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The Politics of Gender in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

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The article discusses the ideologemetics of Bildungsroman/ Künstlerroman underwriting Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Joyce's *A Portrait*, in particular the relationship between self-definition and gender. The tenor of the article is that Bildungsroman/ Künstlerroman is concerned with the process of becoming a *man*. Consequently, *To the Lighthouse*, though predominantly a female novel, delineates the process of maturation through the father-son relationship. The journey to the lighthouse symbolizes James's initiation into manliness as he steers the boat to its final destination. In *A Portrait* Stephen's artistic search also ends with self-cognition and is also rendered as a metaphor of travel. However, unlike James, Stephen does not desire to inscribe himself into the codified system of manliness; he aims at the individualized self-definition, that of an artist. In this he complies with the relevance ascribed to fin de siècle art. Both novels end with a moment of artistic self-realization, since Stephen's epiphanic recognition of his artistic vocation is comparable to that of Lily Briscoe at the end of *To the Lighthouse*. Yet, the moment of Lily's creative revelation turns out to be abortive since her art would not participate in the artistic production of the period. Instead, she succumbs to her woman's fate designating her art as solipsistic, her paintings being fated to end up stored in the attic or destroyed. Her artistic self-definition is thus undercut by the signifying practices of Victorian society ("women can't write, women can't paint") defining the metaphysical space of representation as solely male.

Bildungsroman¹, is the subgenre of the biographical novel in which the bourgeois idea of education and social progression is most persuasively outlined. Codified within bourgeois social structures, affirming the accepted ideas of education and personal growth, it is similar to the educational novel (Erziehungsroman), in which education is understood in the context of Foucault's

¹ I am using Bildungsroman (formation novel) as the term that does not only designate the topic of the novel, but also implicates its ideological designation. (See also: Žmegač: 65).





notion of upbringing based on discipline and punishment. In this sense, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprentice* is a model example of the growth of an individual, whose personal development affirms received notion of education and socialization. A realist novel, on the other hand, portrays the process of coming to terms with society as more dramatic and painful. An excellent example of realist usage of the ideologemetics of the Bildungsroman that portrays the dynamics between the individual and society in which the individual has to come to terms with social norms and expectations, is the character of Rastignac in Balzac's *Father Goriot*. Having buried Father Goriot, he looks down from the cemetery at Place Vendome and the cupola of the Invalides and throws a glove in the face of Paris high society: "Henceforth there is war between us"². A modernist novel, focused on the growth of the individual mind, conceives of the conflict differently. Yet, it is also concerned with the restraints and obstacles imposed on the main protagonist trying to reach his self-realization. Their efforts to achieve self-recognition can be compared to a voyage on the rough sea. Sailing through many temptations, obstacles and dangers, whether mythological or psychological, the protagonist undergoes the process of maturation; having successfully reaches his final destination, the hero has passed the ritualistic initiation into the world of manliness.³

Travel is therefore the ultimate metaphor of the Bildungsroman, its *telos* being defined in psychoanalytical (predominantly Lacanian) terms as the process of the acquisition of a phallus⁴. The Bildungsroman is concerned with the initiation into manliness through a journey in which the hero learns about the ways of the world and develops the self-knowledge needed to survive in it. Its *telos*⁵ occurs at the moment of realization of the self and its place in the world. This is the moment of metaphorical homecoming—the journey is over and the traveller has reached his designated fate.

The *telos* of the narrative in Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* is underwritten by the ideologeme of the Bildungsroman⁶. As a Modernist novel in which the

² Oxford World's Classics, 1999, transl. A.J. Krailsheimer, Oxford UP, 1999

³ Such a character is also portrayed in genealogical novels marking the beginning of the degenerative processes in the family sequence. Cf. Thomas Mann, *The Buddenbrooks* or Miroslav Krleža, *The Return of Filip Latinovicz*

⁴ "The fact that the phallus is a signifier means that it is in the place of the Other that the subject has access to it. ... It is this desire of the Other as such that the subject must recognize ... The emergences that appear in psychological genesis confirm this signifying function of the phallus." Lacan: 288.

⁵ In this, the described journey resembles that of many mythical travellers, the Argonauts and Odyssey being most famous ones.

⁶ "„literary 'production' is a *parole* ... but the 'consumption' of literature by society is a *langue*, that is to say a whole the parts of which ... tend to be ordered into a coherent system" (Genette, 1982: 18-19). See also Gerard Genette, 1992: 43n and *passim*.





traditional narrative method, which Woolf described as scaffolding, has been replaced by tunnelling⁷, it is not concerned with the description of a journey itself. Instead, Woolf's novel is structured around two moments in time, separated by ten years of war, death and human suffering as suggested by the narrative haze of unattributed quotes, reminiscences and references in the middle chapter: "Time Passes". Yet, as its title implies, it is a narrative about a travel; its final destination being the lighthouse. Centred about the Ramsay family, the narrative is concerned with the dynamics of their relationship at two moments of time separated not only by ten years, but more importantly, by the death of Mrs. Ramsay. Whereas the first part of the novel, "The Window", is dominated by the character of Mrs. Ramsay, with the narrative voice focusing on her consciousness, the third part, *The Lighthouse*, is an homage to her, with the characters trying to come to terms with the loss.

The opening scene in *To the Lighthouse* takes place in the seclusion of a bay window. The window itself is symbolic, and denotes a certain type of lifestyle. In spite of the shabby furniture inside, this summer house signals the privileged social status of the protagonists, as does the fact that the mother is admired for her beauty and the father is followed by young men, imitating him, trying to impress him. But even more importantly, the bay window is symbolic of Mrs. Ramsay's protective motherly wings, sheltering her youngest. A mother and a son, the mother knitting, her small son cutting out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores, make an idyllic picture. The picture is fringed with joy. In its tenderness and protectiveness this scene can be almost likened to paintings of the Madonna and a child. The painter, Lily Briscoe, who observes the scene from the lawn outside, has painted a purple triangle to express the joy and the harmony of the scene. The serenity is destabilized by the arrival of the father, as Mrs. Ramsay's attention turns toward him. The anger and frustrations that James feels at that moment remain impressed in his memory and can be interpreted in Oedipal terms. But more significant for James's mental make-up is the rage that his father's Victorian strictness and love for the truth, whatever its effect, awaken in both James and his mother. His remark that the trip, to which James has been looking forward is unlikely to take place as the wind is due west, causes such a strong resentment in the boy that

"had there been an axe handy, a poker or any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him there and then James would have seized it. Such were the extremes of emotions that Mr Ramsay excited in his children's breasts by his mere presence; standing,

⁷ Virginia Woolf, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" in Bonnie Kime Scott (ed.): *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, pp. 634-42. See also, Bonnie Kime Scott: *Refiguring Modernism: Postmodern Feminist Readings of Woolf, West and Barnes*, Vol. 2, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1996, p. 15





as now, lean as a knife, narrow as the blade of one, grinning sarcastically, not only with the pleasure of disillusioning his son and casting ridicule upon his wife, who was ten thousand times better in every way than he was (James thought), but also with some secret conceit at his own accuracy of judgement" (Woolf, 1993:5).

The opening scene thus depicts the typical drama of a Victorian family – a strict, uncompromising father, and a mother who is protective, but who succumbs – not out of fear, but out of love – to his authority. On the one hand it provides stability, secured by both father and mother playing their assigned roles. The novel describes a confident Victorian society, centred in the institution of the home. The scene that Mr. Banks remembers of Mr. Ramsay admiring a hen, protecting its chicken (Woolf, 1993:26) is a *mise en abyme* of family relations, celebrating the maternal instinct as something natural and archetypal. Yet the narrative constantly hesitates between admiration and accusation of the patriarchal family. Though safe, this world is not a happy one. The children are resentful of their father's tyranny and their mother's submissiveness to his authority.

The symbolic meaning of the aborted trip to the lighthouse can therefore be read in psychoanalytical terms. James's frustration is Oedipal, since he is prevented by the authority of the father as the embodiment of the Law (Lacan) to acquire his manliness. But it is not only his father who prevents him from maturing. In a certain way, the trip to the lighthouse is also prevented by the fact that James cannot stand up to his father because of the mediation of his mother, who comes between them. The bay window, analogous to the protective wings of Mrs. Ramsay, the angel of the house, shelters James, but also prevents him from confronting the real world. Her wisdom and intuition in mediating between the members of her household, which exhaust her physically and emotionally, make their lives pleasant and safe. Yet this safety preserves the status quo of the Victorian world, the world in which young boys and their mothers have to submit to their father's authority and where, as Tansley enjoyed pointing out to Lily Briscoe, women cannot write or paint.⁸

Coinciding with the period after World War I, when the patriarchal world order started to disintegrate and new values set in, the access to the lighthouse marks a new beginning, not only for James, but for the other protagonists as well. This new order will enable Cam to participate in the journey to the lighthouse

⁸ "He was really, Lily Briscoe thought, in spite of his eyes, but then look at his nose, look at his hands, the most uncharming human being she had ever met. Then why did she mind what he said? Women can't write, women can't paint – what did it matter coming from him, since clearly it was not true to him but for some reason helpful to him, and that was why he said it?" (Woolf 1993: 116). And yet, Lily knew that it was not just Mr. Tansley's personal opinion; he was voicing received ideas that art, culture, and metaphysical space in general are sole province of men.





and to resist her father's authority however strongly she feels for him, and Lily Briscoe will complete her painting. Consequently, we can argue that both women enter the forbidden world of phallocracy, Cam by not staying on the shore, but participating in the symbolic journey, and Lily by disregarding Tansley's claim "women can't write, women can't paint". The unresolved ambiguity of the novel is in the fact that on the one hand it seems to suggest that only after Mrs. Ramsay, the angel in the house, dies, the new order might be established. On the other hand, all characters are still overwhelmed by love and nostalgia for Mrs. Ramsay. It is not only that the final stroke on the painting represents the moment when Lily's yearning for Mrs. Ramsay materializes in her artistic vision, but the trip to the lighthouse is undertaken as a tribute to her. Without her loving presence, which lingers in the hearts of the protagonists, the narrative seems to suggest, though with some hesitation, neither Lily Briscoe's painting, nor the sense of tolerance and togetherness on the trip to the lighthouse that secures James's journey into the world of maleness, would have been possible.⁹

For that reason, Mrs. Ramsay's death leaves other characters in the novel devastated, but in a certain way also liberated. Only ten years after her death Lily Briscoe will be able to finish her painting and the Ramsay family will finally set off to the lighthouse. In the enclosed yet liberating space of a boat, Mr Ramsay, James and Cam travel not only to the lighthouse; their trip is also a spiritual journey of revisitation; two spots in time, two moments of being, overlap during the journey, as memories of the past are redefined by the present. The central figure in the boat is still Mr. Ramsay, dramatizing his bereavement. Cam resents him, but also loves him, and is ready to succumb to his needs. James is still jealous of him, now because of his interaction with Cam, who, in a way, has replaced his mother in her submissiveness and the adoration of her father. Therefore the memory of the bay-window scene comes back to James, blurred, but emotionally overpowering:

They look down, he thought at their knitting or something. Then suddenly they look up. There was a flash of blue, he remembered, and then somebody sitting with him laughed, surrendered, and he was very angry. It must have been his mother he thought, sitting on a low chair, with his father standing over her. (Woolf, 1993: 219)

⁹ Writing about *To the Lighthouse* over 20 years ago, I argued that Mrs. Ramsay's death, symbolically marking the end of patriarchal family relations, is necessary in order to liberate other characters – Cam to go on the trip to the lighthouse together with men and Lily to finish her painting. 20 years later, more mature and less rebellious, I believe that it is Mrs. Ramsay's loving presence, still lingering over characters as some invisible protective wings, that has enabled them to come on terms first with themselves and then with each other. See Ljiljana Ina Gjurgjan, "Dvoznačnost funkcije mita 'domaćeg anđela' u romanu Virginije Woolf *K svjetioniku*" (The Amphibolous Function of the Myth of the 'Angel in the House' in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*), *Republika*, No. 11-12 (1983), 156-163





In psychoanalytical terms the situation on the boat can be rendered as a phallic desire for Mrs. Ramsay, the need to compensate for the lack of her empowering gaze. Mr. Ramsay expects his children to replace their mother's attentiveness to his needs, and James desires that his father would acknowledge him, as his mother used to, which his father, engrossed in his egocentricity, fails to do. Left without Mrs. Ramsay, whose gaze always reflected his image in a doubled size, Mr. Ramsay takes on the role of a tragic hero. Slowly and painfully, however, he learns from his loneliness. While James skilfully steers the boat on the open sea, he finally takes notice of his young one for the first time, and praises his skill in steering the boat. The simple words 'well done' upon nearing the lighthouse are the climax of James's psychological travel. He is filled with pride and joy. It is as if his father has handed over to him the token of manliness. This is all he needed, all he wanted, thought Cam, watching James's unsuccessful attempt at hiding his emotions:

There! Cam thought addressing herself silently to James. You've got it at last. For she knew that this was what James had been wanting, and she knew that now he had got it he was so pleased that he would not look at her or his father or at anyone. ... He was so pleased that he was not going to let anybody take away a grain of his pleasure. His father has praised him. (Woolf 1993: 266)

The simple utterance "well done" marks the overturn on the Oedipal scene. If the Bildungsroman is about a journey whose *telos* is in attaining the moment of self-realization, James has reached it: he has been initiated in the world of manliness.

Being in accord with the ideologematics of Bildungsroman, James's narrative is not one of the overturn, but of arriving, and the journey itself, as well as its *telos*, are encoded in patriarchal value system. This codification is set at the very beginning of the novel, when Mr. Ramsay's reflections on life are reported:

life is difficult; fact uncompromising; and the passage to that fabled land where our brightest hopes are extinguished, our frail barks founder in darkness (here Mr. Ramsay would straighten his back and narrow his little blue eyes upon the horizon), one that needs, above all, courage, truth, and the power to endure (Woolf 1993: 5).

James's taking over the steering of the boat in a practical and a metaphorical sense and his ability to do it skilfully so that his father recognized it as "well done", affirms the he has grown up to his father's expectations, that he has developed the qualities prescribed by the Victorian code of manliness, namely "courage, truth, and the power to endure" and therefore his passage to "that fabled land"





is secured. Father's recognition of his son as a man marks thus a sequence in the family lineage – elderly father has been replaced by a son; an heir has inherited the throne. From this moment, James would not need Cam's solidarity. It is he and he alone who has safely navigated to the goal of the travel, the lighthouse, it is he who has succeeded his father's authority and gained control. The ideologematics of a Bildungsroman, underlined by the patriarchal concept of family lineage, has triumphed. By assuming the responsibility to bring to fruition the journey planned in his childhood, James has taken over the role of the head of the family, he has continued the family tradition, and has, so to speak, reproduced. In the story about James Ramsay, the family narrative of continuity and lineage, though rendered in the framework of a Modernist novel, has been maintained.

Both Joyce's *A Portrait* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* are concerned with a factual as well as a spiritual journey underwritten with the ideologematics of a Bildungsroman. The characters of James and Stephen are encoded in spatial metaphors of home in the opposition to the sea. Their movement from home which – like a mother's womb – suggests both security and confinement,¹⁰ to the open sea, symbolizing freedom, characterizes the process of liberation of the two male protagonists. Thus, the journey in *To the Lighthouse* and the image of the black arms of tall ships that stand against the moon inviting Stephen to be their kinsman (Joyce: 330), serve as metaphors for their journeys to the *telos* of their desire.

Though the spatial movement in the two novels is similar, whereas the closed space of home for James means protection and stability, enabling him to develop into a self-realized person, for Stephen, as he grows up, the world he lives in becomes suffocating and oppressive, whether it be his home, college or church. Even open spaces filled with people, such as the playground swarming with boys, or the encounter with his colleagues in their pitiable nakedness, suggest oppressive, claustrophobic experiences.

An artistic Bildungsroman or Künstlerroman¹¹, portraying a young artist, Stephen Dedalus, on his journey from the enclosure of home and religious institution to a liberating flight of an artist acquiring self-knowledge, *A Portrait* also follows a teleological narrative typical of the Bildungsroman, ending with a metaphor of travel. The tenor of the narrative is the drive towards self-definition of the artist in suffocating conditions of post-Parnellite Ireland in which colonial

¹⁰ The home suggests protectiveness for both characters in their childhood. Later, for Stephen it will become one of those nets that hold him back, his mother's love and her religious zealotry creating in him the sense of guilt and rebellion simultaneously.

¹¹ A Künstlerroman denotes a sub-genre of a Bildungsroman, concerned with the growth of an artist, but following the same ideological pattern as a Bildungsroman – delineating the dynamics between an artist and his social background in the search of his artistic self-definition.





conditions are overpowered by the Victorian ideal of manliness. "Never peach on a fellow"¹² is the advice that Stephen's father gives him when starting off for the school. For a child whose childhood is marred by the sense of stagnation that followed the fall of Parnell, by the nationalistic zealousness and religious bigotry of women, and the frustration, bankruptcy and spiritual paralysis of men, the code of manliness is somewhat different than for an English gentleman, Mr. Ramsay. The tears that Stephen sees in his father's eyes, shed for Parnell during the quarrel at the Christmas dinner, are unimaginable in Mr. Ramsay. But the gender codification still stresses the same Victorian qualities in defining what it takes to be a man: discipline and self-control as well as loyalty and solidarity. Stephen's boyhood affirms these qualities; from his early school days he will show courage and willpower in spite of his physical weakness. He will face the dean of studies in his struggle for justice and alone confront a group of stronger boys defending Byron as a poet. But he will not peach on the fellow who pushed him into the ditch, breaking his glasses. Loyal but independent and self-assertive, young Stephen thus perfectly fits into the grand narrative of a Bildungsroman, in which a young man becomes a manly hero, by having the moral strength and courage to overcome his surroundings and to liberate himself for some noble deeds. His name, Stephen Dedalus is symbolic of his destiny. He will sacrifice himself for the sake of art and he will, in a Dedalian manner, fly over the nets of family, religion and nation. At the end of the novel we see Stephen, looking at "the black arms of tall ships standing against the moon" (Joyce: 330), seeing himself as their kinsmen, ready for a journey to a chosen destination, that of an artist. The symbolism of these black arms of tall ships is comparable to that of the lighthouse. Stephen's self-realization is also rendered in psychoanalytical term as the acquisition of a phallus. But the *telos* of *A Portrait*, though also underwritten by the ideologematics of a Bildungsroman, differs from that in Woolf's novel. Stephen does not desire to become his father; he desires to become an artist, one who will create "in the smithy of his soul yet uncreated conscience of /his/ race" (Joyce: 330). Read within the historic context of the period when the novel was written, Stephen's artist vocation meets the expectations at the turn of the century: he will serve art for its own sake. However, he does not just content himself with withdrawing into the ivory tower, accepting the split between art and life. He sees the artist as a new priest, in the wake of Yeats's contention that the arts are about to "take upon their shoulders the burdens that have fallen from the shoulders of the priests"¹³. For Stephen, however, it does not mean to discover "the essences

¹² I am referring to a phenomenon that Valente refers to as the double bind of Irish manliness, arguing that the colonial representation of the Irish "Celtic femininity" has been counteracted by the overrepresentation of manliness. (See Valente, 2000: pp. 96 – 127). This can be detected in the code of solidarity, namely in the advice Stephen's father gives to him: "Never peach on a fellow". Such a sentiment is characteristic of male bonding, but also of solidarity typical for the underground or para-military organizations.

¹³ W.B. Yeats, *The Autumn of the Body*, *Essays and Introductions*, New York: Macmillan. 1973, p.193





of things¹⁴” as it does for Yeats, but to teach the Irish women to breed “a race less ignoble than their own”. Yet, his calling is also idealistic, he also desires to become “a new priest”; he does not wish his art to be socially engaged in a manner of *avantgarde*, or existentialism, or, before that Zola’s naturalism; he wishes to create art that reinforces a new ethical code (creates the conscience of his race).

Stephen’s self-definition therefore challenges the ideologematics of a traditional Bildungsroman, codified in patriarchal ideology, in a profound way – not only its idea of manliness, but also of gender roles. Stephen not only has to reject the social restrictions of home, church and nation in order to fulfil the role of the artist as defined by early Modernism, in which the artist sacrifices himself for art’s sake; he also has to overturn the socially defined role of masculinity, in which the acquisition of a phallus signifies access to the dominance within the metaphysical space of the Law of the Father¹⁵. If the idea of creating the “conscience of his race” is the desire to usurp the place of the maker of the Law of the Father (or of the God-like creator to put it in Stephen’s own words), it is not to be achieved by attaining dominance in the existing hierarchy. Stephen desires to overturn and to create anew. In doing so he would have to challenge the concepts that are at the heart of traditional patriarchal society, in particular the concept of what it means to be a man. And to be a man primarily means to ensure the continuity – to replicate and reproduce.

Consequently, *A Portrait* is concerned with the initiation of a different kind, the artist being his own procreator. In the scene on the beach we witness how he gives himself a new life, that of an artist. As Christine Froula claims in *Modernist Body*, Stephen has learnt how to use the symbolic law of gender to change the law of nature, to turn his lack of an actual womb into the Daedalian symbolic womb/wings¹⁶. The climax in the novel occurs at the end of the fourth chapter. On the beach, Stephen, aroused by the beauty of a girl whom he compares to a bird, declares himself liberated from the nets imposed on him and ready to open up to the adventure of life. Revoking the symbolic significance of his name, he sees himself as a liberated artist who will “create out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being” (Joyce: 212). The climatic ecstasy he reaches is rhetorically rendered by an image of a flower, evoking the life-circling towards the act of birth: “breaking in full crimson and unfolding.... Flooding all the heavens with its soft flushes, every flush deeper than the other” (Joyce 1995: 217).

This epiphany of self-deliverance denotes Stephen’s stepping outside of the reproductive circle and is symbolic of Stephen’s ability to outgrow prescribed

¹⁴ Yeats, 1973.193

¹⁵ The true function of the Father ... is fundamentally to unite (and not to set in opposition) a desire and the Law....(Lacan: 321)

¹⁶ Cf. Froula, 41-83.





social restrictions. Therefore, in his essay "Disjunctive Structure in Joyce's *Portrait*", Brivic has stressed the political significance of such a gesture:

His aims to re-form human consciousness by bringing a new awareness of the mind through self-exploration...vividly establishes the idea that every person is entitled to define his or her self apart from Church, state and family..... Once this idea has spread human freedom has advanced in a way that may be critical and lasting (Brivic: 266).

For my argument, it is even more important to note what Linda Charnes, in her study on *Hamlet* claims about the political significance of breaking what she calls "the dream of patriarchal continuity":

Shakespeare's fascination with the violent coercion of identity exacted by paternal legacy waxes his entire corpus, which is full of children who cannot, or will not, be 'like' their father, or their mother for that matter. For all the devastation this tension generates, Shakespeare shows us time and again that the only route to political change is through the *lack of resemblance* between parents and off-springs. In his refusal to take up the crown, a wife and father off-springs, Hamlet breaks the continuity of production that would enable the dream of patriarchal 'inevitability' to continue. (Charnes: 70)

These two interpretations highlight the significant difference between the traditionalism of *To the Lighthouse* codifying James's maturation within prescribed Victorian gender roles and Joyce's re-evaluation of these roles, pointing to a possibility of a new definition of the meaning of one's existence. Yet, Brivic's optimistic reading of *A Portrait* as an emancipatory text, a landmark for new existential possibilities, is problematic. In the context of the novel Stephen's proclaimed emancipation appears to be self-delusion as the scene on the beach, declaring the self-birth of the artist, is rendered in terms of masturbation ("on and on and on and on", Joyce: 216), suggesting thus that his recognition of his artistic vocation has been just a barren self-satisfying fantasy.¹⁷

Hugh Kenner in "The *Portrait* in Perspective" (1948) and Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) have already claimed that Stephen's credibility has been undermined and his artistic inadequacy indicated by the discrepancy between the two instances of focalization, that of Stephen and of juxtaposed narrative

¹⁷ As O'Malley notes, via Said's notion of 'problematic filiation', the failure to pass on patriarchal authority to sons marks many texts of the Irish Literary Revival, such as Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and Yeats's *On Baile's Strand*, and 'the failures of this relationship betoken forms of broken authority in colonial Ireland.' O'Malley: 33.





voice, putting his pompous tone in perspective. Margot Norris has taken this argument one step further grounding Stephen's inadequacy in the contradiction between Stephen's codification within the turn-of-the-century myth of the artist and the reality of its social circumstances. In *The Social Unravelling of Modernism*, she argues that

Stephen's *non-serviam* was the basis for the canonization of Joyce as an ahistoricistic and apolitical writer which has functioned as a defining feature of Joyce's place within modernism, or, at any rate, the mythology of a modernism. In its crudest version this 'effect' is the equation of Joyce with the aestheticism of modernism, but an equation redolent with modernism's suppressed romantic plot of the heroic artist saving art's power to transcend its degradations in the modern world. (Norris: 6).

In her counter-argument to such an understanding of Joyce's art, Norris claims that Joyce historicizes his own modernist aestheticism by grounding it in the nineteenth century liberal tradition's separation of art from social life¹⁸.

Read in the light of Norris's argument, Stephen's grand statement at the end about forging in the smithy of his soul yet uncreated conscience of his race should be read as ironic, the verb to forge meaning not only to create but also to falsify. This ambivalence undercuts the impact of Stephen's proclaimed vocation, and points out that he is incapable to "recreate life out of life" since he, in his mother's words, does not even know "what the heart is and what it feels" (Joyce: 330); consequently, he can only invent (forge) life.¹⁹ When read in this interpretative key even the last sentence, Stephen addressing his spiritual father, Dedalus, praying to him that he keeps him "now and ever in good stead" (Joyce: 330) is ironic. The reference to Dedalus as his father designates Stephen as Icarus, an over-reacher, whose triumphant journey will end in a fall, his wings having melted in the sun.²⁰

Yet, this is not how the rhetorical impact of *A Portrait* directs us to interpret Stephen. Even if the reader is made aware of the contradictions in which Stephen's self-realization is grounded, the teleological force of the genre of the *Künstlerroman* prevents us from seeing Stephen as a failure. The reader admires his Byronic spite for his school-fellows, his determination to devote himself to art, the rhetorical suggestiveness of his self-deliverance as an artist, his attempt

¹⁸ Norris, 1992: 6

¹⁹ Thus, he is a true son of his spiritual father, "an old artificer". See Ljiljana Ina Gjurgjan "More Mud, More Crocodiles' – The Turn in the *Portrait's* Aestheticism", *Studia romanica et anglica zagrabiensia*, No. 47 (2004), pp.87-95

²⁰ This allusion to Icarus's fall recalls the rhyme of *Humpty Dumpty* as the parodic rendering of Stephen's overblown self image. On the ironic role of the invocation of Icarus see also Boots (1961:327).





to overcome the nets and sail to the unknown lands of creative enterprise. In the closing scene, the reader empathises with Stephen's readiness to escape. Thus Stephen, who has recognized his calling and is ready for every sacrifice it might entail, is a tragic figure. Within the ideologematic structure underlying the narrative of a Bildungsroman, he must come to the terms with social norms, reach compromise or end tragically. The evocation of Icarus, intertextually linking Stephen's fate with the heroic myth, has a cathartic function. If, in the end, Stephen does not fulfil his vocation and live up to his ideals, this is just the fulfilment of his tragic destiny. As a tragic hero he must be defeated in the end, not because he has failed as an artist or a human being, but because the ideal is unattainable in a real world.

The predominant topics in *A Portrait* and *To the Lighthouse* are those of self-realization, symbolized by the journey to the lighthouse and artistic self-definition. While both these topics are merged in *A Portrait*, in *To the Lighthouse* they are divided between the two characters. James is the one who fulfils the laws of the genre of a Bildungsroman, by reaching his symbolic destination, the lighthouse. Yet, there is another instance of self-recognition and maturation in *To the Lighthouse*, that of the artist Lily Briscoe.

Lily Briscoe, a character from *To the Lighthouse*, is a modern woman, professional and single. In the novel, she participates in the homage to Mrs. Ramsay, this motherly, yet dominant woman. She has to come to terms not only with the sense of loss, but also with the shadow of patriarchal values professed by Mrs. Ramsay. Therefore, her painting is simultaneously the celebration of Mrs. Ramsay and the overturn of her (Mrs. Ramsay's) value-system. Drawing the last stroke of the painting with a new intensity, Lily Briscoe reaches a new phase of her creativity. The narrative about Lily Briscoe, if viewed as being inscribed within the genre of a Künstlerroman, can be read as a feminist topic. In the novel, Lily is portrayed as a spinsterly, thus in the Victorian social codification an inferior character, always reminded of her place – she should marry and have family and children, since women cannot write or paint since within the designated space of gender roles, the artistic representation of men and women alike is the sole province of men; the female role being to nourish and protect.²¹

Therefore, it is significant that Lily does not participate in the actual journey to the lighthouse, but remains on the shore as an onlooker²². However, at the

²¹ And if she wrote or painted, as many women did at the time, than she was expected to comply with the genre restrictions.

²² To be a passive observer is also typical for the stereotype presentation of women. Therefore Lily does not participate in the journey, but remains on the shore. Cam, on the other hand, is in the boat. This might signal that the situation for women has somewhat changed. But it is James who metaphorically arrives to the lighthouse; Cam travelling as a passive observer.





end of the novel Lily, led by a sudden creative impulse, finishes her painting. In this, she is similar to Stephen; she has also given herself an artistic birth, she has reached an epiphany. Her act of finishing her painting can therefore be seen as a moment of self-realization and a teleological ending of the artistic narrative. Moreover, it may signify the symbolic acquisition of a phallus, since the white line she draws at the moment of her creative vision, may stand for the lighthouse itself²³. Yet, her moment of artistic cognition, her new empowerment as an artist, cannot be turned into a public statement, influencing the metaphysical order of the aesthetic representation, inscribing itself in the canon. She accepts the code of privacy, the fact that her paintings will remain invisible to the public eye, as her female destiny. It is ironic that Lily Briscoe simultaneously recognizes her calling as an artist, finding ecstatic pleasure in the very act of creation, and denies it. For her, it is not a moment of manly triumph, of a character throwing a glove in the face of society, going to win it on its own terms. Neither is it the Dedalian moment of attributing to art the capacity to effect the change in social codification. As a visionary who does not obey the prescribed limitations to the topics and genres of female art and thus can articulate a difference, she is similar to Stephen. But she is not allowed to usurp the male place. She must accept the imposed social limitations and succumb to the solipsistic nature of her artistic production ("It would be hung in the attic, she thought, it would be destroyed," Woolf, 1993: 269).

In her essay "My Monster, My Self" Barbara Johnson, writing about another woman's novel, *Frankenstein, or Modern Prometheus*, claims that it is as monstrous for a man to give birth as it is for a woman to write biography and elaborates: "Yet, how could it be otherwise" she claims, "since the very notion of the self, the very shape of human life stories...from St. Augustine to Freud...consists precisely in the story of the difficulty of conforming to the standard of what a *man* should do" (Johnson:1982: 10. italics mine). Consequently, compared to Stephen's artistic limitations, those of Lily Briscoe are different in kind. Her symbolic travel is limited by the ideology imbedded in the law of the genre. If the Bildungsroman is concerned with the process of becoming a *man*, and its variant Künstlerroman with a *man* becoming an artist, the catharsis of her artistic self-recognition is fated to be abortive. Like a female journal or a diary, her painting also would not be allowed to participate in the cultural production of the imaginary; it will be kept away from the public eyes, stored in the attic or destroyed. Thus, it would be seen as just another female somnambulist fantasy, an incoherent blotting of colours on the canvas, too insignificant to impose itself on the male space of representation. And thus make a difference.

²³ It also might be interpreted as symbolizing Mrs. Ramsay since Mrs. Ramsay is, after all, portrayed as a phallic mother. (See Lacan: 198-99)





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POLITIKA RODA U KA SVJETIONIKU VIRGINIJE WOOLF I PORTRETU UMJETNIKA U MLADOSTI JAMESA JOYCEA

U članku se raspravlja o načinu na koji se ideologematika formulirana u tradicionalnome i umjetničkome Bildungsromanu ogleda u romanima *Portret umjetnika u mladosti* Jamesa Joycea i *Ka svjetioniku* Virginije Woolf, prvenstveno u svjetlu odnosa između odrastanja (spoznaje vlastitoga mjesta u svijetu) i roda. Polazišna teza rada je da je Bildungsroman po samoj svojoj definiciji žanr koji se bavi postajanjem *muškarcem* u svijetu. Stoga žena iz njega biva automatski isključena, pa bila ona i kreativni umjetnik poput Lily Briscoe. Stoga *Put ka svjetioniku*, iako predominantno ženski roman, proces odrastanja može prikazati samo kroz odnos oca i sina. Jamesova inicijacija u svijet muškosti simbolički je prikazana kao plovidba k svjetioniku. I Stephen, junak *Portreta*, ostvaruje samospoznaju na kraju romana, također simboliziranu metaforom putovanja. Ali za razliku od Jamesa, Stephen ne teži afirmaciji unutar kodificiranoga sustava rodnih uloga; on teži izvornoj definiciji sebe, onoj umjetničke provenijencije. Njegova spoznaja umjetničke vokacije u skladu je s kultom umjetnosti na "prijelazu stoljeća". Oba ova romana završavaju trenutkom umjetničke samospoznaje i po tome su slični. No umjetničku vokaciju Lily Briscoe podriva činjenica da ona ne redefinira dinamiku njezinoga odnosa sa svijetom. Njezina kreativnost je osobna, solipsistička i ona može svoje slike zamisliti jedino na tavanu, odbačene ili uništene. Lily zato nije stigla do simboličkoga svjetionika; ona je ostala na obali, njezin talent zatopljen značenjskim praksama viktorijanskog sustava vrijednosti («Žene ne znaju pisati, žene ne znaju slikati») koji metafizički prostor umjetničke kreacije vidi isključivo kao muški.

Key words: *A Portrait, To the Lighthouse, Bildungsroman, Künstlerroman, gender roles*

Ključne riječi: *Portret umjetnika u mladosti, Ka svjetioniku, Bildungsroman, Künstlerroman, rodne uloge*

