

## The Unreadability of the *Bildungsroman*

### Reading *Jane Eyre* reading

#### I THE BILDUNGSROMAN AS A DECONSTRUCTIVE DISCOURSE

He overlooked the whole ring of his life; only, alas, it lay broken in pieces in front of him, and seemed never to want to unite again.

(Wilhelm Meister, VIII, 7)

In his book on the genre of the *Bildungsroman*, *The Way of the World*, Franco Moretti wonders why there are only a handful of texts that correspond to the principles of the *Bildungsroman*, and why the classical *Bildungsroman* had a very brief life. His answer is that perhaps it was too perfect.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on the criticism written about this genre one may give a slightly different answer to Moretti's second question; namely, that it was required for the *Bildungsroman* to be too perfect, and that this requirement was set up by literary criticism. The *Bildungsroman* as a genre was brought into existence by definitions invented by literary critics by way of (mis)reading German novels of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, among them Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, which, even today, is considered to be the "prototype" of the genre. The term *Bildungsroman* was created and first used by Karl Morgenstern in 1810, that is, about fifteen years after the publication of *Wilhelm Meister*. Later, as more and more definitions were attached to the name, a genre came into existence

<sup>1</sup> Franco Moretti. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. London: Verso, 1987, p. 72. All parenthesised references in the first part of the paper are to this critical work.

with its own theories and novels that supposedly belonged to the category. The bubble grew by the creation of many (and often opposing) definitions up to the point when critics realised that the classification of individual novels had become impossible and the term appeared to be rather useless.

The present paper is an attempt to approach the *Bildungsroman* and its theories from a post-structuralist, basically deconstructivist perspective. My assumption is that the *Bildungsroman* is constructed as a genre by its theories and definitions by way of deriving an abstract category from individual novels, and by supposing that the concept of the genre relates beyond the concept to particular works of literature. The method of specification used by the critical writings is to find the most important classificatory features on the basis of which novels can be treated as representatives of the genre. I will examine how the *Bildungsroman* is born in the critical texts written about it, and how one of the novels regarded as a *Bildungsroman* reads the *Bildungsroman* as it is created by the critical texts. This novel, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, will come into existence as a supplementary narrative generated in the course of the deconstruction of the theories of the *Bildungsroman*, and it will narrate the unreadability<sup>2</sup> of the narratives on the *Bildungsroman*, and also the supplementary nature of the *Bildungsroman* as a "perfect" form. In my interpretation I will start out from the *Bildungsroman* as it is created by the definitions of critical texts by reflecting on some attempts to define and thus to create the genre.

Chronologically not the first, but perhaps the most influential definition was offered by Wilhelm Dilthey in 1906. According to him, the theme of the *Bildungsroman* is the history of a young man "who enters into life in a blissful state of ignorance, seeks related souls, experiences friendship and love, struggles with the hard realities of the world and thus armed with a variety of experiences, matures,

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<sup>2</sup> Paul de Man's concept of unreadability questions the possibility of closing off the reading process by a final, adequate interpretation, and also implies that the text can possibly engender several readings contradicting one another. The impossibility of closing off reading by finding the "referent" of the text is due to the figurativity of language. Figurativity causes blind spots in every reading, and these spots can only be revealed by subsequent readings. Although every text questions its own referentiality by proving to be figurative, referentiality is restored in that every text can be read as the "portrait" of its own referential indeterminacy (see de Man. *Allegories of Reading*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 188–220; Bókay Antal. *Irodalomtudomány a modern és posztmodern korban*. Budapest: Osiris, 1997, p. 424).

finds himself and his mission in the world.”<sup>3</sup> Dennis F. Mahoney, relying on Karl Morgenstern’s first definition of the genre, proposes that instead of focusing on the development of the hero we should consider the novels’ intended effect on the reader, since the *Bildungsroman* depicts the *Bildung* of the hero, and together with that promotes the education of the reader.<sup>4</sup> The category is further broadened by Jeffrey L. Sammons, who allows the inclusion of modernist works as well as novels that can be regarded as parodies of the genre. For him, it does not matter whether the process of *Bildung* succeeds or fails, whether the protagonist is integrated into society or not.<sup>5</sup> Feminist criticism extends the boundaries of the genre to include novels of female development as well, emphasising the differences in narrative pattern caused by the limited developmental options available to women.<sup>6</sup>

While the above definitions tend to broaden the meaning of the *Bildungsroman*, James Hardin, the editor of *Reflection and Action*, a collection of essays devoted to the *Bildungsroman*, denounces “loose” and “ahistorical” interpretations of the genre, and many essays in the volume try to use the term *Bildungsroman* in a more restricted sense, to designate novels in the tradition of *Wilhelm Meister*. On a closer scrutiny, however, it turns out that the *Bildungsroman* is a “phantom genre” with at most three novels in the *Wilhelm Meister* tradition.<sup>7</sup> As far as Goethe’s novel is concerned, it was doubted if even this novel would fit into the category of which it is the prototype,<sup>8</sup> which implies that the genre can easily be deprived of its prestigious origin.

The desire of literary criticism created the genre by defining it, yet, at the same time, made the *Bildungsroman* elusive by the very process of creation and definition. It seems that the reader, searching for its meaning, can hardly get closer

<sup>3</sup> Cited by James Hardin. “Introduction.” *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*. Ed. James Hardin. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991, p. xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Dennis F. Mahoney. “The Apprenticeship of the Reader: The *Bildungsroman* of the ‘Age of Goethe.’” *Reflection and Action*, p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> Hardin, p. xxiii.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland. “Introduction.” *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Eds. Abel-Hirsch-Langland. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1983, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Mahoney, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Thomas P. Saine. “Was *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* Really Supposed to be a *Bildungsroman*?” *Reflection and Action*, pp. 118–141; Hartmut Steinecke. “The Novel and the Individual: The Significance of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* in the Debate about the *Bildungsroman*.” *Reflection and Action*, p. 71; David H. Miles “The Picaro’s Journey to the Confessional: The Changing Image of the Hero in the German *Bildungsroman*.” *PMLA* 89, 5 (1974) 980–992, p. 981.

to the *Bildungsroman* as a genre through its definitions. Since genres and genre theories are verbal constructs, they cannot help being figurative. With the (hopeless) intention of getting closer to the *Bildungsroman*, I will focus (mostly) on one particular text, namely Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World*, which I found the most elaborate and detailed among the critical texts I am reading in my paper. I will read this text by touching upon some of the points that it promotes as classificatory characteristics of the genre, treating these points as figures which the *Bildungsroman* as a system of figures consists of, and doing a closer analysis of only two of them, namely *Bildung* and *self*.

The starting point of Moretti's narrative is that the *Bildungsroman* is a grand narrative, the symbolic form of modernity. The basis for this interpretation is that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe entered the phase of modernity without possessing a culture of modernity, so it became necessary to attach a meaning to modernity. One (symbolic) solution was the identification of the latter as youth which came to be regarded as the most meaningful part of life in this period (p. 4).

Moretti attempts to determine the meaning of *Bildungsroman* by regarding it as a genre which emphasises the possibility of individual development and social integration, and which offers a model for the middle-class youth in these aspects of life. In the *Bildungsroman* individual development and social integration belong together as part and whole, and at their point of encounter and fulfilment lies maturity. In this conception the painful aspect of socialisation is missing.

It is also necessary that, as a 'free individual,' not as a fearful subject but as a convinced citizen, one perceives the social norms as *one's own*. One must *internalise* them and fuse external compulsion and internal impulses into a new unity until the former is no longer distinguishable from the latter. This fusion is what we usually call 'consent' or 'legitimation.' If the *Bildungsroman* appears to us still today as an essential, pivotal point in our history, this is because it has *succeeded in representing* this fusion with a force of conviction and *optimistic clarity* that will never be equalled again.

(p. 16, last two emphases added)

In this interpretation, the *Bildungsroman* is treated as a sign which successfully represents the fusion of the external and internal, the individual's ability to abolish the difference between the inside and the outside. Thus it seems to be related to symbolic representation which, according to Jonathan Culler, implies "abolishing alienation within man, between man and the world, between objects or forms and meanings... In symbolic operation meaning is seen as something inherent, to be

drawn out of the depths of the object itself" (cited by Moretti, p. 61). But, Moretti argues, it is interpretation rather than alienation that is being abolished here. At the end of *Wilhelm Meister*, for example, Wilhelm has to denounce the position of the interpreter, and give up intellectual autonomy if he wants his story to have a "univocal, definitive, and totalizing meaning," given, in fact, by the Tower Society, that is, an external force which actually wrote Wilhelm's story (p. 62). The abolishment of alienation and interpretation presupposes the integrity and continuity of the personality, as well as the assumption that the process of integration can be represented, the story of internalisation can be told.

The problem with this argument is that the existence of the *Bildungsroman* would be impossible without alienation and interpretation. In most of the novels that belong to this genre one tells one's own story, thus, applying Gérard Genette's term, the narration is autodiegetic; not always on the extradiegetic level, but very often on the intradiegetic level.<sup>9</sup> In *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre* there is extradiegetic autodiegetic narration, but we have autodiegetic narrators on the second level of narration in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*: such is the narrator of the "Confessions of a Beautiful Soul," or of Wilhelm's childhood. Narrating the self automatically causes an alterity in the very self which is intended to be narrated as continuous and integral, since the roles of narrating self and narrated self (interpreter and interpreted) are created in the act of narration. Thus, by the very activity of trying to define one's self as a continuous whole, one also narrates the impossibility of the coherent self. The narrator must be alienated from the narrated self, which he creates by interpretation.

Belief in the creation of the coherent narrated self, in the protagonist's integral personality, is a requirement present in all the theories of the *Bildungsroman* I have been reading here. While stating that in the *Bildungsroman* the integrity of the personality is achieved, the critical texts, however, also point in the opposite direction. Moretti accounts for the *Bildungsroman's* resistance to Freudian analysis by contrasting the self-image of psychoanalysis and that of the *Bildungsroman*.

<sup>9</sup> In *Narrative Discourse* Genette distinguishes between different types of narration. In the heterodiegetic type the narrator is absent from the story he tells, while in homodiegetic narration the narrator is a character in his story. In autodiegetic narration, a subtype of homodiegetic narration, the narrator is the protagonist. On the basis of narrative levels the narration can be extradiegetic (it takes place on the first level), intradiegetic (it takes place on the second level, that is, within the first level) or metadiegetic (it takes place within the second level) (See Gérard Genette. "Voice." *Narratology: An Introduction*. Eds. Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa. London and New York: Longman, 1996, pp. 172–189).

While psychoanalysis breaks up the psyche into “opposing forces” and looks beyond the Ego, the *Bildungsroman* attempts to build the Ego, to fuse or bring together the conflicting features of the individual personality (pp. 10–11). Nevertheless, when he discusses the four types of *Bildungsroman* on the basis of the Ego’s relation to various factors which endanger its unity, in the case of the French *Bildungsroman* he points out that this type of the novel emphasises the dangers of either a forceful Super-Ego, or an Id (p. 230, n. 7), thus placing the conflict, which in other cases takes place between the Ego and outside forces, within the divided psyche. Thus the definition of the *Bildungsroman*’s image of the self has its premise in the Freudian divided image of the psyche, even to the point of using the terms introduced by psychoanalysis to name the different parts of the human psyche.

Most theories of the *Bildungsroman* do not leave the etymology and connotations of *Bildung* unaccounted for, which concept, generally supposed to be a stable factor in interpreting the *Bildungsroman*, is closely connected to the emergence and formation of the coherent self.<sup>10</sup> *Bildung* is generally interpreted as a typical pre-modern idea with a powerful influence on the image of the self and on the function of culture in human life, the relation between man and society. This idea is based on the belief in the possibility of the individual’s successful integration into society by accepting its ethic and culture, while also preserving the self as a coherent entity exposed to various social vectors in the course of *Bildung*.<sup>11</sup> By the period of Modernism, however, the concept of *Bildung* becomes highly questionable, and the ideal is attacked by many figures of the period, among them Nietzsche, Joyce, or Musil.

Different influential trends of cultural history promoted and popularised different aspects of the concept. Its well-established, “canonised” meaning is ‘shaping,’ ‘formation,’ ‘development.’<sup>12</sup> Many define *Bildung* as “shaping the individual self from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social

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<sup>10</sup> It is not (and cannot be) my intention to give an overall history of the concept here. In my reading, I rely on English language interpretations of *Bildung* and *Bildungsroman*. For a thorough account of the German connotations of *Bildung* see Brunner–Conze–Koselleck, eds. *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Band 1: A–D). Stuttgart: Klett–Cotta, 1972, pp. 508–551.

<sup>11</sup> Bókay, p. 249.

<sup>12</sup> The *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines the *Bildungsroman* on the basis of this connotation. In the dictionary, the *Bildungsroman* is defined as ‘novel of formation’ presenting the youthful development of the hero or heroine. The end of the formation process is maturity.



experience to the threshold of maturity,"<sup>13</sup> a development coming not just from outside mentors but also a self-development which affects the whole human being, mind, body and spirit alike.<sup>14</sup> Besides these often quoted and frequently promoted implications, however, one may find behind the general term many different connotations as well, which potentially question or subvert the unity (homogeneity) of its meaning. The terms *Bildung* and *bilden* had already been used by the medieval German mystics in the sense of "purging the soul of its impurities and forming it according to its divine model." In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the concept was secularised and used alongside the terms 'education' and 'enlightenment,' but, in contrast with education and the more reason-oriented term enlightenment, *Bildung* was thought to affect the entire self.<sup>15</sup> Thus *Bildung*, on the one hand, figures a purgation process, a cleansing of the soul, returning to the natural, while on the other hand it implies quite the opposite process, which is formation, breaking with revered nature, and accommodating oneself to that very culture which was considered to be "dangerous," "deviant," a supplement to the natural state. It is also important to note that subsequent explanations of the word *Bildung* picked up the development aspect and neglected the purgation sense.

This suppression can possibly be explained on the basis of the pre-modern approach to nature and culture and the contradictory function of education in human life. This approach, based on Rousseau, promotes nature's primacy over culture; the natural state is considered to be perfect, which cannot, does not, have to be supplemented. In its relation to nature, education is exterior, something evil (yet necessarily there as a "dangerous supplement"), and it is outside the positivity to which it is super-added. Promoting the development aspect of *Bildung* may emphasise the importance of the individual's contact with culture, but it also implies a belief in a happy stage of life before the development starts, which Wilhelm Dilthey calls the "blissful state of ignorance." What the neglected purgation aspect may promote is a disbelief in a clean, natural innate stage; since the soul has to be purged of its impurities, the "natural" cleanness has to be *achieved* in *Bildung*, and only after this purgation process can formation start.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Hardin, p. xxiii.

<sup>14</sup> Mahoney, p. 109.

<sup>15</sup> Mahoney, p. 109.

<sup>16</sup> A similar disbelief in the primacy of nature is expressed by Jacques Derrida; in *Of Grammatology*, he cites passages from Rousseau's writing, and points out that it is Rousseau's text itself which emphasises the imperfect innate in the natural. Derrida's argument is that if nature needs a supplement then there is a natural weakness, a deficiency innate in nature. Childhood is the first

For many of its users the connotations of *Bildung* are over-optimistic. Humboldt's idea of the complete development of human potential that has beneficial effects on the state itself, or Novalis's concept of *Bildung* that is extended to that of the state,<sup>17</sup> for example, imply a possible interpretation of *Bildung* as the development of the individual as an allegory of the development of the nation. Against these over-optimistic interpretations of *Bildung* feminism endowed the word with a different meaning, connected to the possibilities of the female individual. Here *Bildung* (or very often *awakening*, a term used together with or instead of *Bildung*) is very frequently a series of disillusionments or clashes with society, or the realisation of one's limited options in the world, of the impossibility of *Bildung* available for men; and even the "male" *Bildung* can be regarded as an illusion contradicting the actual human possibilities in culture.<sup>18</sup>

A further disruptive internal duplicity in the word *Bildung* is revealed in an incidental remark by Jerome Buckley, who, however, seems to be unaware of its meaning: the connotations of the word *Bildung* include 'picture' or 'portrait' as well as 'shaping' or 'formation' since the word is related to *Bild*, *Bildnis*.<sup>19</sup> As opposed to the latter connotation, the former does not include change or development; it implies instead a static image.

Approaching the term from its more frequent connotations, namely 'formation' or 'education' will, however, lead to further contradictions, which concern the individual's relation to society. In Dilthey's sense of formation the protagonist, as I have quoted above, starting out from a happy state of innocence, finds his place in the world after gaining experience in society. Although innocence implies happiness, the hero has to break with it, and enter the world of experience. In Moretti, man has to willingly give up individual freedom in the process of social integration. How is it possible to convince the individual that it is worth entering culture, the "dangerous supplement?" Only if the contact with the supplement also promises happiness, claims Moretti. The classical *Bildungsroman* promotes happiness

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manifestation of the deficiency that needs a substitute, which is education in this case. If nature needs substitution, if it is imperfect, if the sign, the written, culture make the world move, then nature as something desired and perfect emerges from culture as a supplement, thus nature becomes the supplement of art and society (Jacques Derrida. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, pp.146-7).

<sup>17</sup> Mahoney, pp. 110-111.

<sup>18</sup> Abel, p. 6. See also Susan J. Rosowski. "The Novel of Awakening." *The Voyage In*, p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> Jerome Hamilton Buckley. "Introduction: The Space Between." *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974, pp. 13-14.



as the highest value, which is offered as a compensation for giving up one's freedom.<sup>20</sup> The "compensation" (happiness) manifests itself in marriage at the end of the novel.

However, the achievement of the unity of the personality, breaking with happy innocence, entering the sphere of the "dangerous supplement" while also gaining happiness is indeed an ambitious enterprise, yet these are the requirements the *Bildungsroman* should meet. This image is indeed too perfect, although at many points it undermines its own perfection. Even *Bildung*, the concept on which most critical texts are based as their stable point, contains in itself several contradictory meanings: it is the desired goal of formation, the progress from the origin to the end, the promise that the (often) positive end, the complete formation and cultural integration of the individual can be achieved, as well as the knowledge of the impossibility of fulfilling such a desire, the consciousness of the inevitable failure of the enterprise. *Bildung* emerges from the analysis as an elusive metaphor. When it points to a meaning, that meaning in its turn will point to other possible connotations. These possible referents read one another, and, by way of interpretation, bring about more and more possible connotations, thus making the discourse of the *Bildungsroman* riven by internal contradictions.

Our reading, however, cannot stop at this point. If we continue reading the concepts in the focus of the critical texts, we will find that the *Bildungsroman* emerges from the texts which intend to create it as a discourse consisting of various figures that the theories regard as genre classificatory features. If, by thorough analysis, we go through all these figures in search of the "meaning" of the *Bildungsroman* as it is created in the critical texts, our reading, in its attempt to find the solid foundation for a possible definition, will be found to shift from figure to figure. The elusive and self-contradictory definitions will turn the direction of our reading to figures pointing from *Bildung* through modernity, youth, self and society to happiness and freedom that will open up other possible chains of supplements. Thus, instead of finding a solid point (the first appropriate figure which is thus no longer a figure) in the centre of the discourse of the *Bildungsroman*, our reading will follow a chain of figures that substitute one another and point farther and farther away from the *Bildungsroman*. Instead of being the "perfect," optimistic form it is assumed to be by Moretti, the *Bildungsroman* as a discourse turns out to be self-contradictory and elusive. While constructing the *Bildungsroman* as a system of figures, its theories themselves bring about the deconstruction of their own narratives, and create the *Bildungsroman* as a deconstructive discourse. Thus the *Bildungsroman* is born as a "perfect" form in the deconstruction of

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<sup>20</sup> Moretti, p. 8.

the critical texts that create it, and it comes into existence only as the desire, or the supplement of the above mentioned narratives. This supplement, however, can well be regarded as an allegory (in Paul de Man's interpretation of the concept) which narrates the elusiveness of the *Bildungsroman* as a system of figures, thus narrating the unreadability of the *Bildungsroman* as it is created by critical texts.<sup>21</sup> Out of the deconstruction of the critical texts various supplementary texts emerge. These texts are novels interpreted by the theories as novels which conform to the criteria of the "perfect" genre.

From the possible supplementary narratives engendered by the deconstruction of the theories of the *Bildungsroman* I chose to read *Jane Eyre*. This novel is frequently read as a *Bildungsroman*, yet it will now be read as a text reading the narratives analysed above. Let *Jane Eyre* be here a new, unfamiliar text brought into existence by the previous narratives, which text, nevertheless, has existed before as a readerly, classical text in the Barthesian sense, determined by representation and the signified. The narratives on the *Bildungsroman* have already created *Jane Eyre*, and read it symbolically. In the course of the deconstruction of these narratives, *Jane Eyre* is born as a writerly text, which will denounce totalling meaning and present itself as a text based on the play of the signifier and differences, and which, as a supplement, may narrate the unreadability of the ideal *Bildungsroman*, the "optimistic" genre as it is desired by its theories.

## II JANE EYRE AS A READING

You seem to me like Saul, the son of Kish, who went  
in search of his father's asses, and found a kingdom.  
(Wilhelm Meister, VIII, 10)

Despite the difficulties *Jane Eyre* presents to such readings, critics who read *Jane Eyre* as a *Bildungsroman* attempt, or rather strive, to create and read Jane's narrative as a development story, and promote *Jane Eyre* as one of the possible

<sup>21</sup> When the readability of the narratives on the *Bildungsroman* is questioned, they point back to earlier texts (in this case to novels considered to be *Bildungsromane*) in search of a referent (but all in vain), and they engender a text (or subsequent texts) which narrates the unreadability of the first narratives. As Paul de Man puts it: "The paradigm for all texts consists of a figure (or a system of figures) and its deconstruction. But since this model cannot be closed off by a final reading, it engenders, in its turn, a supplementary figural superposition which narrates the unreadability of the prior narration. As distinguished from primary deconstructive narratives centered on figures and ultimately always on metaphor, we can call such narratives to the second (or the third) degree *allegories*" (p. 205).

referents of the term *Bildungsroman*. Moreover, the narrator Jane also reads her story according to the assumptions of this genre. It is not my intention here to prove that *Jane Eyre* is not a *Bildungsroman* (on this issue one can hardly make a decision because of the indeterminacy of the term), but rather to show how this very text, as a supplement, narrates the deconstruction of its readings as a *Bildungsroman*. On a closer scrutiny it seems that *Jane Eyre* and the critical texts tell a similar story: *Jane Eyre*'s text repeats the way the critical texts deconstruct themselves, and thus it allegorically narrates their deconstruction. These critical readings, among others, include texts by Helene Moglen, Franco Moretti, Karen E. Rowe, Janet H. Freeman, and Jane Eyre, considering the novel also as a reading (or allegory) of the fictitious author Jane Eyre's reading, that is, of a reading preceding the text. For this I shall examine some of the requirements established by these texts for *Jane Eyre* as a *Bildungsroman*, read them together with the narratives analysed in the previous section, and let *Jane Eyre*'s text reflect on them. As in the first part of my paper, I shall start with *Bildung*.

In the examination of the novel's relation to the *Bildungsroman* one may attempt to answer the question what idea of *Bildung* (if any) *Jane Eyre* satisfies. According to Helene Moglen, the novel is the "story of the heroine's psychological development," which presents the emergence of the integrity of the female self.<sup>22</sup> In Karen Rowe's interpretation, *Jane Eyre* conforms in some respects to Buckley's definition of a "typical *Bildungsroman* plot" in that Jane as a child is in conflict with hostile forces, then leaves home, receives education, and seeks experience at Thornfield.<sup>23</sup> In this novel, however, the protagonist's growth and maturation are facilitated by the encounter with male sexuality and love that will change her "from a plain, lowly Jane into a beautiful lady of the manor." In contrast with the usual "male" *Bildungsroman* plot, the novel follows the pattern of the fairy-tale up to the point when the latter is subverted, since it cannot satisfy

<sup>22</sup> Helene Moglen. "Jane Eyre: The Creation of a Feminist Myth." *Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived*. London: The University of Wisconsin Press, Ltd., 1984, p. 108 and p. 143.

<sup>23</sup> Jerome Buckley attempts to determine the main characteristics of the genre by abstracting from different novels a "typical" *Bildungsroman* plot, in which a child grows up in the country among many constraints placed upon his free imagination, and where his family, especially his father, is hostile to him and to the new ideas he has gained from reading. At an early age he leaves home for the city, where his real "education" begins, and where he experiences love, sexuality, and friendship. In the end he accommodates to the modern world, and gains maturity (p. 17). Buckley regards as *Bildungsromane* novels like *Wilhelm Meister*, *The Red and the Black*, *Sons and Lovers*, *The Mill on the Floss*, but excludes *Tom Jones*, and does not mention, for example, *Jane Eyre*.

the heroine's independence and human equality, which are gained at the end of the novel after breaking with the fairy-tale pattern.<sup>24</sup> Franco Moretti considers *Jane Eyre* a representative of the English *Bildungsroman*, which type of novel, in contrast with the continental type, can be characterised by the stability of narrative conventions and cultural assumptions.<sup>25</sup> Whereas these readings focus mainly on the formation of the narrated self, Janet H. Freeman follows up Jane Eyre's progress in storytelling and acquiring verbal skills, till in the end it becomes possible for her to narrate the autobiography properly. She considers Jane's autobiography as sufficient proof for Jane's successful development as a narrator: "The re-creation of her own life in her own powerful words completes Jane's history much more fundamentally than does her marriage with Rochester: the inevitable outcome of *Jane Eyre* is *Jane Eyre*."<sup>26</sup>

These critics offer optimistic interpretations of *Jane Eyre* as a *Bildungsroman* and claim that *Bildung* in the novel affects the whole human being, including mind, body and spirit, and that in the end marriage, happiness, equality, and maturity are achieved.<sup>27</sup> The texts also imply that it is possible both for the narrator and for the narrated self to emerge from the development as complete and integral. Consequently, the narrator will be able to tell her true story, which is presented in the novel. Such optimistic interpretations are possible only if, on the one hand, one attributes too much value to Jane's reading of her own story, considering it as a privileged interpretation, and, on the other hand, if one chooses to interpret the novel teleologically, from the end back to the beginning, and to invest Jane Eyre with a developed character in the end, supposedly achieved as a result of the *Bildung* she has undergone in the novel. The readers of the *Bildungsroman*, with the happy outcome in mind, interpret the text as a representation of the hero's development resulting in a happy ending. Now I will start to follow this method, but with a closer look at the presupposed *telos*, and first I will read the tropes of the final happiness and equality at the end of *Jane Eyre*.

<sup>24</sup> Karen E Rowe. "Fairy-born and human-bred: Jane Eyre's Education in Romance." *The Voyage In*, pp. 70-1.

<sup>25</sup> Moretti, p. 181.

<sup>26</sup> Janet H. Freeman. "Speech and Silence in *Jane Eyre*." *Studies in English Literature* 24 (1984) 683-700, p. 698.

<sup>27</sup> For Jane's spiritual development see Barbara Hardy. "Dogmatic Form: Daniel Defoe, Charlotte Brontë, Thomas Hardy, and E. M. Forster." *The Appropriate Form: An Essay on the Novel*. London: The Athlone Press, 1971, pp. 51-82.

## 1 The outcome

The above mentioned readings claim that happiness is achieved in Jane and Rochester's marriage, because they become equals in the end, so equality is the basic condition of happiness, which will be fulfilled. The text, however, says something different from its readings, even from Jane's authorial reading. Earlier in her text Jane states that she has no belief in marriage: "I don't want to marry, and never shall marry" (383),<sup>28</sup> yet in the end she says that perfect concord and happiness in marriage are achieved:

I have now been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest – blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

(pp. 445–6)

Although equality is stated later on, the text alludes to the Biblical creation story, where the woman, secondarily, is created out of the man's body. Reference to the first human couple implies Jane's identification with the role of Eve, that is the secondary, the traditionally inferior. Also, for Jane, to be together with Rochester is "as free as in solitude, as gay as in company" (p. 446). Being together is measured by the values of solitude and company, which implies the priority of these for Jane. Something similar happens in the case of talking and thinking: "We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and audible thinking" (p. 446). Here the activity to which talking is compared, which is taken for granted, in terms of which the narrator does the defining is solitary thinking. The text implies that the values of solitude are more basic for Jane than the values of being together with Rochester. Happiness in marriage has thus to be explained, justified, it is not accepted as something natural or self-evident, since it has to be defined in terms of solitary life. One possible reason for this can be the nature of marriages the protagonist encounters in the course of the novel. Most of them imply the feeling of disappointment for Jane: Miss Temple's marriage, which is followed by the teacher's leaving Lowood and Jane's feeling of losing Lowood as a home; the second marriage of Helen Burns's father; Jane's own

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<sup>28</sup> All parenthesised references to the novel are to Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre (An Autobiography)* (1847). London: Penguin, 1994.

aborted marriage with Rochester; the total failure of Rochester's marriage with Bertha; St. John's lack of marriage with Rosamond Oliver, and his proposed marriage to Jane, which would evidently have ruined her. Thus the critics' claim of 'marriage as the emblem of happiness in the *Bildungsroman*' is contradicted by the text; the symbolic relation between the two stated by genre theories can be questioned.

For Jane, marriage can become the emblem of happiness only if there is equality in marriage, and this is what even Jane admits in her reading of the end of her story. The language Jane uses, however, challenges her reading of "perfect concord:"

Mr. Rochester continued blind the first two years of our union: perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near – that knit us so very close! for I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand. Literally, I was (what he often called me) the apple of his eye. He saw nature – he saw books through me [...] Never did I weary of reading to him; never did I weary of conducting him where he wished to go: of doing for him what he wished to be done. And there was a pleasure in my *services*, most full, most exquisite, even though sad – because he claimed these services without painful shame or damping humiliation.

(p. 446, emphasis added)

Rochester's mutilation and loss of sight at the end of the novel are interpreted by psychoanalytic readings as the loss of male power, that is Rochester's "symbolic castration," where the heroine's happiness is achieved. Some readings claim that with Rochester's mutilation Jane gains phallic power, and this is the point of their equality, the denial of difference.<sup>29</sup> Dianne F. Sadoff, however, challenges this psychoanalytic reading, and claims that Rochester's symbolic castration is a punishment which does not represent equality but Jane's fear of masculine power and her desire to oppress it, so it is this desire that castrates Rochester.<sup>30</sup> All these readings imply that Jane in the end either achieves equality with Rochester, or gains (or tries to gain) power over him.

<sup>29</sup> See Barbara Milech and Cecelia Winkelman. "My Nameless Bliss: *Jane Eyre* and the Intolerance of Difference." Unpublished paper presented at conference: "The Legacy of the Brontës 1847–1997," University of Leeds, UK 11–13 April 1997, p. 4; Sandra M. Gilbert. "Plain Jane's Progress." *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre*. Ed. Beth Newman. Boston, New York: Bedford Books, 1996, p. 499.

<sup>30</sup> Sadoff, Dianne F. "The Father, Castration, and Female Fantasy in *Jane Eyre*." *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre*, p. 528.



Such readings, however, including Jane's own, which claims equality, create further problems of interpretation. If we assume that there is equality between the mutilated Rochester and Jane in the end, it would mean that Jane at the end of her progress is also reduced if Rochester had to become "castrated" in order to become her equal. In this case Jane's progress cannot be complete, since, instead of her rising from a status of inequality to that of equality, it was Rochester who had to be reduced.

The text itself may offer a different reading of the question of equality or inequality in the passage cited above. It is Rochester's defect (incompleteness) that draws Jane near to him, and makes Rochester dependent on Jane. By losing his sight and his right hand Rochester loses the ability to read and write.<sup>31</sup> Jane will read the world for him and write his story in her autobiography. (Note that Jane calls these "services.") Thus Jane becomes someone to complete Rochester's defects, someone added to Rochester: a supplement. Their relation is like that of text and supplement; Rochester, like the text without supplement, cannot even possess the illusion of completeness without Jane, as Jane and her story cannot exist without Rochester. Jane's happiness is achieved (if achieved at all) not in equality, but rather in this state of supplementarity, in the lack of totality, in the demystification of completeness.<sup>32</sup>

Jane is presented in her text as a reader; she has to read nature and culture for Rochester, and she has to read her own story. She tries to give meaning to her own story as a development story by supplying the figure of happiness with referents like marriage and equality, but she is blind to her own text which challenges the referential determinacy of 'happiness' and 'equality.' It is not my intention to offer another reading which claims that the figure 'happiness' can find its referent in supplementarity; I would rather state that it is supplementarity which, in Jane and Rochester's case, narrates the elusiveness of happiness,

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<sup>31</sup> Helene Moglen calls the reader's attention to an interesting ambiguity, namely that earlier in the text (p. 426) we are told that Rochester loses his left hand, and later Jane contradicts herself by saying that it was his right hand that was destroyed (Moglen, p. 141). In this way Jane herself can foster more possible interpretations than she could if she accounted for a lost left hand. Also, it becomes possible for her and for critics to interpret it as Rochester's loss of power, which contributes to her equality with him.

<sup>32</sup> Also, there is enough sadness behind Jane's happiness to make the very notion of happiness ambiguous. There are many deaths contributing to this final stage (Bertha Mason, John Eyre, Aunt Reed, John Reed), and it is Rochester's miserable state which, although makes Jane sad, still results in her happiness, since she can interpret the end of her story as the attainment of equality.

deconstructs the binary opposition of equality and inequality, and thus Jane and Rochester's marriage in the end becomes the allegory of the unreadability of the concepts.

A happy ending is not a factor accepted as a determining genre classificatory feature of the *Bildungsroman* by all the texts on the *Bildungsroman* I read in my paper, but it is necessary in novels of successful *Bildung*. For those who read *Jane Eyre* as a *Bildungsroman*, happiness achieved in equality is the *telos* of Jane's *Bildung*, an ending deserved by Jane. If happiness, both in itself and as a *telos* achieved as the result of *Bildung*, can be questioned, the possibility of a successful *Bildung* will also become rather uncertain, which may lead one to the suspicion that even those novels which are considered to be representations of the successful *Bildung* speak about their own disbelief in such a notion.

Despite Jane's optimism and belief in a development pattern, the text, unnoticed by Jane, expresses a disbelief in all these, and speaks against Jane's will. One such point among many is the elusiveness of the image of the happy family Jane presents at the end of the novel. Nina Schwartz points out how Jane's text shows the innate contradictions in the idealised completeness and harmony of the Victorian family.<sup>33</sup> Jane cannot notice, however, how her own family reproduces the same image, containing in itself the possibility of failure. Jane's treatment of Adèle repeats Jane's position in the Reed family (that of being different, being an outcast), and also the fate of Helen Burns, who was sent to the Lowood institution because of her father's second marriage. Adèle is also sent to school, where she starts to resemble the image of Jane as a child: "She looked pale and thin: she said she was not happy" (p. 445). Thus Jane's family also engenders the different, the supplement, carrying in itself the threat to narrate the incompleteness of the "complete" to which it is super-added.

The effect of happiness at the end of the story is also diminished by Jane's concluding the narration with St. John Rivers's last words. Jane believes in her development story, as St. John believed in his own. The two stories, both of them read by its narrator optimistically, can be read together. Here is St. John's story narrated and interpreted by himself:

[religion] has cultivated my original qualities thus: From the minute germ, natural affection, she has developed the overshadowing tree, philanthropy. From the wild stringy root of human uprightness she has

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<sup>33</sup> Nina Schwartz. "No Place Like Home: The Logic of the Supplement in *Jane Eyre*." *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre*, pp. 549-64.

reared a due sense of the divine justice. Of the ambition to win power and renown for my wretched self she has formed the ambition to spread my Master's Kingdom, to achieve victories for the standard of the Cross. So much has religion done for me; turning the original materials to the best account; *pruning and training nature*. But she could not eradicate nature; nor will it be eradicated "till this mortal shall put on immortality."

(p. 371, my italics)

St. John interprets his life as a successful story of religious formation. Successful in that nature has been pruned and trained, general human values like philanthropy or divine justice have been developed, the natural, not perfect in itself, has been perfected "to the best account." Knowing the end of St. John's story, we may note that behind the optimism and the belief in a perfect development there lies the shadow that such a perfection can be completed only by the individual's death, where nature (the original state to be perfected) will indeed be eradicated. Ending the novel with St. John's last words makes one read Jane's and St. John's "development" together, and makes one read St. John's "story of development" as an allegory of Jane's story. This allegory narrates the contradictions in Jane's optimistic reading of her own text, and narrates the fact that Jane's interpretation, like St. John's reading, is a misreading blind to the impossibility of perfect happiness and concord.

If even Jane's final reading is a misreading, this questions the assumption that Jane as a reader (or narrator) of her story successfully develops, which in turn challenges Mahoney's and Morgenstern's notion of *Bildung* as the development of the reader.

## 2 Reader and narrator

Starting out from the assumption that Jane as the author is at the same time the first reader of her story, first I shall examine *Bildung* as the development of the reader. I will compare the final stage, (mis)read by Jane as a state of happiness based on equality, to earlier interpretations of the same notions in Jane's reading. The main turning points in the plot can be interpreted as moments of insight for Jane, moments when she as a character reconsiders the events happened thus far, re-interprets figures she uses, and also her own position as a reader of her story. Such a turning point is the aborted marriage after which Jane will re-read her whole love story with

Rochester, even though we must note that the reconsideration of the notion of equality between Jane and Rochester starts after their betrothal, when Rochester begins to treat Jane as one of his mistresses. Interestingly, however, Jane's way of reading and re-reading her love story is similar to *Jane Eyre's* way of reading and re-reading the narratives on the *Bildungsroman*.

Before the turning point, for a long time Jane interprets her relationship with Rochester as one of equality: "[...] though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him" (p. 174); "I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, not even mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal – as we are!" (p. 251). As Gilbert points out, Jane's love is strongly connected to a feeling of equality.<sup>34</sup> Her concept of love implies a possible spiritual communication in spite of the social difference between herself and Rochester, and a mental assimilation, the abolishment of difference between self and other. The self is defined in the other, and the other in the self. This identification with the other includes the whole human being (brain, heart, blood, nerves), all those factors which are to be developed in the *Bildungsroman*.

With Jane's disillusionment, however, the whole construction of images, that is, love's metonymic identification with equality, equality's interpretation as the assimilation of the self with the beloved (self and the other, inside and outside), turns out to be inapplicable to the Jane–Rochester relationship. It also becomes evident for Jane that she misinterpreted the figure of Rochester and treated him as an idol, a substitute for God ("I could not, in those days see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol" [p. 272]). After the disillusionment, a possible moment of insight, all the figures the love story was based on become subverted, and Jane re-reads her story from a different perspective:

I looked at my love: that feeling which was my master's – which he had created; it shivered in my heart, like a suffering child in a cold cradle: sickness and anguish had seized it; it could not seek Mr. Rochester's arms – it could not desire warmth from his breast [...] Mr. Rochester was not to me what he had been; for he was not what I thought him [...] Real affection, it seemed, he could not have for me, it had only been fitful passion; that was balked; he would want me no more. I should fear even to cross his path now: my view must be hateful to him. Oh, how blind had been my eyes! How weak my conduct!

(p. 294)

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<sup>34</sup> Gilbert, p. 486.

Realising the unreadability of her own narrative of love in that the system of figures it had been based upon was not adequate in the case of her romance, Jane, in her re-reading, first attempts to make the story readable. She tries to read what she could not read before, the enigmas of the story ("I don't understand enigmas. I never could guess a riddle in my life" [p. 196]). Jane now tries to read the dreams she had before her wedding, or rather, lets the dream write her own re-reading of the love story. Committing the same mistake as before, she again reads her love figuratively through substituting the former (supposed) referent (equality, assimilation) with another one, the image of the suffering child she had in her dreams. Jane's dreams and her state of mind after the disillusionment interpret each other in an allegorical chain of figures. Jane's love is the concept to be given meaning and to be expressed figuratively. Jane's love, which was also Rochester's love when self and other were thought to be identifiable by Jane, is compared to a suffering child in a simile. For its sickness the child cannot even attempt to reach Rochester, its father. This simile points back to Jane's dreams where Jane, attempting to overtake Rochester on a long road in vain, has to carry a little child. While in the dream it is Jane who reaches out for Rochester, in the simile it is the little child who cannot reach his arms. The dream re-reads the simile, so it becomes possible to identify in a synecdoche Jane with the child as her love, that is the whole with the part. Now Jane can treat this system of tropes as an allegory of her present state of mind. In this allegory Jane (as the child as love) dares not attempt to reach Rochester (father of the child as love) because of the disillusionment, the realisation of separateness, the impossibility of interpreting her love as an assimilation of self and other, or equality.

Her mistake is not only to risk reading her story again figuratively and thus risk making the same mistake, exactly when she realises her blindness and denounces the mistake, but also to attempt to find a signified for love in the figure of the child in her dream. The dream, however, cannot give meaning to Jane's interpretation of love after the disappointment. The dream points to the unconscious, the unnarratable and unreadable, of which it is not a sign (since the dream hides rather than signifies), but a supplement narrating the inability of the unconscious to function as a referent. Thus Jane's search for the meaning of her love cannot come to an end in this direction. She finds herself in a hermeneutic circle, in which she tries to understand her new notion of love from her dream, but the dream is understandable only from the new notion of love.

When Jane re-reads the love story, she has to realise that the equality on which she based her love never existed in their relationship. One proof of the inequality is Rochester's secret: the story of Bertha Mason.<sup>35</sup> Jane knows that Rochester's language is enigmatic, it hides something she cannot know but wishes to know ("[...] and I thought Miss Ingram happy, because one day she might look into the abyss at her leisure, explore [the eyes'] secrets and analyze their nature" (p. 187); "Your language is enigmatic, sir" [p. 139]). Nevertheless, she forgives him after his confession of the secret. The secret itself, however, remains half-told, which Jane cannot recognise for her trust in language; consequently, she will misread Rochester in the future too. When telling the story of Bertha, Rochester notes: "Jane, I will not trouble you with abominable details; some strong words shall express what I have to say" (p. 303). His language hides as well as reveals, and important details may remain untold that may support Bertha's right, or reveal the causes of Bertha's behaviour.

Another reason for the inequality that Jane has to realise is that it was always Rochester who directed the plot of the Jane-Rochester story which turns out to have been something like his experiment: "Impatiently I waited for the evening, when I might summon you to my presence. An unusual – to me – a perfectly new character, I suspected, was yours: I desired to search it deeper and know it better [...] Yet, for a long time, I treated you distantly, and sought your company rarely" (pp. 310–11). Rochester wants to fit Jane into his story, to use her to erase his past.<sup>36</sup> He believes that he can transform Jane into a means that would turn his story of corruption into a story of development, but what he does, instead, is to treat her as an object of his desire, like his other mistresses. Jane realises the impossibility of equality and changes the idea of bodily, mental, and spiritual assimilation into the possibility of an exclusively spiritual assimilation after death, ironically referring back to her own earlier reading of their relationship. "Believe in heaven. Hope to meet again there" (p. 313).

After leaving Thornfield, Jane tries to substitute love with religious longing (for a long time felt for another substitute for God the Father, St. John) and veneration:

I felt veneration for St. John – veneration so strong that its impetus thrust me at once to the point I had so long shunned [...] I was almost as hard beset by him now as I had been once before, in a different way, by

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<sup>35</sup> Gilbert, p. 488.

<sup>36</sup> Moglen, p. 123.



another. I was a fool both times. To have yielded then would have been an error of principle; to have yielded now would have been an error of judgment.

(p. 413)

Denouncing St. John's substitution for God by questioning the idea that it is God's will that she should marry St. John, Jane returns in the end to her first, once rejected interpretation of love based on happiness in equality and spiritual, mental, and bodily assimilation, thus committing once more the same mistake ("the pulsation of *the* heart that beats in our separate bosoms" [p. 446]; "We talk, I believe, all day long" [p. 446]; "In spirit, I believe, we must have met" [p. 442]; emphasis added).

Thus we cannot say that Jane as the reader of her own story develops, since even if she is occasionally able to read her story critically she makes the same mistakes from time to time. One reason for Jane's committing the same reading error in the course of the novel can possibly be her trust in language, in Franco Moretti's interpretation of the *Bildungsroman*, an important requirement for the genre.<sup>37</sup> It is Jane's trust in language, her belief that language is capable of expressing the truth, which, ironically, hinders her development as a reader and narrator, and contributes to the impossibility of interpreting the term *Bildung* as the successful development of the narrator.

According to Moretti's theory, the *Bildungsroman* "strives to prove [...] that everyone – bastard child, woman, drunk, fugitive, pauper – has the right to tell her/his side of the story, to be listened to and receive justice."<sup>38</sup> In order to be listened to, this statement implies, one has to be able to tell one's story. Jane, both as a character and as a narrator, expresses this objective; in her quarrel with Mrs. Reed the child Jane promises that "I will tell anybody who asks me questions, *this exact tale*" (p. 39, emphasis added). Jane as narrator, with a belief in language and her narrating abilities, announces that "I am merely telling the truth" (p. 110).

The problem with this assumption lies not only in the inescapably rhetorical nature of language, but also in the impossibility of the existence of the true story to be told. Freeman reads Jane's story as the successful development of Jane as a narrator. During the process of Jane's education as a narrator, Freeman claims, she hears and re-tells her story again and again. Jane's story and Jane

<sup>37</sup> Moretti, p. 49.

<sup>38</sup> Moretti, p. 213.

herself exist in interpretations given by other characters. Jane tells different stories about herself to Mrs. Reed, Helen Burns, Miss Temple, Rivers, and Rochester, which stories are parts of the whole story narrated in the end. "All these narratives are noticeably limited in scope and intention, only partial versions of the complex narrative we ourselves are taking in as we listen to them."<sup>39</sup> In Freeman's interpretation, Jane in the end succeeds in narrating her truth by narrating her final text.

In my view, however, even this final version (Jane's autobiography) should not be taken for the reported truth; it is to be considered as a *sjuzet* meeting the requirements of narrative coherence. Franco Moretti, while aware of the elusiveness inherent in the binary opposition between *fabula* and *sjuzet*, still emphasises their importance in the English *Bildungsroman*. Truth and justice, in Moretti's interpretation, can be grasped best in *fabula*, since, as the English juridical commonplace puts it, 'Justice is as simple as truth.' *Fabula*, according to the formalist theory, is "logical, complete, chronologically consequential, objective – in a word, simple," as opposed to *sjuzet*. But *sjuzet*, which is connected to the villain in his theory anyway, is not merely a literary device, but functions as a counter-*fabula* the aim of which is to silence the original truth forever.<sup>40</sup> *Fabula*, however, as Jonathan Culler argues, is not the reality reported by discourse, not a true sequence of events out of which various *sjuzets* can be formed, but rather the product of *sjuzet* which can exist only in discourse.<sup>41</sup> Thus one can argue that the story Jane Eyre narrates in the end is not her true *fabula* as it is. The moment when the *fabula* can be (re)constructed from the *sjuzet* (that is the moment when the mystery is supposedly solved) is not the revelation of truth, but only a device used for the narrator's justification of her motives and deeds. What Jane tells in the end is not an artistic arrangement of the elements of the true story but a narrative construction, a *sjuzet* from which one can construct a *fabula*, but this, as a secondary construction, can also be regarded as a *sjuzet*. This secondary *sjuzet* can be called history.

History, Wolfgang Iser claims, is the pattern that underlies the biographical form of the novel. The ordering of the elements is teleological; they

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<sup>39</sup> Freeman, p. 685.

<sup>40</sup> Moretti, p. 210.

<sup>41</sup> Culler, Jonathan. "Fabula and Sjuzet in the Analysis of Narrative: Some American Discussions." Eds. Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa. *Narratology: An Introduction*. London and New York: Longman, 1996, p. 95.

are bound together by the meaning of the end and presented in causal order.<sup>42</sup> While a historical explanation is constructed, however, details that challenge this unity are suppressed. Coherent writing always implies not-saying besides saying.<sup>43</sup> One example from *Jane Eyre* is when, at the beginning of Chapter 10, the narrator mentions that she will leave eight of her Lowood years unaccounted for, since they will not contribute to the understanding of the end. Another example is the confession of Rochester mentioned earlier, when he hides facts about his relationship with Bertha.

The truth and the complete story thus cannot evidently be narrated properly, even if Jane attempts this and believes it possible. It is the plot and the requirements of a “coherent” narrative that dominate and guide Jane’s telling and reading of her story. In the sections that follow, many other elements of plot in *Jane Eyre* shall be re-read from this perspective; that is, as events that try to meet the requirements of narrative coherence and the plot structure of the *Bildungsroman*. I will start to read plot in *Jane Eyre* while examining other aspects of the *Bildungsroman*, namely the process of social integration as a process due to the individual’s free will, and the aspect of individual formation as a condition of the attainment of the coherent self.

### 3 Social integration: “as a free individual, not as a fearful subject”

Plot in *Jane Eyre* is interpreted by critics who read the novel as a *Bildungsroman* as an “allegorical journey of development,”<sup>44</sup> a pilgrimage the goal of which is maturity, independence, and equality with Rochester,<sup>45</sup> and, according to the norms of the *Bildungsroman*, social integration. The plot of Jane’s assumed development starts at Gateshead with Jane’s childhood. Even as a child, Jane is excluded from the society of the family by Mrs. Reed:

Me she had dispensed from joining the group, saying, ‘She regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance; but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation that I was endeavouring in good earnest to *acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition*, a more attractive and sprightly manner – something lighter,

<sup>42</sup> Wolfgang Iser. *Sterne: Tristram Shandy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 2–3.

<sup>43</sup> Schwartz, pp. 550–1.

<sup>44</sup> Moglen, p. 117.

<sup>45</sup> Gilbert, p. 491.

franker, *more natural*, as it were – she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy little children.’

(p. 9, emphases added)

As the price of the possibility of integration into a community, Mrs. Reed requires Jane to *acquire* a childlike behaviour, to learn to be natural, thus questioning the primacy of childhood as a natural stage of life. As Nina Schwartz points out, Mrs. Reed’s theory of childhood education resembles that of Rousseau, who defines human nature as essentially good, yet claims that education is necessary to perfect the (supposedly already perfect) child.<sup>46</sup> Mrs. Reed’s requirement is that in order to become social Jane should learn to be natural. Thus, an outside addition (learning, education) is needed for the original to become itself and be capable of socialisation. This idea of education and the natural, however, reads the contradictory medieval, non-canonised meaning of *Bildung* that implies both the purgation of the soul and its formation, which meaning may hide an innate disbelief in the primacy of the natural as clean and good, and thus imply the supplementary state of nature. Interestingly, it seems that this *Bildungsroman* reads against the canonised meaning of *Bildung*. Like Derrida, it reads Rousseau and reads the contradictions innate in ‘education’ as one possible connotation of *Bildung*. The idea of nature as a supplement, present at many points in *Jane Eyre*, may shed a different light on the *Bildungsroman*’s concept of socialisation happening in concord with the individual’s free will.

One such point can be found at the very beginning of the novel. “There was no possibility of taking a walk that day,” is how Jane starts her autobiography (p. 9). Jane is excluded from nature because of its hostility, because of the cold winter wind and penetrating rain which makes outdoor exercise impossible. Paradoxically, however, Jane seems to be contented with this situation: “I was glad of it; I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed” (p. 9). The reason for her gladness is the possibility of avoiding coming home to the family in which Jane has to feel herself inferior and despised.<sup>47</sup> Excluded both from nature and from society, the only option for her

<sup>46</sup> Schwartz, p. 555.

<sup>47</sup> Schwartz, p. 554.

remains reading Bewick's *History of British Birds*. This book can be read as the possibility of getting access to nature only through culture, as a mediator between the two which constructs nature through the letter, establishes nature as already written. Jane also notes the significance of the letter in understanding, producing, and giving meaning to nature:

I returned to my book Bewick's *History of British Birds* the letterpress thereof I cared little for, generally speaking; and yet there were certain introductory pages that, child as I was, I could not pass quite as a blank [...] The words in these introductory pages connected themselves with the succeeding vignettes, and gave significance to the rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray; to the broken boat stranded on a desolate coast; to the cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking.

(p. 10)

This very book, as a representative, not just of culture as Boumelha<sup>48</sup> points out but also of nature as a supplement to culture, is the object John Reed flings at Jane. It has the power to hurt as well as to educate, thus connecting the notions of nature, culture, education and suffering.

Other manifestations of nature as a supplement can be traced in the novel at points where nature can be present only through *prosopopoeia* or pathetic fallacy. Nature is given face, presented as a humanised entity, having a function in the narrator's interpretation of her own story, and also as a background reflecting the inner state of the protagonist's soul. It is a heavy storm that appropriately follows Mr. Rochester's false marriage proposal to Jane (pp. 254–5), and the beautiful weather next day suits Jane's happiness: "Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy" (p. 256). Jane, however, cannot read the fallacy of *prosopopoeia*, the optimistic device she uses when interpreting the world. One of the causes of the many deaths at Lowood is beautiful but hostile nature. "That forest dell, where Lowood lay, was the cradle of fog and fogbred pestilence; which quickening with the quickening spring, crept into the Orphan Asylum, breathed typhus through its crowded schoolroom and dormitory, and, ere May arrived, transformed the seminary into a hospital" (p. 78). Failing to learn from the hostility of nature, and committing the same mistake over and over again, Jane

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<sup>48</sup> Penny Boumelha. "Jane Eyre." *Charlotte Brontë*. New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, p. 65.

attempts to read Nature as her helper in the scene of her wandering in the moors after leaving Thornfield. When Jane leaves Rochester, remaining alone and without money, thus incapable of finding her place in human society, she feels that "I have no relative but the universal mother, Nature: I will seek her breast and ask repose" (p. 319). Excluded from humankind, Jane tries to find shelter in an already humanised Nature, to which she gives a human face, the face of the mother.

Nature *seemed* to me benign and good; *I thought she loved me*, outcast as I was; and I, who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, insult, clung to her with filial fondness. To-night, at last, I would be her guest, as I was her child: my mother would lodge me without money and without price.

(p. 320, my italics)

Margaret Homans refers to the tone of doubt and disillusionment in this passage. Nature only seems benign, Jane desires to be loved by the "universal mother," desires to be her child, but she is just her non-paying guest.<sup>49</sup> Jane has to be disillusioned with the image of humanised nature, and recognise the fallacy of *prosopopoeia* by awakening to her bodily needs, unsatisfied and unsatisfiable outside society. Jane, as a human being, cannot find her place in nature, since nature proves that to become part of it is to die.<sup>50</sup> "I wished I could live in it and on it. I would fain at the moment have become bee or lizard, that I might have found fitting nutriment, permanent shelter here. But I was a human being, and had a human being's wants: I must not linger where there was nothing to supply them" (p. 321).

After suffering from the false interpretation of nature which almost caused her death, Jane is forced to find her way back to human society if she wants to remain alive. If nature can be grasped only through interpretation, and if man cannot find his place in it, then there is no other option for the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* but to find his or her way in society; integration, thus, is not an optional but a necessary factor. The possibility of one's social integration as a free individual, the option of one's giving up freedom for the sake of a safer

<sup>49</sup> Margaret Homans. "Dreaming of Children: Literalization in *Jane Eyre*." *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 95.

<sup>50</sup> Homans, p. 95.



social state that the theories of the *Bildungsroman* promise seem to be too idealistic. What remains for the hero and the narrator is the belief that a successful social and individual formation is possible. In other words, what remains is to strive to write one's story as a successful *Bildungsroman*.

#### 4 Self: insistence on unity as resistance to development

Besides social integration, however, the formation of the self as a coherent, integral entity (an important aspect of *Bildung*) is a crucial criterion in a novel considered to be a *Bildungsroman*. There are two basic points to be examined in this interpretation of *Bildung*. First, whether the self is really as integral in the novel as it should be to conform to the criteria of the ideal *Bildung*, and second, whether the self develops or not.

Helene Moglen calls our attention to the fact that Jane's self is divided at every separation, but the last act of separation (separation from St. John Rivers) contributes to the attainment of the integral self, and this integrity will be achieved in the union of Jane and Rochester.<sup>51</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert also admits that there is a "frightening series of separations" within the self symbolised in Jane's dream by the little child interpreted by the critic as Jane's orphaned alter-ego she has to carry with herself. According to Gilbert, it is the "symbolic" death of Bertha that frees Jane from the tormenting furies and makes possible wholeness within the self, which comes together with a marriage of equality.<sup>52</sup> To the question of coherence or incoherence, however, Jane's text may also offer an answer. It is often noted by critics that every moment of crisis or important decision is reflected in Jane as a conversation of opposing forces within her psyche, as a debate between sense and sensibility, Super-Ego and Id.<sup>53</sup> This, however, in itself contradicts the ideal of *Bildung*, which, according to Moretti, focuses on the Ego, and imagines the self as it gets impulses from various forces from the outside, from society to which impulses the self reacts. Here the outside influences cause a debate between the parts of the self.

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<sup>51</sup> Moglen, p. 114.

<sup>52</sup> Gilbert, pp. 491-3.

<sup>53</sup> For the interpretation of the opposing parts within Jane's self see Doreen Roberts. "Jane Eyre and the Warped System of Things." *Jane Eyre* (New Casebooks). Ed. Heather Glen. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1997, pp. 36-7.

From the many moments of crisis where such a conversation takes place, I will analyse one, Jane's decision to leave Rochester: "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. [...] I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad – as I am now" (p. 314). In order to care for the self, to be able to preserve the self, Jane has to make a division within the self in a reflexive act also signified by the reflexive pronoun, to create an 'I' which will take care of 'myself'.<sup>54</sup> Paradoxically, the division within the self is necessary if Jane wants to preserve the self; thus the strict binary opposition of coherence and incoherence is decomposed. Many other characters of the novel (like Mr. Brocklehurst, Rochester, St. John Rivers) are read by critics as forces which threaten Jane's self, which try to deprive the self from features important in Jane. Running away from Rochester is often interpreted as Jane's attempt to preserve the unity of her self which Rochester wanted to deprive of its aspect of masculinity.<sup>55</sup>

Interestingly, however, in the passage cited above there are more than two 'I's' presented. There is an 'I' which cares for the self, respects the self and holds to the principles, and there is the 'I' of the *now* which is mad, friendless, solitary and needs care. As opposed to the 'I' of the *now* a past 'I' is also presented as an ideal, which needed no care, thus no division, since it was sane. Jane presupposes an ideal state of the self when the part which received the principles was the same as the part which was able to follow the principles. It is very difficult to tell from the text which is the ideal state of sanity Jane refers to in this passage. One can only think of the Lowood period, frequently regarded as a scene of Jane's exposure to self-discipline, but her Lowood education in outside values was rather vague, and questionable even for herself, which fact I will discuss in the next section of this paper. It seems, rather, that this ideal state of balance and unity within the self is a supplement emerging as Jane's desire from the division innate in Jane's self.

There are many examples which present a discourse between various parts of Jane's divided psyche, such as Jane's decision to find a place as a governess, the struggle between her calm self and her wild dreams while she teaches at Morton, or her hesitation whether to marry St. John or not. The question, however, is the achievement of a unity of the self in the end as a *telos* of *Bildung*, and the

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<sup>54</sup> In *Allegories of Reading*, Paul de Man calls our attention to the differentiation between the nominative and the reflexive 'I,' created in the reflexive act (p. 165).

<sup>55</sup> Moglen, p. 128.

development of the self in the course of the novel. Let me start out from the *telos*. Although at the end of the novel there is no conflict presented that would divide the self by fostering communication between its parts, the novel, as an autobiography, should conclude with the act of narration in which the roles of the narrator and the narrated self are created. This, as it is claimed in the first part of this essay, automatically causes a division within the “coherent” self the narrator attempts to narrate, since the narrator has to be alienated from the narrated self in order to be able to tell its story.

It is often noted by critics, however, that Jane as a narrator strives to reduce the distance between her narrating and narrated selves by the lack of ironic distancing, which is otherwise a frequent device used in autobiographical novels.<sup>56</sup> Milech and Winkelman interpret Jane the narrator’s attempt to identify herself with the narrated ‘I’ as one manifestation of the ideal symbiotic union Jane seeks all through the novel. This desire for union presents itself in Jane’s creating her self-images from perceptions of the external world. In the process of constructing the image of the self, Jane turns to different objects (landscape, characters, paintings, dreams, mode of narration). The self defines itself by overtly identifying with “good” characters (like Miss Temple, the Rivers sisters) and objects, but the “bad” characters (like Mrs. Reed, the Reed children, Mr. Brocklehurst) are set in opposition with the heroine, so her identification with them remains repressed.<sup>57</sup> The desire for the ideal union is present in the novel in three basic forms: “Romantic transcendence (being one with nature), religious submission (being one with God), and romantic love (being one with a sexualized other).”<sup>58</sup>

Jane’s earliest images of her self that we encounter in the novel are those of the scapegoat and the elf. She defines herself against the Reed family as an outcast, “a heterogeneous thing,” the “scapegoat of the nursery” (p. 17). As Nina Schwartz puts it, she is like Adèle in Jane and Rochester’s marriage; her function is that of the supplement in opposition with which the family can define itself as perfect, complete, and happy.<sup>59</sup> Jane’s identification with the image of the elf, however, can possibly be a result of Bessie’s stories, many of them fairy-tales,

<sup>56</sup> See Susan Sniader Lanser. “*Jane Eyre’s* Legacy: The Powers and Dangers of Singularity.” *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992, p. 182; Milech-Winkelman, p. 12.

<sup>57</sup> Milech-Winkelman, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> Milech-Winkelman, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Schwartz, p. 556.

which have a crucial role in Jane's self-definition. Bessie's stories function as alternative narratives for Jane, which she can use as possible models to accept or reject. Jane's mirror episode in the red room well exemplifies the importance of Bessie's narratives in Jane's "Ego formation:"

[...] the strange little figure there gazing at me with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented as coming out of lone, ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travellers.

(p. 16)

This is an act both of alienation and self-identification. In the mirror Jane finds a tale instead of herself, an alien figure, the elf from Bessie's fairy-tales. After differentiating herself from the "bad" Reeds, the remaining option for Jane is to identify herself with the fairy. Thus, as Rowe also notes, it is not the self that Jane sees in the mirror, but the other, the fairy-tale hero, which functions as a possible figure for Jane to identify with.<sup>60</sup> Rochester, from their first meeting, very strongly relies on this image when he interprets Jane. He even re-writes their romance in fairy-tale patterns for Adèle, and in this story he will live with the fairy-Jane on the moon (pp. 265–6). Karen E. Rowe points out that when Jane leaves Rochester she denounces the self-image of the fairy-tale hero and her story subverts the fairy-tale pattern in order for the heroine to gain independence and human equality.<sup>61</sup> After renouncing this self-image, however, Jane creates other self-images by using the same method of identification. Although it turns out that many of these images of herself are false, she continues creating new ones in the same way, substituting them for the old ones. Such images are that of the student in Lowood; the governess, "disconnected, poor, and plain;" her desired identification with Rochester as her equal both in Thornfield and Ferndean; and Jane Elliot, the village schoolteacher. All the objects and roles the self finds for itself to identify with will have to be given up for the sake of the final desired "equality" and "unity" with Rochester. In order to gain the desired happiness, Jane has to denounce her governess self, and make herself useful in only one

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<sup>60</sup> Rowe, p. 73.

<sup>61</sup> Rowe, p. 70.

direction. This end goes against the assumed goal of the *Bildung*, which is a developed state of all human potentials.<sup>62</sup>

Milech and Winkelman emphasise that the fantasy of the symbiotic union, the desire for completeness, wholeness, the resistance to accepting the difference between the self and the other is a determining characteristic of an early stage of subject formation, the pre-oedipal stage.<sup>63</sup> An important characteristic process of this phase of life is projective identification, in which the nascent self-conceptions are realised as wholly good and wholly bad, and projected onto objects of the external world. The individual identifies with objects representing the good part of the psyche, while objects regarded as "bad" are rejected.<sup>64</sup> In Milech and Winkelman's interpretation, in the process of Ego formation from the pre-oedipal to the oedipal stage, the infant has to develop towards the acceptance of separateness and sexual difference, but it must also preserve the nascent self despite the losses of separation and differentiation. Thus the earliest tasks of the emerging self are development and defence.<sup>65</sup>

Jane Eyre refuses to accept difference and separateness, and desires to preserve the ideal union. Thus, what happens in Jane's case is the rejection of

<sup>62</sup> Personality in the modern age was believed to be divided between different realms of life in competition with each other, such as the intimate, the private, the professional sphere, etc. "Modern man is divided by a professional life and a family life which are often in competition with each other... The modern way of life is the result of the divorce between elements which had formerly been united..." (Philippe Ariés quoted by Moretti, p. 39). The culture of *Bildung*, however, is strongly connected to the belief in the cultivation of all spheres at the same time. Georg Simmel: "We are not yet cultivated by having developed this or that individual bit of knowledge or skill; we become cultivated only when all of them serve a psychic unity which depends on but does not coincide with them" (quoted by Moretti, p. 40).

<sup>63</sup> Milech-Winkelman, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Projective identification is also a characteristic process of what Jacques Lacan calls the "mirror stage." According to Lacan, the formation of the Ego points from the mirror stage (determined by the Imaginary register, a self-deceit in which the Ego defines itself in others) to the symbolic, oedipal stage, in which the unconscious is built up by symbols, and which phase is also influenced by the Imaginary (see Jacques Lacan. "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I." *Écrits*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Routledge, 1977, pp. 1-7; Milech-Winkelman, p. 22, n. viii). Jane's identification with objects and characters is similar to the infant's self-identification through the Imaginary in Lacan. Jane's attempts to define herself through the Imaginary will result in her misreading and polarising other characters, such as reading Rochester's figure in fairy-tale terms, or interpreting St. John's character according to stories she read ("I saw he was of the material from which nature hews her heroes" [p. 388]) disregarding the fact that he chooses to become a missionary out of vanity and exhibitionism (see p. 358).

<sup>65</sup> Milech-Winkelman, p. 7.

development, of entering into and accepting the oedipal phase. By the very insistence on the achievement of a coherent personality by ending her story with presenting an idealised unity with Rochester and an attempted unity of the narrating and narrated selves, Jane also narrates allegorically her Ego's desire to resist development and remain in the pre-oedipal stage. It seems, paradoxically, that the development and the unity of the self, both important criteria of the *Bildungsroman*, cannot be present at the same time. Thus, instead of representing the heroine's *Bildung*, *Jane Eyre* narrates the intrinsic contradictions in the notion of *Bildung* as an overall development of the "Ego" and the attainment of the coherent self.

### 5 Plot: insistence on development

It must have taken much effort and optimism on Jane Eyre's part to create a plot which critics now interpret as something that satisfies the notion of the "typical *Bildung* plot" by using elements of plot pointing to decline and corruption rather than to development. Every major turning point in the plot (maybe except for Jane's leaving Gateshead as a child) is a step to undermine the heroine's development, or a step which, while pushing the protagonist forward and trying to contribute to formation, draws her backward at the same time. Nevertheless, critics usually interpret phases of Jane's life as "phases of development."<sup>66</sup>

It is very common to read the Lowood scene as a phase where Jane learns patience, fidelity, serenity, and self-control from Helen Burns and Miss Temple.<sup>67</sup> Even Jane admits (but at the same time also questions) Miss Temple's influence upon her: "I had given in allegiance to duty and order; I was quiet; I *believed* I was content; to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I *appeared* a disciplined and subdued character" (p. 86, emphases added). The vagueness of her discourse is explained later: when Miss Temple leaves, Jane undergoes a transforming process; "My mind had put off all it had borrowed of Miss Temple – or rather, that she had taken with her the serene atmosphere I had been breathing in her vicinity – and that now I was left in my natural element, and beginning to feel the stirring of old emotions" (p. 86). Thus, she enters into the Thornfield scene almost as passionate as she was before her education at Lowood. So the Lowood scene, together with depicting Jane's attempts to fuse into her character traits from the

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Moglen, pp. 105–45.

<sup>67</sup> Moglen, p. 117.



outside, also proves Jane's resistance to outside values, the failure to merge the external and the internal properly.

The major motive for leaving Lowood is Jane's sense of a scarcity of experience in a community closed out of real life, a community which Jane *succeeded* to be integrated into, nonetheless. She announces her wish to "seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils" (p. 86), to see the "real world." Leaving the community in which she was able to make herself accepted, and in which she felt "not unhappy" (p. 85), Jane will encounter experience only in solitary places (Thornfield, Marsh End, Ferndean). The biggest community she lives in is a village, Morton. Therefore, she sees rather little of the world she desired to know so much. Even the final scene of the novel when Jane claims to have attained happiness takes place outside society, thus questioning the idea of any kind of social integration.

The next turning point after leaving Lowood is Jane's flight from Thornfield, which even Franco Moretti interprets as a decision not really satisfying the requirements of the *Bildungsroman*. "Any *Bildungsroman* worthy of the name would have had Jane remain among the needles of Thornfield. But this would have meant facing the imperfect, debatable, and perhaps incorrect nature of each fundamental ethical choice. Better to begin all over again..."<sup>68</sup> And beginning all over again is in fact what Jane does after every turning point in her story, very well figured by choosing a new name in the Marsh End scene. Starting always anew, however, is a factor that undermines the existence of a continuous development.

It is at Marsh End where Jane's fortune changes, and up to this point her story seems a story of ordeal, of suffering and decay rather than development. What makes it even for Jane seem like a story of development is not really the new turn of events but, instead, Jane the narrator's efforts to read the story optimistically. One example of this is Jane's experience as a teacher at Morton school. At first she feels the job degrading, but her only option to experience development is to force herself to accept it, and seek some kind of happiness in her pupils.

I felt desolate to a degree. I felt – yes, idiot that I am – I felt degraded. I doubted I had taken a step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social existence [...] I know [these feelings] to be wrong – that is a great step gained; I shall strive to overcome them. [...] In a few months, it is possible, the happiness of seeing progress and a change for the better in my scholars may substitute gratification for disgust.

(p. 355)

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<sup>68</sup> Moretti, p. 188.

But for the efforts Jane takes to suppress her feeling of degradation and changing it step by step into a feeling of happiness, Jane's story could easily have become a novel about her sinking on the social ladder, and a story of failed development and integration. The final happiness at the end of the novel is, as we have already seen, just as ambiguous and dependent on Jane's self-conviction as her happiness at Morton school. Now, by using (and at the same time questioning) the teleological reading method of the theories of the *Bildungsroman*, I intend to explore the factors that lead to what Jane calls in the end happiness.

One factor is Jane's yielding to Rochester's voice and going back to her lover. Critics interpret this moment as the result of the supernatural machinery foreshadowing the final reward,<sup>69</sup> but others cautiously avoid dealing with the moral ambiguities of Jane's decision, which would contradict the frequent interpretation that Jane at the end of the Marsh End scene is morally and spiritually on a higher level of her development than she was in the Thornfield scene. The moral ambiguity underlying Jane's decision is the risk of adultery. When Jane hears Rochester's voice and starts searching for him, she does not know what has happened to Rochester and Bertha during her absence. Though conscience dictates against the morally false step and suggests her to seek information about him in the inn, she goes back to Thornfield first, hoping that Rochester is there, thus denouncing her earlier decision of leaving Thornfield and refusing to become Rochester's mistress. In spite of the supposed development that should have taken place between the two points in time, now it seems that Jane does not care about the moral evaluation of herself any longer: "Could I but see him! Surely, in that case, I should not be so mad as to run to him? I cannot tell - I am not certain. And if I did - what then? God bless him! What then! Who would be hurt by my once more tasting the life his glance can give me?" (p. 419) At an earlier stage of her supposed development, however, Jane's answer to the same question was different, and there, indeed, *was* an answer: "Who in the world cares for *you*? Or who will be injured by what you do? Still indomitable was the reply: 'I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man'" (p. 314). Thus the earlier grammatical question is turned into a rhetorical one. It is only fate or a supernatural power (which can well be the coherence of plot) and not her developed state of mind that prevents Jane from becoming an adulteress. Only when she cannot find Rochester in

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<sup>69</sup> Hardy, p. 63.

Thornfield is she informed that Rochester lost his mad wife and lives alone, blind and mutilated, in Ferndean.

The moment when Jane hears Rochester's voice, however, can be interpreted differently from being merely a result of the work of divine Providence. Besides Providence or fate there are other superhuman powers brought into the game of narration, such as narrative coherence, or yielding to the requirements of plot. Thus, instead of saying that Jane went back to Rochester because she heard his voice, we could also say that Jane heard Rochester's voice in order to be able to go back to him, in order to have the reason for going back; putting it differently, to yield to the requirements of the plot of a development story. With the knowledge of the impossibility of happiness in a marriage with St. John Rivers and the death surely waiting for her in India, Jane's only hope to re-shape her story as a story of happiness and the only hope for her story to ever reach a happy ending is to *hear* Rochester's voice and to try to satisfy the love that remained unfulfilled. Another advantage of this solution is that Rochester's voice is a reply to Jane's prayer at the moment when Jane almost submits herself to St. John's will: "Show me, show me the path!" – I entreated of Heaven. I was excited more than I had ever been; and whether what followed was the effect of excitement the reader shall judge" (p. 414). Thus Jane's prayer is answered, Jane, as many times before, is worthy of God's attention, so she can interpret her religious development as a story of success, too.

Another factor leading to Jane's supposed happiness in the end is her becoming financially independent. So money (not earned but gained suddenly, as if by chance) is a basic factor that underlies Jane's feeling of happiness. Disillusioning as it is, the hero of the *Bildungsroman* could never gain independence but for this sudden change in her social status. Now Jane can share her wealth with Diana and Mary, and she can free them as herself is now freed from the servitude of work, so she can become a benefactress, as Moglen points out;<sup>70</sup> but it is important to note, however, that it is only through this sudden inheritance that all this could happen, only by means of money transferred to the hero and not earned by the talents of the individual. The money was left to Jane by will of her uncle not in acknowledgement of her personal merits (since John Eyre did not even know Jane), but, as Nina Schwartz also emphasises, as a result of familial antipathy and the uncle's revenge of which Jane was only a means and

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<sup>70</sup> Moglen, p. 135.

beneficent.<sup>71</sup> And, taking the story (re)constructed from the plot into consideration, it indeed turns out that this was wealth Jane originally could have had, it was her right to regain it, so what happened was not a rise from a lower to a higher social state, but a return to the state before the disinheritance, to the “natural” Jane,<sup>72</sup> or, rather, striving to achieve this state all through the story, following Mrs. Reed’s advice.

It is Jane’s sudden inheritance and her false step together with other factors and mistakes like the uncle’s death, Rochester’s mutilation, Bertha’s death, Jane’s signing the portrait, Jane’s writing to her uncle, etc. that lead to the final outcome.<sup>73</sup> Not even a sacrifice is necessary for “happiness” on Jane’s part. As she puts it, “Sacrifice! What do I sacrifice? Famine for food, expectation for content” (p. 440). Thus the *Bildungsroman*’s idea of happiness as a compensation for sacrifice is contradicted. It is, therefore, not the protagonist’s *Bildung* in any sense that brings about a deserved happiness in the end. Instead of development, formation, or education, it is rather the lack innate in these, that is, the part of Jane that remains unformed, together with good fortune and plot requirements, that settles everything. The *Bildungsroman*, instead of giving account of its belief in *Bildung* and promoting it as a necessary process the hero has to go through in order to be settled, questions both its importance and its necessity. As Friedrich puts it in *Wilhelm Meister*, “Basically the whole thing seems to say nothing less than that, in spite of all his mistakes and all the dumb things he does, man, guided by a higher power, still reaches a happy end.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Schwartz, p. 562.

<sup>72</sup> Boumelha, p. 72.

<sup>73</sup> As Milech and Winkelmann also point out, it is not the heroine’s development, not her growing self-knowledge that generates plot, but her lack of self-knowledge, “lack of insight into her own desires and motives” (p. 14). Such lack of insight will bring about leaving her money in the coach and wandering penniless as a beggar, thus contributing to a further decay in her social career, and also to her becoming rich, since she accidentally signs her name on a portrait, letting St. John identify her. Not only her self-knowledge but also her habits of moral judgement remain rather undeveloped, especially in that she reads characters that can be counted as her rivals for affection, like Adèle, Blanche, the Reed sisters, as vain, stupid, and shallow, without acknowledging that she is jealous of them.

<sup>74</sup> Cited by Saine, p. 132.

## 6 “Portrait,” or (the impossibility of a) conclusion

The connotation of *Bildung* which *Jane Eyre* resists the least seems to be that of ‘purgation and formation.’ I do not assume that formation in any sense takes place in the novel, but this connotation, like *Jane Eyre*’s text, narrates the self-contradictory nature of the notion of education, and the resistance to the belief in a perfect, natural state. Thus *Jane Eyre*, which is often characterised as a novel representing successful *Bildung*, speaks about its own disbelief in such a notion, narrates the incompleteness, the imperfect nature of the *Bildungsroman* as an ideal form. We must not forget, however, that together with disbelief, both the critical texts and the novel(s) claim a desire for the “perfect,” optimistic formation story. In this way, the *Bildungsroman*, using a connotation of *Bildung* indicated by Buckley, becomes the portrait both of the desire for the “perfect” form and the texts’ knowledge of its impossibility, and also a portrait of the process in which the successful form is born as a supplement in the course of the deconstruction of the texts which attempt to create the successful form. Thus it is the *Bildungsroman*, born in this process of deconstruction, that will narrate the unreadability of the *Bildungsroman* as it is created in its theories.

Such a reading, however, cannot and must not stop at this point. The generation of supplementary texts is endless: readings generate novels, and novels generate interpretations. The roles of text and supplement are interchangeable. The difference between any novel considered to be a *Bildungsroman* and its readings as a *Bildungsroman* together with *différance* working within the texts generate further texts that function as narratives “about” the gap between the novels and its readings. Such texts (including Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*) narrating the impossibility of the desired *Bildungsroman* will bring into existence as supplements the theories of the *Bildungsroman* with the desire for the *Bildungsroman* as an optimistic form.