says: "Manifest Destiny! They mapped it out. ... Those were the last bits of the continent, the blank spaces no one had explored. ... The golden spike driven right through our hearts" (149). The words echo Marco's dazed description of the moon walk he sees on TV: "I saw the two padded figures take their first steps in that airless world, bouncing like toys over the landscape ... planting a flag in the eye of what had once been the goddess of love and lunacy. Radiant

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60 The description and interpretation of *Moonlight* in *Moon Palace* is lifted virtually word for word from an article Auster wrote for *Art News* in 1987, "Moonlight in the Brooklyn Museum."

Diana, I thought, image of all that is dark within us” (31). Both the moon image and the “moon palace” of the novel’s title represent a dream of utopia. The moon, Auster says, is “the longing for what is not, the unattainable, the human desire for transcendence” (McCaffery and Gregory 1992, 317). Throughout its history, America itself has been such a symbol of the ideal, whether the perfect world has been located before the arrival of white men or in the distant future of the New Jerusalem that the Puritans hoped for. According to Sacvan Bercovitch, “[t]he New England Puritans gave America the status of visible sainthood” (1975, 108). For them, America became the City of God foretold in the Bible, and America the elect nation (106-107). “The subsequent impact of their concept cannot be overestimated,” Bercovitch claims (108), finding their legacy in the “American dream, manifest destiny, redeemer nation, and fundamentally, the American self as representative of universal rebirth” (108).

According to Karen Tolchin (2006), the reason for the endless laments in a certain type of American coming-of-age novel that she found to include *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The World According to Garp*, among others, is that the heroes of these works are waiting for utopia. They find it unbearable that their dreams are not coming true, and their only response is to complain or have mental breakdowns. Marco Fogg tries this road, but gives up on it when he almost dies in Central Park without any fundamental truths being revealed to him. The rest of *Moon Palace* is a succession of similar stories – stories about people whose great hopes came to nothing but defeat. Alongside these runs the story of America in the late 60s: The chaos, the violence, the feeling of Marco and so many others that America has failed to live up to its promise. In spite of its latest triumph – the conquest of the moon – Marco’s conclusion is that “since the day he was expelled from Paradise, Adam had never been this far from home” (31). America had never been so far from realizing its ideals.

The individual stories of defeat include Barber’s tragic love story and Effing’s yo-yo-like life that results in a very lonely, bitter old man whose major achievement is to die on an appointed day. There are also some true stories with similar ends: That of the brilliant painter Blakelock, for instance, whose *Moonlight* was sold for fourteen thousand dollars, “the highest price ever paid for the work of a living American artist” (132). Yet Blakelock and his family lived in abject poverty, and the painter spent the final decades of his life in a mental institution. And then there is the story of Nikola Tesla, the once famous inventor, that ends no better. In Effing’s youth, Tesla “was like some prophet of the future age” (144). Tesla lit up the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1898 with electricity, and proved that men had the power to tame the forces of nature and build a future of their own choosing. He symbolized



“[t]he total conquest of nature! A world in which every dream was possible” (144). But even though Tesla could work wonders with the forces of nature and control energy, he could not control the direction of his own life. “Mr. Tomorrow, the prophet of a new world” (148) ended up a penniless old man who talked to pigeons in the park and prophesied about death rays. Neither could he control his own inner life. He was always “morbidly afraid of germs, paralyzed by every kind of phobia, subject to fits of hypersensitivity that nearly drove him mad” (144).

The conflict between the real and the ideal runs through all the works in this study. Some, such as *David Copperfield* and *The Magus*, manage to reconcile the two, so that the real becomes almost ideal. *Wilhelm Meister* goes further, choosing to end on an elegiac note of perfect bliss. *On Human Bondage* and *Jane Eyre* can be placed between these two, while *Great Expectations* and *The Diviners* leave their protagonists fulfilled, but a bit disappointed that reality has not given them the love they dreamed of. Irving’s *The Cider House Rules* takes place in a social world (an America) that is far from ideal, but the hero adapts to this reality by doing what he can to remedy its faults.

In Auster’s *Moon Palace* a central thematic issue is the concept of an “ideal” in itself. On both an individual and a national level, loss and defeat are seen simply to be a condition of life itself. They cannot be avoided. Marco learns that what cannot be avoided must be accepted, and he learns to carry on in spite of loss. That is why the loss must be total: No last minute reunion or coincidental inheritance are allowed to obscure the lesson that in order to become an adult, a person must be able to accept loss and go on living.



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## Conclusion – Change and Continuity

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### **Aims revisited**

The purpose of this project has been to study Anglo-American bildungsromans from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, concentrating on both the changes that have occurred in the course of the period and on what has remained constant. This study could only realize this objective by developing a new genre definition. Existing definitions were problematical in that they tended to be either very wide or very narrow, in the sense that they either embraced an enormous number of novels or hardly any. In addition, most definitions are intensely disputed. The Bildungsroman Index (BRI) was created as an alternative means of definition. The BRI takes into account both recent developments in classification and categorization, and the now dominant view that genres are not rigid classes composed of necessary and sufficient properties. The BRI was created by comparing four classical and largely undisputed bildungsromans, and their points of resemblance could then function as a framework for comparing twentieth-century novels to classical ones. The subsequent analyses have in my view greatly benefited from the comprehensiveness and complexity of the BRI, which made it possible to compare a very large number of aspects in works from different time periods. The specific results of this study could not have been arrived at without this tool.

The bulk of the book consists of the four long chapters of literary analysis. Since the BRI has no necessary properties and says little about the importance of individual features, particular emphasis is given to the main theme of development of the protagonist in each analysis. This development was defined as the particular transition from youth to adulthood that Erik Erikson and other developmental psychologists call identity formation, and my study has used James Marcia's model of the identity statuses as a tool and point of departure.

I started this project wondering if it makes sense to say there is a twentieth-century bildungsroman in English. The question was motivated by claims in the literature that: 1) The bildungsroman tradition ceased to exist around the First World War, and 2) that using the term "bildungsroman" of novels from later periods makes it meaningless, or "just a noise" (Sammons 1991, 41). This project shows that it does make sense to speak of a twentieth-century bildungsroman in English: Not only does the genre exist and flourish in twentieth-century Anglo-American literature, but in spite of the innovations of the more recent novels, the genre still has close resemblances with the original in form as well as content.

## Evaluation of approach and methods

### Usefulness of the Bildungsroman Index

The Bildungsroman Index has a central role in this study and has functioned as a multi-purpose tool. First, creating the BRI implied careful comparison of the four novels that I have referred to as the Four Classics. Following Fowler's assumption that a genre's repertoire (set of typical features) could be of all kinds – themes, plot development and time-span, characterization, setting, development of the protagonist, titles, ending, social criticism, etc. – these elements were all compared. The resulting index shows about ninety points of similarity, most of them shared by *Wilhelm Meister* and at least two of the British novels. Given the numerous books and articles expounding on the differences between German and British novels of formation, this is quite remarkable. Many of the resemblances have not to my knowledge been highlighted in the literature before, such as the importance of others in the protagonist's formation, the typical age of the hero, the time-span of the plot, and the high occurrence of deaths and illnesses and inserted stories.

Three findings deserve special attention. First, the bildungsroman has a particular point of view which combines character focalization with a retrospective narrator focalizer who provides a mature "corrective." Second, the bildungsroman is particularly concerned with protagonists aged 18-23. Although the age of the hero was seldom discussed in the bildungsroman literature, the three British Classics clearly focus on a very specific period – the transition from late adolescence to early adulthood. Goethe does not specify Wilhelm's age at the end, but although his hero is older, the focus seems to be the same. This seemed to show a particular relationship between the age of the main character and the theme of development. The most surprising finding was perhaps the portrayal of gender roles, which (with the exception of Maugham's novel) are more equal than what was commonly accepted at the time the books were written. Interesting in this context is the fact that male protagonists are surrounded by strong, sometimes androgynous women, while the secondary figures in the two books authored by women are more traditional. In addition to challenging gender roles, the novels also confront the division between social classes by having characters marry or have relationships that would have been considered unsuitable at the time.

Once the BRI had been assembled, it fulfilled two different functions: To select the novels for study, and to provide the groundwork for their analysis. Rating novels was the means of selecting literature for inclusion in the study. Novels with a low score were not seen as part of the genre and not analyzed in much detail. Five novels were found to belong to the genre, while two were not. This stage provided valuable confirmation that the BRI could indeed distinguish between novels. Selection on the basis of the BRI means that extensive justification is given for inclusion or exclusion of a novel. Readers can go through the scoring themselves and check the criteria in detail. A disadvantage is that you must know the novel in detail before being able to score it; selection is therefore a time-consuming activity.

A fact that became apparent in the scoring process was that index scores do not always correspond to the “feeling” readers may have about how closely a particular book resembles a bildungsroman. I myself “feel” that *The Magus* and *Moon Palace* are further from the typical examples of the Four Classics than *Of Human Bondage* and *The Diviners*. *The Magus* does have the lowest score of the four and *Of Human Bondage* the highest, but *Moon Palace* is only five points behind Maugham’s novel and ten points higher than *The Diviners*. There are two points to be made in this connection. First, the BRI is supposed to provide the generic repertoire of the bildungsroman, that is, a description of the typical, but not necessary features. We should thus expect all novels to “lack” some features; we cannot say that *Of Human Bondage*, with 138 points, is “more of” a bildungsroman than *The Diviners*, which scores 123. They are both part of the genre or participating in the genre to an approximately equal degree. Second, no psychological surveys have been conducted in order to ascertain how salient or “typical” (in a prototype theory sense) particular features or works are. Many of the features have probably never registered as generic with either writers or critics, and it is impossible to say whether these features unconsciously add to people’s sense of typicality. Just as an election system typically tries to balance population size and geography, the BRI tries to balance the idea that genres have repertoires consisting of a large number of features with the older assumption that some features are particularly important for readers’ recognition of a genre. But the salience of particular features is only hinted at, and should not be considered a true reflection of how “people” might feel about them.

Throughout this study, the main function of the BRI has been to provide a starting point for the analysis of individual texts. As such it has been more of a check-list than a method. It lists features or aspects of texts that can be discussed, but there are too many to include them all in one analysis, and the BRI does not detail how each feature should be approached. The large number of features is both an advantage and a drawback. On the one

hand, once a novel is rated on the BRI, the scholar has a wealth of detail about the book that can be used in analysis. Further scrutiny of individual features means yet more detailed study. This is particularly valuable for comparison with other novels, and is a prerequisite for well-informed generalizations about several works, such as works of a particular genre. On the other hand, it was difficult to have to leave a number of features out of the discussion, and valuable points have no doubt been ignored as a result.

Overall, the decision to first analyze BRI results and then conduct a closer scrutiny of the theme of identity formation proved to be a fruitful strategy. Decisions had to be made about where topics should be discussed, since many belonged in both places. But both sections provided valuable insights, and the BRI section fed important information to the thematic part. I will illustrate this point with some examples.

Feature 1, which related to narration and focalization, was originally very different. But working through the Four Classics, analyzing the texts and comparing them, reveals the particular narrative perspective that is one of my central findings. Once this discovery had been made, it could be used in the examination of the related issues of irony and narrative distance, and also in the discussion of themes. A further hypothesis is then that the differing temporal perspectives of the narrator and character focalizers were related to the development of the protagonist, in the sense that the passing of time and the fact that the main character has changed can be seen throughout the novel. Using the BRI to analyze texts thus helped open up the novels, and alerted me to further generic characteristics. The same process happened with many other features.

Features 19 and 20, which postulate that male protagonists are passive and women main characters self-assertive, also began their existence in different form. Intrigued by Marianne Hirsch's claim that bildungsroman heroes are passive, I went to the four novels, and encountered Jane Eyre, who seemed far from passive. Thus gender roles had to be studied more carefully in all the novels. At least one twentieth-century novel by and about a woman had to be included for comparison with Brontë's novel. This led to the discovery that both heroes and heroines break with traditional gender roles of their time: Men by being more passive, women by being more active. But since the study only has two texts by women, it would be very interesting to follow up this point in a larger sample of novels.

Having decided to use Erikson and Marcia's developmental theories for the thematic section, I primarily focused on development within the "life domains" of occupational choice, interpersonal relations, and ideology. Although Marcia's later research includes gender roles in the interpersonal domain, the untraditional gender roles discussed in relation with the BRI

required added attention. Sandra Bem's sex role inventory (BSRI) was useful in its understanding of masculine and feminine as poles on a spectrum, but also as independent qualities, so that it is possible for an individual to have both feminine and masculine characteristics (Bem 1974). It then became apparent that all the novels in the study stress sex role development, and that most protagonists develop in the direction what Bem calls "psychological androgyny" (1974, 155). It was tempting to go back to the BRI and rewrite Features 19 and 20 in order to include the concept of "psychological androgyny." In the end, I decided against this because it should be possible to understand and use the Bildungsroman Index without knowledge of particular theories or other types of very specialized knowledge.

A further advantage of using the BRI as a starting point for analysis is that it opened up a whole new world of variation, change, and differing connotations within features. Many of the changes discussed in the section by that name below in fact occur "inside" established features: Modern works use the traditional features, but in new ways, so that innovation can take place without breaking with the tradition. Although Feature 39, (money problems), for instance, is found in all the works except *Cider House*, the particular money problems of Wilhelm Meister, Jane Eyre, David Copperfield, Pip, Philip Carey, Nicholas, Morag, and Marco Fogg are quite different. These problems also have different relations to the theme of development.

Overall, the BRI has fulfilled its role in this study. It has been revised many times during the process: Features have been changed, cut, and new ones added; maximum scores have been altered; and section arrangements revised. One idea that was abandoned was the inclusion of certain aspects that are in a sense external to the work: Bildungsromans tend to be autobiographical; they are often the first novel begun by the author (although they may have been published later); they are set in the recent past (the time of the author's own youth); and the main character tends to be born in the same year as the author. At one point, however, I simply had to decide that the BRI was complete, even if new features kept suggesting themselves.

## **Usefulness of Erikson and Marcia**

Complementing the BRI with Eriksonian developmental psychology turned out to be a happy choice. Especially Marcia's four-status model of identity formation proved even more useful than I had hoped. Originally I was primarily interested in developmental theories as a way of making the theme of "development" more concrete and specific. Using Erikson and Marcia's

concepts and models, however, provided a deeper understanding of the workings of the bildungsroman genre, and was also extremely fertile for textual analysis.

“Identity” and “development” can easily become vague or ambiguous concepts in literature and culture studies. Erikson’s definitions were helpful in making them more understandable and specific. For analysis, Marcia’s identity formation model facilitated comparison of identity development in the various works by providing a number of specific aspects of identity. Without these tools it would have been hard to find a common approach to the development of the various protagonists, as there is, after all, considerable variation. As with the BRI, developmental psychology made it easier to see the resemblances between the works.

Eriksonian psychology shows that identity formation can be considered one of several developmental phases that human beings go through, and that it belongs to a particular age. Marking the transition from youth to adulthood, identity formation typically belongs to the late teens and early 20s. These facts explain why the bildungsroman can do without a comprehensive treatment of childhood and early adolescence, but cannot focus exclusively on childhood and early youth. Among the novels receiving high index scores, *Wilhelm Meister*, *The Magus*, and *Moon Palace* say very little about childhood. *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield*, on the other hand, along with *Great Expectations*, *Of Human Bondage*, *The Diviners* and *The Cider House Rules* have thorough treatments of the protagonist’s childhood. *The Diviners* and *The Cider House Rules* further explore identity changes happening in middle age.

Erikson and Marcia point out that although identity formation usually takes place in late adolescence to early adulthood, it can also happen later. Further phases of moratorium and commitment can follow an early identity resolution, and it is also possible to regress to a less developed status. The process can be very complicated, as for instance in Fowles’ novel. Nicholas is in fact in negative foreclosure at the start of the book. He starts feeling unsettled, and goes into diffusion, then moratorium when he meets Conchis. The long middle section of the novel shows how tormented and confusing moratorium can be, and what a struggle it can be to change. Many of the novels show Marcia’s claim that “no matter how much protest there is to the contrary, no one really wants to change” (1994b, 34).

The concept of life areas or identity “domains” was useful in describing and comparing developmental processes. Particularly important was the interpersonal domain, which might have received little attention without this concept. Main characters tend to develop in the direction of greater capacity for intimacy, and become gradually more aware of



what kinds of friendships and love relationships are right for them. They all grow towards a profound understanding of the importance of close relationships in their lives. This points to the double focus of the genre: The individual in relation to the other or others.

## Development of the bildungsroman: Continuity and change

### Continuity

This study shows pervasive continuity in the genre, both in terms of the features of the BRI and as concerns the development of the protagonist. In order to avoid repeating the points made in the conclusion to Chapter 4, where generic characteristics of the Four Classics were discussed and put into historical context, this section is much shorter than the discussion of change below.

The high index scores of the twentieth-century novels show that the genre's characteristic features have been very persistent. If we accept the BRI as a fair description or definition of the genre, it is obvious that the pronouncement of the bildungsroman's death was premature – the genre is still recognizably itself, in spite of various changes. The following figure shows the endurance of features.

*Table 50. Number of 20th-century novels features occur in*

		cumulated
No. of features found in all 5 novels	41	41
Features found in 4 of 5	27	68
Features found 3 of 5	17	85
Features found in 2 of 5	3	88
Features found in 1 of 5	0	88
Features found in 0 of 5	2	90
<b>Sum</b>	<b>90</b>	

Ignoring features given as alternatives of others (such as “or fatherless” as an alternative to “orphan”) there are 90 index features in all. Of these, 41 features occur in all the novels, and their survival should thus be in no doubt. Four out of five is also quite convincing, so I would conclude that 68 of the 90 features are still part of the repertoire. When it comes to the remaining 22, my theoretical starting point was that a polythetic definition implies that members of a category share many features but not all, and that it is perfectly natural that some should be missing from any one member (novel). With only five examples, it is thus

hard to say whether features “missing” from two or more novels have become less common or might just happen to be absent these particular novels.

The characteristic split focalization of the genre persists in three of the five twentieth-century novels, while *The Diviners* and *The Cider House Rules* offer variations of the model without dispensing with it. In addition to showing a changing protagonist, the split focalization enables the genre to balance the limitations of the young protagonist by not letting his or her viewpoint be the only one: The older, wiser narrator – whether in the older voice of the protagonist or that of an “authorial narrator” – can “correct” the reader’s impression and show how the protagonist is immature or sometimes wrong. The voice of innocence is countered by the voice of maturity and reason, which in the end proves the more correct, moral position. The bildungsroman runs a middle course, between youth and maturity, innocence and experience.

*The Diviners* is the exception to the rule, in that it does not have the same shift between protagonist focalizer and a narrator who evaluates and modifies the protagonist’s views. Rather, the protagonist is the sole focalizer of the past, Morag’s life history. This gives her experiences a heightened validity, accentuating the value of the process in itself, and presenting the changes in her life in a positive light. Leaving the reader to fit together the two focalizers and temporal levels, Laurence makes the reader mimic adult Morag’s process of evaluating the past. She thus emphasizes that constructing and interpreting a life story is a creative process, not given once and for all. *The Cider House Rules* does shift between protagonist focalization and another view, but differs from all the other books by not making Homer Wells the primary, or even privileged, focalizer. Instead, Irving has chosen to shift between Homer, a large number of character focalizers, and an omniscient extra-diegetic narrator. The effect is that the viewpoints of all the characters are commented on, moderated, and corrected both by other characters and by the narrator. The result is a highly interpersonal, relational form of narration and focalization.

Identity development has remained the principal theme in these twentieth-century novels, and the processes are similar in both periods. The relative importance of life domains differs from one novel to the next, but there is no systematic variation between the Classics and the modern novels. Occupational concerns are very important to some protagonists, not at all to others. The interpersonal domain, particularly love and relationships, plays a prominent role in all the novels. The various characters undergo similar developments in this life area: They develop from selfishness or low interpersonal skills toward appreciation of others and capacity for love. Furthermore, they all become more psychologically androgynous than

normal for their time. In the ideological domain, world view, values and ethical questions are important in all the novels, although religion and politics – the two main constituents of Marcia’s ideological domain – are hardly treated at all. The various main characters resemble one another in that they all progress towards a coherent working philosophy of life and a clear sense of values and morality. Their values are surprisingly similar, in that all come to embrace a humanist ethic, and they all find family, love, and close relations with others as a major provider of meaning in life. Apart from Philip in *Of Human Bondage*, they also reach the conclusion that the best marriage is one between equals. In other respects, the nature of their philosophy of life differs, and each main character is quite strongly marked by the time in which the book is written and the beliefs and values of the authors.

As regards ideas of gender relations, the novels are remarkably similar, and some are quite different from the mainstream beliefs of their time. Goethe, Brontë and Dickens present idealized relationships between men and women that are very equal for their day. This concern with gender relations has become even more pronounced in the post-World War II novels. The women’s liberation movement and increased equality in Western societies are reflected in greater equality in the novels as well. *The Magus*, *The Diviners*, and *The Cider House Rules* can all be seen as feminist works. *The Magus* cures Nicholas of his habit of objectifying women and disregarding the common humanity of the sexes. *The Diviners* shows the importance of meaningful work in a woman’s life, and reconciles Morag to being a single mother before this was generally accepted. *The Cider House Rules* ultimately defends women’s right to choose to have an abortion.

Both the Four Classics and the twentieth-century novels are quite radical in their mixing of social classes, and in the post-World War II novels nationality and ethnicity also start making an appearance. Misalliance has been discussed in chapter 4, in relation to the Classics, and the tendency continues in the more recent novels. Class features strongly in the opposition between Mildred and Norah in *Of Human Bondage*, but Philip breaks free of his snobbishness and marries a working-class woman. In *The Magus*, class and nationality meet in Nicholas’ prejudiced opinions of his Australian lover Alison. Again, humanity and goodness win over snobbery and inherited intolerance. *Moon Palace* portrays gentiles and Jews, and Kitty is from a different culture as well as class. Here, little is made of the differences, and instead, psychological and emotional boundaries within people themselves come to determine their relations with others. *The Cider House Rules* describes a small New England community which is nonetheless socially and racially complex. Both class and race lines diminish, so that in the end no one seems to be shocked that the young heir to the apple

farm is in love with a black apple-picker's daughter. Auster and Irving advocate community and solidarity, thereby going against both American individualism and the postmodernist idea of late-twentieth-century identity as uprooted and fragmented.

## **Change**

We now turn to the development of the genre from the Four Classics up to *Moon Palace*, focusing on changes and variation. Overall, there has been less change, and less consistent or systematic change, than expected. The high number of similarities between older and newer novels could of course be attributed to the method, that is, the BRI, since it was created to capture similarity more than differences. On the other hand, critics using definitions with only a few defining features have usually failed to find the same continuity. I believe the continuity found in this study is real. Other critics have not found them because they have concentrated more on changing ideologies than on other commonalities. This said, however, it must be remembered that “my” novels are quite different in ways not captured by their BRI scores. Form and style change, as do the themes they choose to focus on besides the main theme of the formation of the protagonist. Critical studies of *Wilhelm Meister*, *Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations* might not have much in common, and this is even more true of the newer novels. In addition, the BRI does not bring out some of the differences resulting from social change and changing literary styles and movements. The following overview of generic change does not aim to be exhaustive or systematic, but focuses on a few notable BRI features and differences in the treatment of the occupational identity domain. Afterward, I discuss how each of the twentieth-century novels modifies the genre to achieve its own particular aims.

### ***Overall changes***

Although a number of individual BRI features are lacking in one or more of the twentieth-century novels, my study is too small to say whether these are evidence of generic change. The only feature “missing” in all the post-Classics novels is the generic titles. In the English-language tradition at least, titles no longer seem to serve as a bildungsroman characteristic. None of my twentieth-century novels include the protagonist's name or the once typical additions “life,” “history,” “adventures,” or the like. Such titles might have gone out of fashion because they were also generic for the picaresque. There are, however, still novels with more “classic” titles that have been characterized as bildungsromans, such as May

Sinclair's *Mary Olivier: A Life* (1919), John Fowles's *Daniel Martin* (1977), Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth* (1929) and *Ann Vickers* (1933), and Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) and *Herzog* (1964). If there is a title trend in my material it is toward nouns and brevity: *The Magus*, *The Diviners*, *The Cider House Rules*, and *Moon Palace*, but this is unlikely to have any generic associations for readers.

Less persistent is the way some novels change the social background of the protagonist and the arena in which their primary learning experiences take place. *The Diviners* and *Cider House* – that is, two of the three North American novels – have protagonists from the lower rather than the middle class who do not go to boarding school. These novels thus reflect the dramatic social changes that have taken place in the West in the last 50-100 years. Given American concern with equal opportunity and the tradition of rags-to-riches stories, it is not unlikely that this trend is stronger in America than on the other side of the Atlantic. It may also be that this is a North American tendency. I suspect this may be the case, although two novels are not enough to make a trend. If my suspicions are correct, it may have to do with the North American focus on new possibilities and equality of opportunity.

*Moon Palace*, *The Cider House Rules*, and *The Magus* resemble *Wilhelm Meister* and *Jane Eyre* more than Dickens's novels in that the protagonists do not go to a big city to further their education. Marco Fogg is, of course, in New York for most of the novel, but his apprenticeship largely takes place in Effing's apartment as well as a few other enclosed spaces. Homer Wells moves to a big apple farm, which resembles *Wilhelm Meister*'s social environment in having a clear social hierarchy and giving Homer a chance to interact with a number of people from different classes and professions. In *The Magus* most of the learning experiences take place in Conchis' special realm at Bourani. This change in the setting of the apprenticeship might indicate a changing attitude to the city – and an increased focus on interiority, reflection, and philosophical concerns. But these possibilities and tensions were also there in the Classics: There is in all of them an alternation between a big, buzzing, exterior world and the intimate spaces of one or two chosen people. *Of Human Bondage* and *The Cider House Rules* are the modern novels that come closest to portraying the variety of social classes, ages, and profession of Dickens's and Goethe's novels. Fowles and Auster give their learning experiences a more metaphysical tint, with one important mentor figure presiding over the apprentice. Laurence's Morag finds herself in an intermediate position – as she does in several respects – wavering between the city and the country, between immersion in social life and solitary reflection and creation.

Although the twentieth-century novels have the traditional secondary-character roles, there is a difference in the attitude the novels take toward these characters. It was mentioned in the sub-chapter on continuity that secondary characters in the Four Classics often seem to exist primarily in order to further the education of the protagonist. The post-WWII bildungsromans in this study offer variations on this pattern that can be seen to question and change the presentation of the other in the older books. In *The Magus*, for instance, a number of characters have made the education and formation of a young man into their vocation. We know they carry out their project in the summer, and have the rest of the year to lead their own lives, independent of the “game” and this year’s subject. Fowles thus avoids “sacrificing” these characters for the protagonist.

*The Diviners* brings up the potential for conflict between self and other implicit in the genre. Whereas in the Four Classics some impersonal force sacrifices minor characters for the edification of the protagonist, Laurence’s book makes Morag directly responsible: When she leaves her home town in order to educate herself and provide herself with the possibility for growth, she simultaneously relegates her adoptive parents to squalor and poverty. Morag might have sacrificed herself and stayed home to take care of Prin and Christie, as her childhood friend Eva does. But that would have stunted her own growth. *The Cider House Rules* is the novel that goes furthest in valuing secondary characters as individuals; their importance is seen in the fact that many are focalizers, and they exist also when they are not seen by the main character. They are not in the novel merely to provide particular learning experiences for the protagonist. In addition, Homer ends up dedicating his life to serving others. *Moon Palace* accentuates the independence of the secondary characters by making Effing and Barber the narrators and protagonists of their own life stories.

The Four Classics explore the possibilities and new freedoms for the individual who is not determined by his or her past, or the family, religion, class or gender role they are born into. The twentieth-century novels make more of the potential conflict between this free individual and the people who are relegated to secondary roles in their lives.

We have seen that occupational development is a primary concern in some novels in this study, and a minor issue in others. I hypothesized that these differences could be related to the time the novels were written, but going through them I found no consistencies. There was no evidence that time of writing, or nationality, are decisive factors with regard to the role of occupation in these novels. The bildungsroman seems to suggest that occupational identity development is not essential for character’s sense of meaning and living the good life. Some characters’ identities are fundamentally dependent on their work, while others find their

identity in other domains. In this respect, the genre contradicts the views of sociologists and psychologists, who tend to consider occupation an important part of identity.

### *The tertiary stage*

I now turn to specific innovations of the individual twentieth-century novels, emphasizing in particular how they utilize elements that are already a part of the generic repertoire to bring a particular aspect or theme into sharper focus. Many of the changes found in the twentieth-century novels accentuate something already present in the genre, instead of abandoning old features or themes, or inventing new ones. Gender relations, for instance, has always been an important theme, but *The Magus* and *The Diviners* foreground this theme even more and give it fuller treatment than the Four Classics. This at least partly explains why the BRI fails to show many of the differences between older and newer novels.

It may seem surprising or even paradoxical that *The Diviners* from the 1970s and *Moon Palace* from the late 1980s receive such high scores, the latter scoring only ten points less than *Wilhelm Meister*. This seeming anomaly may, however, be explained by Alastair Fowler's account of how genres develop. Historically, according to Fowler, genres evolve through primary, secondary, and tertiary stages, a development toward more complex, literary, and sophisticated narratives (Fowler 2002, 160-164). The primary stage is the first phase, when the generic repertoire is assembled:

[T]he phase of assembly may of course be largely unconscious. The author perhaps thinks only of writing in a fresh way. It will often be his successors who first see the potential for genre and recognize, retrospectively, that assembly of a new form has taken place. Then the assembled repertoire will become a focus of critical activity. (Fowler 2002, 159)

A genre really only comes into existence in its secondary phase, when writers can use it consciously and readers recognize it. This is when variation and perhaps even subgenres arise (Fowler 160-162).

We can see *Wilhelm Meister* as the assembly phase. As soon as the book had appeared in English, British writers starting imitating it, combining it with characteristics of the British fiction that had also influenced Goethe (Richardson and Fielding among others [Boes 2008, 271]), thereby establishing the conventions of the new genre. The second phase of the bildungsroman began after about 1800 in Germany, when a host of new bildungsromans saw

the light of day. In Britain, the development probably dates from around the 1850s. At the second stage, Fowler says, “particular conventions are available that were unknown as such to the inventors of the primary form. The advantages are obvious: Virgil is able to finesse on forms that he can take for granted as recognizable” (162).

Fowler warns us that his idea of stages is not absolute; The stages “interpenetrate chronologically” and “may even coexist within a single work” (164). The stages are relative to what comes before and what comes after. What is primary, secondary, and tertiary, also depends on the standpoint of the critic, and among other things the time period under consideration. *Wilhelm Meister*, for instance, is a primary bildungsroman in relation to the British and German bildungsroman authors who took Goethe’s example, but secondary in relation to Wieland’s *Agathon* and British life-narratives.

The tertiary stage Fowler counts from the time “when a writer takes up a form already secondary, and applies it in quite a new way. The tertiary form may be a “symbolic reinterpretation of the secondary” (162), or it may “interiorize the earlier kind” (163). The tertiary stage may also take “individual conventions as material for symbolic developments that presuppose allegorical, psychological, or other interpretations of them” (163). Edgar Allan Poe is found to be secondary gothic, while Hawthorne, with his “strong tendency to parable” approximates the tertiary: “In Hawthorne, birthmarks or diseases do not merely horrify; they also signify” (163). A further example of tertiary gothic is, according to Fowler, Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*, in “which gothic is interpreted in terms of abnormal psychology and used to explore paranoid delusion” (163).

While Brontë and Dickens were writing within a young genre, Maugham, as well as Laurence and Auster, could count on their readers being familiar with *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *David Copperfield* (1849-50). They could thus make sure readers identified their novels as belonging to the same tradition by using recognizable elements. At the same time they could vary and add to the original repertoire, adapting the form to their own designs and their own times. The high scores of *The Diviners* and *Moon Palace* are thus not an anomaly but rather the rule for genre-conscious writers.

In order to avoid rigidity and taxonomic problems, Fowler recommends “thinking in terms of continuous generic development. ‘Primary,’ ‘secondary,’ and ‘tertiary’ then becomes relative to an observer interested in particular generic forms” (164). This is what I intend to do in the following. The idea of three stages is a useful starting point for explaining some of the changes (and continuity) we see in the twentieth-century bildungsromans, but should not be understood rigidly.



### ***Internal conflict: Of Human Bondage***

The BRI includes falling in love and the character role of lover as features, but not the fact that bildungsroman protagonists tend to encounter antithetical examples of love and lovers. They can use these to form their own ideas of what kind of relationship they want and what type of partner would be right for them. A positive and a negative love experience is part of Buckley's genre definition (1974, 17), but I chose not to include this because it is absent from *Wilhelm Meister*, and only partly realized in *Great Expectations*. It is, however, a central conflict in *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre*, and in some of the later novels.

*Of Human Bondage* takes the right lover vs. wrong lover opposition and drives it to its extreme. Here, Mildred is not only wrong; she is a symbol of the irrational. Philip's choice is not a matter of knowing or finding out what he wants, as it is for David Copperfield. His problem is that he knows what is right, but finds himself unable to choose it. His free will is disabled, not by a hostile community, parental restrictions, social customs, or morality, but by irrational forces within himself. In this way, personal choice is given added weight and a new facet. Rather than concerning the balance between individual and society, it has become an internal or psychological matter.

Maugham continues the development toward interiority that has always been a salient concern of the bildungsroman and extends it to the unconscious and other aspects of identity. The main innovation of *Of Human Bondage* is its penetrating study of inner life and the struggle between reason and emotion, the rational and the irrational. This theme is not a new one, as shown by the fact that the title comes from Spinoza (Shaffner 1981, 41). But when Maugham started his novel in 1898, psychology had initiated a revolution in the perception of the mind, and Freud had started exploring the subconscious. The exploration of the interior life of the individual – a main task for Goethe as well – took a big step forward. The complexity of the portrayal of the life of the mind increased.

### ***Loss and maturity: The Magus and Moon Palace***

In his afterword to *The Wanderer (Le Grand Meaulnes)* by Alain-Fournier, John Fowles describes what he finds to be Fournier's great achievement:

What he nailed down is the one really acute perception of the young, which is the awareness of loss as a function of the passing of time. It is at that age that we first know we shall never do everything we dream, that tears are in the nature of things. It is above all when we first grasp the black paradox at the heart of the human condition:

that the satisfaction of the desire is also the death of the desire. ... *Le Grand Meaulnes* is, then, about the deepest agony and mystery of adolescence. (Fowles 1971, 209)

That loss is inseparable from the forward movement of time is acutely present in both *The Magus*, which Fowles wrote “powerfully under ... the influence” of *The Wanderer* (Fowles 1971, 208), and in Auster’s *Moon Palace*. Loss is an inevitable consequence of all change, even of progress and growth. Change involves pain and nostalgia for what has been lost.

Marco’s most crushing loss, the death of Uncle Victor, coincides with the Apollo moon landing. These two events are linked to tie the knot between progress and loss. Alone and famished, Marco laments the death of the moon as a site of dreams and myths – “Radiant Diana, image of all that is dark within us” (31). He has similar feelings about the historical development of America. The world Marco lives in has been made possible by the taming and exploitation of the wild west of Blakelock’s American idylls. Progress and loss are thus inextricably linked.

In *The Magus* loss takes a different aspect: It is Alain-Fournier’s sensation Fowles wants to get at, the idea that the satisfaction of desire is also its death. For Nicholas wants Alison, but he also wants the intoxication of the first meeting, falling in love, the mystery of a new woman not yet known. But once he is having a relationship with Alison, he cannot go back and have everything he felt when they first met, or were just beginning to know one another, as he can with the mysterious twins at Bourani, who are yet unexplored.

The development of the theme of loss in *The Magus* and *Moon Palace* can be regarded as stage three in Fowler’s model of generic development because Fowles and Auster have reinterpreted an idea originally found in the classic bildungsroman – that development entails loss – in various literal, metaphorical, and symbolic ways. In the Four Classics, loss of innocence is an unavoidable part of growing up and becoming a mature adult, as is the loss of loved ones through death. Auster takes the idea of loss and uses it on anything he can think of that might affect a person’s identity. Marco loses not only his mother and adopted father (in fact, his entire known family), but his lover (through a breakup), his home, his newly-discovered father and grandfather, and all his belongings (twice). In this way, losses come to dominate the narrative, crying out that Marco and readers must pay attention to them. And what happens? Marco at first cannot handle loss on this scale. He falls apart, gives up, and would have died if not for a chance occurrence. Loss involves trauma, and poses a tremendous danger and threat. Loss is not just something one experiences, learns from, and forgets, after becoming a better, more mature individual. Loss is a very real risk: There is no

guarantee of progress – everything might be lost forever. This experience is repeated in the life stories of Effing and Barber, both of whom fail to recover from some of their losses. Effing loses his identity as a painter and does not get a family after abandoning his pregnant wife. Barber’s loss of love affects him so deeply that he never dares love again.

The second twist Auster gives to the theme of loss is to transfer it to the national history of the United States, thus creating a parallel between the individual Marco and the society in which he lives. The book is set in 1969, as the first astronauts plant the American flag on the moon, marking another stage in America’s road to progress and fulfillment of what has often been seen as its Manifest Destiny, territorial expansion. The painting *Moonlight* – with its white moon like a hole in the center, so that Marco can look through it to another world – connects two historical periods, the present (early 1970s), and the time before white immigrants took over the West. The landscape in the painting depicts a harmonious paradise in which human beings have found their comfortable, natural place in the vastness that surrounds them. *Moonlight* induces nostalgia because Marco’s world is a result of the destruction of the world of the painting. That loss is the price of progress and the moon landing. As Marco travels westward at the end of the book, he repeats the journey of American history – the journey of the settlers, and the American nation state, seeing simultaneously the world as it is now, and the one that has been lost. Effing’s cave has been flooded by the gigantic dam of Lake Powell. Marco says that “the inner and outer could not be separated except by doing great damage to the truth” (25). In Auster’s book, the relationship between individual and society has become a large metaphor in which each comments on the other. Marco’s struggle to come to terms with loss parallels the struggle of the counter-culture of the 1960s, which made many attempts to undo what was seen as the loss of true American ideals.

Loss is a theme in the Four Classics, and characters in those novels lose many of the same things (and people) as Nicholas and Marco. Where Fowles and Auster deviate from the Classics is in investigating particular aspects of the theme that are not as central in the earlier works.

### ***The River of Time: The Diviners***

As discussed previously, the Four Classics – especially the British ones with their first-person narrators – have two temporal levels, represented by the story of maturation and the time of writing. Laurence’s *The Diviners* foregrounds these time levels via the metaphor of the river that looks like it runs both ways, connecting past, present and future, and links it with the theme of identity development. In the older novels, the retrospective perspective primarily serves to show *that* the protagonist has changed. In *The Diviners*, the back-and-forth movement of time is part of the reason *why* the heroine changes. In the Classics, however, individuals develop through their experiences to become what they are at the end, that is, at the time of writing. In *The Diviners*, the act of thinking about the past in the present, while writing the story, shapes both present and past. On the one hand, the past does not exist as an objective reality that can just be taken from a cupboard and looked at. It is more like the philosopher Heraclitus’s river; you cannot step into it twice, because the water is different every time it runs past. Morag shows both how she has shaped her story in the past, and how she can now re-evaluate and reinterpret it. And that act influences her in the present and ultimately changes her future prospects. It is because she tells the story of her past that Morag comes to understand and accept both herself and her daughter Pique.

Anthony Giddens sees the modern (and particularly the late-twentieth-century) self as “a reflexive project” (1991, 32). “Self-identity” he defines as “the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of his or her biography” (244). What we see in *The Diviners* is a late-twentieth century individual in the process of actively constructing her own self-identity. In the older books, identity is seen as a composite of the biologically, individual choices, and the social world, in the form of the individual’s experiences and encounters with others. Laurence adds a fourth formative element: The reflexive, constructive consciousness of the individual. Not only personal choices, but the interpretation given to these choices and to experience in general, form the individual’s identity.

### ***The rules of The Cider House Rules***

Irving’s novel is in many respects the most traditional of the twentieth-century bildungsromans, but it also differs (in the same way) from both the newer and older books. Reinforcing even the Classics’ emphasis on “relational individualism,” *The Cider House Rules* is the novel in this study that most strongly focuses on social engagement. In at least one respect, however, *Cider House* lends itself to Fowler’s view of the three generic stages. In

this novel, the question of rules is interpreted and expanded into a theme. In its original form, the question of rules is part of ideological identity formation – characters have to consider whether to liberate themselves from some of the norms of the society they grow up in, or from the rules – or, in milder form, wishes – of parents and other adults. There can be no development unless they exercise their free will and make choices, and very often these choices will entail breaking others’ rules or going against their wishes.

This theme is present in *Cider House* as well, but compared to the Four Classics, many things are very easy for Homer. He does not have to break any rules in order to liberate himself from home or take up his chosen profession. Wilhelm had to defy his father; Jane Eyre had to break social rules in order to start a relationship with Rochester; David Copperfield first ran away from his job as a child, and then married Dora against the wishes of her father and others. Pip also struggled with social rules and expectations. Homer, on the other hand, has a father substitute, Dr. Wells, who in spite of his ardent wishes, does not push him toward the profession and future he wants for him, but lets him live life as he wishes. Homer does not have to battle against cruel step-parents or teachers. The rules question is for him not a conflict between wills (society vs. individual) but a moral, ethical, and finally also legal problem.

Irving’s novel is unique in that both Dr. Larch and Homer choose to dedicate themselves to other people instead of trying to satisfy their own needs and desires. In all the other novels, identity development comes to an end (or the book chooses to close) when characters make commitments to individuals they love. The good life is seen to lie in close relations with others, having a philosophy of life that makes sense of things for you, and usually also an occupation or activity that is experienced as meaningful. In *Cider House*, commitment to a cause to some extent fills the place of both love and philosophy of life. Being of use is ultimately what gives Homer and Dr. Larch meaningful lives.

### ***“Playing God” in the bildungsroman***

Dr. Larch in *The Cider House Rules* resembles God in three ways: When Melony accuses him of “playing God,” what she is thinking of is that “he gives you your history, or he takes it away!” (97). Homer, thinking of Larch’s birth and abortion practice, thinks Larch “played God in other ways” (97). And at the end of the novel, when Homer returns to St. Cloud’s to take over Larch’s job as abortionist, Larch is almost a supernatural force who can be seen to have designed both Homer’s life and the plot of the book.

Of both *The Magus* and *Cider House* it has been said that the bildungsroman has a built-in parallel between the author and God, since the author constructs the characters' lives in order to provide appropriate experiences for making the protagonist a mature adult. In the Classics, this parallel is mostly implicit (although Miss Havisham and Magwitch have god-like powers). Fowles and Irving make the parallel explicit, exploring its implications in several different themes. Both writers use it as a starting point for studying human beings confronted with situations in which God should interfere but does not (whether He exists or not). The Classics never confront Christianity and God directly, either taking both for granted (Goethe and Brontë) or ignoring them (Dickens). Fowles goes against the notion of a God, while Irving leaves the question of His existence open but urges human beings to act when God does not.

*The Magus* makes the cruelties of the two world wars the basis for its treatment of divine non-action, but then extends to life in general the conclusion that human beings must take upon themselves responsibility for their own life, and, when necessary, for the lives of others too. Homer reaches a similar conclusion when he decides to break United States law and perform abortions. Having given one woman an abortion, he decides he cannot “play God in the worst sense; if he could operate on Rose Rose, how could he refuse to help a stranger? Only God makes that kind of decision” (568). In *The Magus*, the relationship between people and God is paralleled by that between Nicholas and Conchis. As Nicholas must liberate himself from Conchis – and from his desire to be controlled by Conchis – people must liberate themselves from their desire to be controlled by God. A similar relationship exists between Homer and Dr. Larch, but here the ending is more ambiguous, as Homer in fact fulfills Dr. Larch's plans for him. *Cider House* has an ambivalence in relation to God and notions of “fate,” whereas *The Magus* is unambiguous in its vision of a world without God.

## **Freedom and commitment**

Tracing representations of individualism from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, Ian Watt (1997) sees a change from condemnation to acceptance and sometimes admiration. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Watt finds that representations of Faust, Don Quixote, and Don Juan condemn these individualistic, selfish protagonists. Faust and Don Juan literally go to hell. In Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), on the other hand, and in Romantic versions of Faust and Don Juan, individualistic, self-serving behavior is no longer punished. Watt's study shows many similarities between these different versions of individualism: The protagonists

have no family bonds (although they do have relatives), no wives or children; they travel a lot; and if they have friends, they tend to be a single servant. These heroes care little for society, and have few, if any, beliefs.

In my view, the mythic figures examined by Watt represent one version or stage of individualism – individualism as freedom. The bildungsroman shows another stage in which freedom becomes freedom “to” rather than “from”: Freedom to form bonds and freely enter into commitments. The bildungsroman protagonists in my study are not satisfied with individualism as freedom. In Marcia’s terminology, Watt’s heroes would be diffused, while the bildungsroman protagonists move on to commitment and identity achievement.

In political science, the term *de*-alignment is used about an election when voters free themselves from old commitments and leave the parties they have traditionally voted for. A *re*-alignment occurs when a large number of voters establish new long-term allegiances and voting patterns. Something similar seems to have happened between the early representations of individualism discussed by Watt, and their more mature brothers and sisters in the bildungsroman. Robinson Crusoe detaches himself from his father, his community, and to some extent from Christian beliefs. He forms personal bonds only when it serves his own personal interests. Wilhelm Meister and his kinsmen and women represent a form of realignment, in that they make new commitments. They find themselves through community with others. Attachment is their road to a happy life, and no desert island could offer them the fulfilling lives they dream of.

The four twentieth century bildungsromans discussed at length in this study attest to the survival of a great tradition. They are part of a humanist art form that believes in the capacity of human beings to develop and change, discover themselves, and emerge out of the prison of egocentricity to care about other human beings and about doing good in the world. The characters in these four novels develop in two different directions. In Auster and Fowles, the most important life areas or identity domains are ideological. Both heroes struggle with life itself and the world around them, and would like things to be very different. They have to learn to accept and make the best of the social world they find themselves in. And they have to take on the challenge that there is nothing “fair” about existence, no god or fate to intervene on their behalf. Their lesson lies in accepting life as it is, in this time and place. Laurence and Irving are more concerned with social issues and the social aspect of identity.

James Marcia thinks traditional psychoanalysis has tended to see society as negative or restrictive for the development of the individual. In Erik Erikson’s theories, society is more positive:

it is viewed also as the provider of those necessary contexts that we have developed over time to nourish and expedite human psychological growth. The individual is viewed as a participant in a social contract wherein personal demands can be moderated voluntarily with the reasonable expectation of a societal response good enough to ensure survival and growth. (Marcia 1994b, 30)

This view is also the one that emerges from the novels studied here: Society and even “most people” might have many and unbearable faults – yet relationships are vital for human development and fulfillment.

As exemplified by the novels studied, the bildungsroman projects a vision of the good life: Knowing yourself, being aware of your own feelings, and being able to express them; being in a close and equal mutual relationship which provides emotional sustenance; having a working philosophy of life that gives life meaning; having a meaningful occupation, although this is less important in at least two of the modern novels, *The Magus* and *Moon Palace*. The novels also show how this good life can be attained. The individual must learn not only what is important in life, but also to appreciate it. Something that distinguishes these books from other stories about an individual’s life and development is the great importance placed on other people. Books like the autobiographies of Benjamin Franklin and Malcolm X emphasize self-knowledge, self-discipline, and what people can do themselves to further their own growth. Bildungsroman heroes do not pull themselves up by their own boot straps; they are helped along by others, and the good life they portray is not economic or other types of worldly success. In this sense, bildungsroman themes have a closer affinity to ideas of humanism and democracy than to capitalism and the ideology of individual success.

## **Last words**

This study has sought to bypass the unproductive controversy over definitions of the genre, and instead started from empirical description of four novels often regarded as prototypical examples. Studying the development of the bildungsroman in the last two centuries from such a vantage point has led to a number of new findings regarding the characteristics of the seminal literary works selected for study and has challenged received opinions on both sides of the bildungsroman controversy. In 2006, Tobias Boes found that “the critical commonplace of a decline in the genre during the modernist period is a myopic illusion” and that the bildungsroman “continues to thrive in post-colonial, minority, multi-cultural, and immigrant



literatures worldwide” (2006, 239). My work confirms that the genre has also persisted among white, Western men (I recoil from calling this minority the “mainstream”). And it confirms that, as Boes says, “the form can be adapted to suit modernist and post-modernist literary techniques” (2006, 239).

The Bildungsroman Index – a list of traits found in most of the prototypical works I have called the Four Classics – has been used as a polythetic definition for evaluating the proximity of literary works to this tradition. Its use here confirms that genre – or at least the bildungsroman – can be regarded as a shared repertoire of a great many different kinds of features that individual books “pick” from, in the sense that they can belong to the genre without using some of the typical features. The study of both the Classics and modern texts has showed how authors have found room within the genre conventions for expressing their individualized – but also historically and culturally influenced – view of the process of becoming an adult.



## Appendix: The Bildungsroman Index

Table 51. The Bildungsroman Index

Features	Sections	Max. Points
	<b>Section 1: Narrative perspective and mode</b>	
1	Focalization shifts between narrator and protagonist. (whether 1 <sup>st</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> person)	3
2	Access to protagonist's consciousness	2
3	Retrospective narrative (1st person or omniscient)	2
4	Narrator understands more than young protagonist	2
5	Ironic attitude to young protagonist	2
6	Plot combines action and reflection	2
7	Verisimilar novel: Portrays existing world realistically	2
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>15</b>
Features	<b>Section 2: Characterization: Protagonist</b>	Max. points
8	One main character	1
9	Protagonist is a round character, not flat	1
10	Protagonist is dynamic; changes in the course of the novel	2
11	Protagonist is an only child	1
12	Protagonist is an orphan or	2
13	Fatherless or	or 2
14	Parent dies in the course of the novel	or 2
15	Only one or no (known) living relatives	1
16	Of middle-class background	2
17	Ordinary (not particularly talented or untalented)	2
18	Protagonist is basically good and willing to help others	2
19	Male protagonist: Relatively passive, uncertain about goals, leaves decisions to chance or other people	1
20	Female protagonist: Relatively active, has strong goals, makes decisions easily	or 1
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>15</b>
Features	<b>Section 3: Characterization: Secondary characters and their functions</b>	Max. points
21	Other character(s) essential in making protagonist change and grow	3
22	Other characters more important in their relationship to protagonist than in their own right	1
23	Important educator(s)	3
24	Important companion(s)	2
25	Important lover(s)	3
26	Other characters' love relationship as exemplary or as contrast to protagonist	1
27	Other characters' marriage as exemplary or as contrast	1
28	At least one important character from lower, middle, and higher social classes	3
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>17</b>
Features	<b>Section 4: Topical story elements: Affecting protagonist</b>	Max. points
29	Experiences poverty	2
30	Experiences hunger	2
31	Goes to boarding school	1

32	Moves to big city or	2
33	Moves away from home or	or 2
34	Leaves home to go on journey	or 2
35	Introduced to new social groups, classes, and professions	1
36	Learns skills	1
37	Tries on particular role or roles	1
38	Falls in love	2
39	Has money problems	1
40	Is wounded or sick	1
41	Nursed back to health by parent substitute or loyal friend	1
42	Nurses other sick person	1
43	Adopted parent dies	2
44	Death of close relative or friend	2
45	Repents immoral or insensitive action	1
46	Rescued from emergency or cliffhanger	1
47	Gets inheritance at the end or	2
48	Loses prospective inheritance at the end	or 2
49	Gets engaged or married	1
50	Has children	1
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>26</b>
Features	<b>Section 5: Topical story elements: Affecting secondary characters</b>	Max. points
51	Serious crime such as murder	1
52	Dangerous or disastrous fire	1
53	Character seriously ill	1
54	Character becomes an invalid	1
55	Character ruined financially	1
56	Character dies (not close relative or close friend)	1
57	Funeral	1
58	Identity or family relationship outside protagonist's family revealed	1
59	Family secret of other family revealed	1
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>9</b>
Features	<b>Section 6: Setting</b>	Max. points
60	Setting for childhood scenes is countryside or provincial town	2
61	English-language novels: Setting after school-leaving age is capital or large city	3
62	German-language novels: Setting after school-leaving age is one or more large houses (other than family home)	or 3
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>5</b>
Features	<b>Section 7: Plot and Structure</b>	Max. points
63	Plot is primarily chronological	2
64	Main part of plot about period when protagonist is between 18 and 23 years old	3
65	Story goes from childhood to adulthood (early 20s)	2
66	Inserted letter(s)	1
67	Inserted narrative: Other character's life story (brief)	1
68	Inserted narrative: Other character's life story (long)	2
69	Turning point, reversal: Protagonist experiences important defeat or failure	3
70	Journey toward the end of the book	1
71	Returns to childhood home after many years	1
72	Protagonist develops from self-centeredness to compassion and desire to be of use	2
73	Protagonist discovers tie to his or her family towards end	2
74	Protagonist learns to "see" at the end	3

75	Episodic structure that nevertheless forms a pattern at the end	1
76	Epigrammatic utterance by the protagonist at the end or just before	2
77	Projected ending: Protagonist finds a place in society (but expectation may not be met)	2
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>28</b>
Features	<b>Section 8: Generic signals</b>	Max. points
78	Book title includes the name of the protagonist	1
79	Book title includes the words “years”, “life”, “adventures,” or “history”	1
80	Allusions to bildungsromans, typically <i>Jane Eyre</i> , <i>David Copperfield</i> , or <i>Great Expectations</i>	1
81	Indications from early on that this will be a life story	1
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>4</b>
Features	<b>Section 9: Theme, subject matter and motifs</b>	Max. points
82	The psychological and moral development of the protagonist from youth to adulthood (main theme)	3
83	Protagonist strives for liberation from the people he/she depends upon in childhood, their values, and their plans for his/her future	2
84	Search for new commitments to people and ideas	2
85	Tension/conflict/discrepancy between inner and outer worlds	2
86	Protagonist confronted with at least one philosophy or philosophical system	2
87	Learning through pain and loss	1
88	Development from false self-perception to self-knowledge	2
89	False idealism gives way to acceptance of reality	1
90	Fate and chance	1
91	Free will	1
92	Death and grief	3
93	Love, relationships, and marriage	3
94	Portrayal of society	2
95	Social criticism	2
96	Family becomes at theme at the end	2
	<b>Section sum</b>	<b>29</b>
Sum	<b>Total score</b>	<b>148</b>



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