

UDC 821.111.09-055.2

821.111(73).09-055.2

Original scientific paper

Received on 24 October 2011

Accepted for publication on 15 November 2011

## The (Im)possibility of Women's Bildungsroman

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The paper argues that the mode in which becoming a woman is inscribed in the cultural imaginary is incompatible with the ideologemetics of the genre of Bildungsroman. Starting with V. Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*, the article discusses canonic literary texts such as "The Bell Jar" and „The Djinn in Nightingale's Eye“ in order to show that the abortive pattern of teleological narration is inherent to the representation of the feminine in the Western culture. Even the concept of *écriture féminine* is ambivalent, since it defines female writing as coming from the body, thus reinforcing the stereotype of woman's dominion being nature, and male culture. Though they represent an important breakthrough in the portrayal of female lives and are subversive to the binary stereotypes of femininity/masculinity, recent female narratives nonetheless testify to the impossibility of the (re)possession of the metaphysical space of representation. Therefore, they have been compartmentalised in the niche of women's writing, as in their self-definition culturally dominant narratives are still depended on the traditional (patriarchal) conceptualization of femininity.

“It is as monstrous for a man to give birth as it is for a woman to write biography”, writes Barbara Johnson in her essay ‘My Monster, My Self’ and elaborates: “Yet, how could it be otherwise, 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 be” (Johnson 1982: 10, my emphasis).

Johnson's claim about the monstrosity of female biography might seem paradoxical at a time when recent feminist and cultural histories have affirmed women as narrative subjects. Female autobiographies, journals – either recently written or recovered from some attic or dusty archive – memoirs or pop-autobiographies have overwhelmed the market and created the illusion that the century of female dominion in literature and culture has begun. So while in everyday life women have entered the public sphere, and thus their voice can be heard in politics and the media, in regard to gender conceptualization they are still reduced to the realm of the personal and the private.

There are two moments that have made female autobiographical writing relevant. The first is the postmodern privileging of little narratives (Lyotard). These little narratives function within the broader political agenda of postmodernism: they are alternatives to the master narratives, both Cartesian and national, which they relativise and reveal as historically conditioned and not universal and therefore unsusceptible to change<sup>1</sup>. The second agenda of postmodern women's writing is to challenge the borderline between the private and the public. This "coming out" has not manifested itself only in the homosexual sphere, but also in other spheres of family life, uncovering instances of family violence and paedophilia. Thus it has been subversive to the narrative of the family romance that has been one of the cornerstones of patriarchal social practices. Though the side-effect of this breakthrough has been the overwhelming production of exhibitionist and pornographic pseudo-confessional writing in the yellow press, its influence on the overall conceptualization of social relations should not be underestimated. It has broken taboos and given voice to the Other, empowering him/her to name the unspeakable within social and family relationships and uncover the deviations behind the masks of a happy and ordered bourgeois life and patriarchal myths.<sup>2</sup>

Those little narratives that have crossed the normative sanitation of space based on the prohibition of the submergence of the private and the public, the socially acceptable and socially prohibited<sup>3</sup>, have significantly contributed to the level of human rights. However, what these texts have not achieved is changing

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<sup>1</sup> The traditional logocentric narrative that asserts that human nature has been once and for all defined by the Ancients can, in Barthe's terms, be described as mythical. Barthes sees the operations of the production of contemporary mythology as the expression of a bourgeois desire for the maintenance of the *status quo*. Therefore, social relations are not represented within the framework of their historical givens, but as universal and therefore unchangeable.

<sup>2</sup> An excellent example of the fact that in traditional culture some forms of sexuality were unthinkable can be found in Freud's contention that lesbian sexuality cannot be the subject of psychoanalysis since women are sexually passive. Therefore, they cannot enter into an active relationship as male homosexuals can.

<sup>3</sup> The most obvious examples of such spatial sanitation is the black/white or male/female division of public spaces and places for prayer. Such sanitation also manifests itself through the implementation of the dress code—in medieval Italian towns for prostitutes; for Jews during the Nazi regime. It also manifests itself in the hysteria related to sexually transmitted diseases, such as AIDS when parents do not allow their children to go to the same school as the children of AIDS parents. However, the symbolic sanitation of space affects social lives as severely. We can see it in the firm division between the public and private. In bourgeois societies public and private are well defined and contained, and trespassing is unacceptable. It encouraged witch-hunting, the mental sanitation of pronounced mad persons, or pushed those who have trespassed into isolation and often suicide. For example, Ana Karenina has not been cast out from society and pushed into suicide because of her infidelity, as infidelity was a part of the upper-class lifestyle. She was punished because she trespassed the codifying of adultery, as she went public about her love affair.

the homogenising aspect of the patriarchal master narrative, which is best outlined in the genre of Bildungsroman that perpetuates the standards of patriarchy. In other words, what the narratives of women's lives have failed to do is to construct the alternative master narrative that would challenge and reformulate the standards set by the narrative of patriarchy. But how could it be otherwise since by the very act of writing they have to enter into the discursive practices intertextually interwoven into the only metaphysical space available to them?

It is for this reason that in this text we want to start from the genre of Bildungsroman as one of the master narratives of patriarchal culture by addressing the question of education, of becoming a "man", in order to show how, in spite of the infiltration within the narrative sphere of Bildungsroman, its thematic and conceptual determinants, a female Bildungsroman is always already, by the very ideologemetics of the genre, fated to be aborted. Through the analysis of a number of canonical texts of modern and contemporary women's writing, we intend to illustrate the limitations of the intervention of a female Bildungsroman in the traditional representation of male/female roles. In other words, we wish to show that the genre of Bildungsroman (the genre which Barbara Johnson in the quote cited at the beginning of the article, in the tradition of Anglophone criticism, refers to vaguely as autobiography, and which is in European critical tradition designated as a Bildungsroman) is inaccessible to women's writing.

A Bildungsroman (formation novel) is a term that does not only designate the topic of the novel, but also speaks to its ideological architextuality.<sup>4</sup> 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 as the formation of character through the forms of discipline and punishment defined by Michel Foucault.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprentice* is a model example of the growth of an individual, whose personal development affirms the received notion of education and socialization. A realist novel, on the other hand, portrays the process of coming to terms with society as something more dramatic and painful. An excellent example of the realist usage of the ideologemetics of the Bildungsroman that portrays the dynamics between the individual and the 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, accompanied only by the empty carriages his daughters have sent, he recognizes all the folly of high society. But his disappointment is also a challenge. Therefore, he looks down from the cemetery at Place Vendome and the cupola of the Invalides and throws

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<sup>4</sup> "...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: 43 and *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Foucault argues that punishment and discipline are not methods used only in prisons, but have been introduced as the means of establishing control over the individual /the body by such institutions as schools and army.

a glove in the face of Paris high society: "Henceforth there is war between us" (Balzac 1999: 303).

A modernist novel, focused on the growth of the individual mind, conceives of the conflict differently. Yet, it is also concerned with overcoming the restraints imposed on the protagonist who is trying to reach his self-realization within a strictly defined framework of social expectations and restrictions. Johnson states this very clearly when she claims that from St. Augustine to Freud, culture and in particular literature, have been concerned with formulating the standards of what a man should do. From Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, or indeed St. Augustine's *Confessions*, to Joyce's *Portrait* the telos of the narrative has repeatedly addressed one basic question, that of becoming a man in the world. Whether concerned with religious self-understanding, education or the self-realization of an artist, the genre follows the same pattern of the quest for self-identity, which has to be attained through a dramatic and painful process of maturation. The telos of the narrative has a cathartic function – the hero gives himself a new birth; he realizes his fate and role in society. If gender is defined by its cultural representation, it is obvious that social signifying practices participate in its definition. In this, the role of the Bildungsroman should not be neglected, since its narrative persuasively defines the notion of manliness. Its narrative of travel and action, of self-assertion and discipline, of filling one's life diary with the account of glorious and victorious deeds, of creating in the smithy of one's soul the as-yet uncreated conscience of one's race, (Joyce 1996: 288) has only one tenor: how to be a man in the world.

It is for this reason that, though female writing is concerned with what can be described in Beauvoir's terms as becoming (Butler 1986: 39), it cannot be biographical in the way in which Barbara Johnson has used the term. Becoming a woman means to comply with the prescribed cultural definition of the feminine as the male other. Whereas the formation of a man is defined by the norms of ideal manliness as outward, enterprising, self-reliant, self-sufficient and self-controlled, female becoming is defined by a different set of cultural stereotypes, in particular those of nurturing and mothering. Žižek, contemplating the relationship between the masculine and the feminine in the wake of Freud and Lacan, points out that the culturally defined role of a woman is to help man to reach his full potential whereas to man woman is just the object of his desire. As an example he refers to a British advertisement for beer. It starts by evoking the fairy tale about a princess and a frog, where the girl's kiss lifts the curse and turns the frog into a handsome young prince. In the following scene, there is a man and a beautiful girl; the man kisses the girl who, as the result, turns into a bottle of beer.

This advertisement, Žižek claims, clearly illustrates the asymmetry of the manner in which the male and the female principles are inscribed in the metaphysical space of representation. Becoming a woman does not implicate the process of becoming a subject in the world, but of complying with the social signifying practices that designate the female as the embodiment of male desire (Žižek 1995). It is for this reason that she cannot participate in the production of the ideologemetics of a Bildungsroman as its main protagonist. Her self-definition is of a different kind, and is codified within cultural signifying practices that subordinate her to the dominant figure, a man.

Though a number of cultural practices changed during the twentieth century, the representation of women within the cultural imaginary has continued to be determined by the Law of the Father.<sup>6</sup> Therefore every attempt to write a female Bildungsroman is fated to prove abortive. One of the most telling examples is that of Lily Briscoe, a character in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Lily can be characterized as a modern professional woman, a painter. Yet, in the world of Victorian values in which "women can't write, women can't paint" as Mr. Tansley keeps repeating, while Mrs. Ramsay, though acting in good faith, thinks that Lily should get married and be saved from her spinsterly fate, she is portrayed as being inferior. It is significant that Lily does not participate in the journey to the lighthouse. A homage to Mrs. Ramsay, the trip to the lighthouse marks a moment of epiphany<sup>7</sup> as it compels its protagonists to come to terms with the past and attain a new self-understanding. Thus Mr. Ramsay finally sees his son as a man, and praises his steering of the boat as "well done". These words mark a turning point in James's narrative of maturation and are for him a secret code of initiation into the world of manliness (by acquisition of a phallus)<sup>8</sup>.

On the other hand, Cam, though on the boat, will remain just an observer, while Lily witnesses the whole journey from the shore. Yet, for her, this journey is also a moment of epiphany. By drawing the final vertical line on the painting, Lily comes to terms with the implications of the trip to the lighthouse; we can interpret the symbolism of this vertical line as the acquisition of the power of creativity now she has been liberated from the influence of Mrs. Ramsay, the epitome of traditional femininity, (and thus acquires a phallus), or as the coming to terms with the memory of Mrs. Ramsay as a phallic mother (Lacan 1978: 266). The narrative of Lily Briscoe, if viewed as being underwritten by the ideologemetics of Künstlerroman, can be read as a feminist one since the moment of self-realization marks the teleological ending of the artistic narrative. From this perspective, it is comparable to the paradigmatic modernist Künstlerroman, Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Yet, differently from Stephen's moment of self-realization,

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<sup>6</sup> "The true function of the Father ... is fundamentally to unite (and not to set in opposition) a desire and the Law" (Lacan 1977: 321). However, I am using the term in a more popular and general sense to indicate the discourse of patriarchy and of woman as someone primarily defined by the lack.

<sup>7</sup> I am using the term as it has been employed in Joyce's writing -- as a moment in which a clear vision or a new phase in self-understanding has been reached. There is a similarity between Woolf's moments of being and epiphany, because both refer to a moment of psychological insight. But, whereas moments of being presuppose Bergsonian flashes of evidence--two separate moments in time being interconnected, the present moment facilitating a better understanding of the past memories and events--the epiphanic flash of evidence is related to a sole moment of spiritual insightfulness in which, in this particular case, the past is overcome rather than understood.

<sup>8</sup> "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 1977: 288).

Lily's is abortive. She is incapable of declaring her artistic vocation. Instead, she looks at her painting and thinks: "There it was – her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attic, she thought, it would be destroyed. But what did that matter?" (Woolf 1993: 269)

Thus, for Lily Briscoe the moment of artistic cognition is not a moment of manly triumph, of throwing a glove in the face of society and going to challenge it on its own terms. Neither is it the Dedalian moment of attributing to art the capacity to effect the change in social codification, to create in the smithy of one's soul the as-yet uncreated conscience of one's race (Joyce 1996: 288). As a visionary who does not obey the prescribed limitations of female art and thus can articulate a difference, she is similar to Stephen. But she is not allowed to usurp a male role. She must accept the imposed social limitations and succumb to the solipsistic nature of her artistic production.

Narratologist studies of *A Portrait* have pointed out that Stephen's artistic self-proclamation should not be taken seriously, as the narrative strategy undermines his credibility.<sup>9</sup> But 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 becomes just another female somnambulist fantasy, an incoherent blotting of colours on a canvas, a therapeutic activity in order to ease some hysteric impulse, too insignificant to impose itself on the male space of representation and thus make a difference.

The very ending of the novel is disruptive of the closure. After accepting the designated place of invisibility and silence to which her art is fated with resignation, Lily Briscoe reaches some new intensity in her artistic expression, almost a kind of anger, with which she draws her final vertical line, the semblance of the lighthouse. The artistic attainment of this phallic symbol<sup>10</sup> marks a moment of self-realization similar to James's. Though it does not revise her previous acceptance of the marginal fate of female art or declare the power of a female artist to inscribe herself into art history, it opens a new perspective. It marks a claim to the right of self-expression and hence to the position of a female artist in society and the novel therefore can be read as a variant of a Künstlerroman. It is for this

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<sup>9</sup> Hugh Kenner in "The *Portrait* in Perspective" (1948) and Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) have pointed to the discrepancy between the two instances of focalization, that of Stephen and of the juxtaposed narrative voice. Also, it might be interpreted as symbolizing Mrs. Ramsay since Mrs. Ramsay is, after all, portrayed as a phallic mother (Lacan 1977: 198-99).

<sup>10</sup> Also, it might be interpreted as symbolizing Mrs. Ramsay since Mrs. Ramsay is, after all, portrayed as a phallic mother (Lacan 1977: 198-99).

reason that *To the Lighthouse* comes closer to the re-evaluation of the phallogentric articulation of the metaphysical space than any other woman's novel.

Another significant challenge to the genre of the Bildungsroman was articulated in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. The novel starts as a Bildungsroman, a promise of fulfilment of the American dream as the protagonist has won a summer internship at a fashion magazine in New York. Yet, this opportunity does not live to its promise. Therefore, the image of the fig tree so often referred to in Plath's criticism can be read only as ironic. It is not her indecisiveness when faced with too many opportunities that paralyses her choice; it is exactly the lack of opportunities for a talented middle-class girl from the American suburbia who is different, and thus does not desire to fit in with the standard female roles of a wife and a mother. Such a girl who is happy to have an excuse to stay in her room and read poetry instead of dating, and who wonders if there is some other way to have babies, does not feel the need to fit in. Therefore the fact that her application for scholarship (that would secure her a safe heaven) has been rejected is enough to unbalance her. The story of Esther is a coming-of-age novel in which the stereotypes of character formation that accord with the American myth are challenged. The falseness of the New York glamour is suggested in the scene in which we realize that, in their romantic shots, the girls are not with real boy-friends but with escorts hired for the occasion. The vomiting scene is symbolic of the greed that characterizes the consumerist hysteria in the American Fifties.<sup>11</sup>

The other side of this hysteria, characteristic of McCarty's era, culminates in the electrocution of the Rosenbergs. The electrocution is also the method of the psychiatric treatment to which Esther will be exposed. The motif of psychiatry as the way of sanitation and exclusion of everything that threatens the logo-phallogentric value system of rationality, common sense, self-discipline and self-control has been already described in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* when Septimus sees Doctor Holmes as the doctor who is forcing his soul. But in *The Bell Jar* disciplining is achieved through the concrete means of sanitation – torturing and disciplining the body by inflicting pain via electric shock treatments. Two other similar motifs in Woolf's and Plath's novel are the concept of the psychiatric treatment through confinement, qualified as "resting," and the characterization of male doctors as unsympathetic and cold professionals. (This is suggested by Doctor Holmes's interest in the antique furniture, to which his mind escapes during the interview with Septimus, and the happy family photo on the desk of Esther's male psychiatrist.) However, the most subversive topics in this woman's novel are the portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship and of the double standards regarding sexuality. The mother in the novel is almost a stranger, focused on keeping up appearances and pretending that once her daughter's mental condition improves the two of them will regard her mental illness just as a bad

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<sup>11</sup> On the other hand it is the expression of her desire to break away from her nature. As Kristeva writes "'abject' – that which has been expelled from the body. Food – I spit myself out, nausea – I balk out that milk cream separating myself from my mother and father who proffer it" (in Butler 2001: 2493).

episode that should be forgotten. Her traditionalism, which makes her appear unfeeling and superficial, is also evident in the newspaper article she sends to Esther about abstinence being the only safe contraception and advising her to wait till she is married, but at the same time accepting, together with Buddy's mother, that it is normal for a man to have pre-marital sex with a person of a lower social rank. Therefore, the female doctor is important to Esther as a mother substitute, introducing her to contraception and thus to sexual freedom, but also teaching her to focus on herself and not to depend on others, in particular on men, for her self-definition. The grotesque scene of defloration, in which Esther haemorrhages with such an intensity that she must seek medical help, subverts the patriarchal stereotype of the "first night" as the most important female experience and shows that a woman does not have to live up to this myth.

And yet, this coming-of-age novel does not comply with the ideologematics of the Bildungsroman. Though Esther has passed from girlhood to womanhood and though the end of the novel tentatively suggests that she will be pronounced cured and released from the sanatorium, Esther's story does not end with the cognition of her new place in society. On her horizon there is no possibility of a lifestyle other than the one of middle-class hypocrisy and pettiness. Though she claims that she wants to dictate her own letters and not to take down somebody else's, we can envisage her only doing the latter. The novel had a significant influence on the American women in the Sixties. But the suicidal author and a mentally disturbed protagonist to whom sanity is the ultimate *telos*, though attractive to quite a number of young women, provided for hours of pensiveness rather than a vision of a possible lifestyle for most of its readers. They might have identified with the protagonist in their frustrations and dissatisfaction with the shallowness of their lives; but in the end the narratives with the happy ending—perpetuating the patriarchal stereotypes of the woman loved, desired and admired—prevailed as the dominant models of the ideal female position in society. Therefore, this narrative, together with the acclaimed women's novels such as Chopin's *Awakening* or Attwood's *Surfacing*, remains in the compartmentalized space labelled as women's writing or life narratives.

The more optimistic version of a female Bildungsroman/Künstlerroman is Irena Vrkljan's novel *The Silk, the Sears*. Written by a Croatian author, who lives in Berlin, this Bildungsroman follows the teleological pattern of the genre. We follow the protagonist from her childhood as she feels oppressed by the traditional patriarchal upbringing (its ineffective clumsiness being likened to cutting silk with the shears), resists it, finds an alternative role model (what Rich would describe as a strong woman) and reaches the stage of self-realization as an artist. The ending of the novel when Benno, the author and a husband, makes room on his desk, is a triumphant moment for a female artist. The dream of Woolf's "room of one's own" has been not only realized, but overcome: the author is not marginalized in the seclusion of the attic, she has won the equal position in the process of writing, symbolised by her sharing the desk with the male author, Benno. Yet, the liberation is not complete as the sense of claustrophobia prevails and the headaches persist.

A British version of a narrative underwritten by the ideologeme of the Bildungsroman is Byatt's story "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye." This narrative seems to carry a promise of a breakthrough in the representation of women, portraying as it does a successful female scholar who is past the need to define her life in relation to her female roles as a mother and a wife. Thus her reaction to the fact that her husband has just left her for a younger woman (the archetypal fear of middle-aged women) surprises even her. Instead of desperation and pain, she feels relief.<sup>12</sup> On a trip to a narratology conference in Ankara she looks at herself with the eye of the big Other, and sees herself as "floating redundant". But Gillian does not feel redundant. She feels needed and successful. Self-realized and professionally recognized, she is emancipated from the traditional stereotype of an aging woman suffering from the empty nest syndrome. She is a new woman ready to re-name, and thus to re-evaluate cultural imaginary. She counteracts the social prejudices about her as being redundant by recalling Milton's usage of the word redundant in the description of the snake: "With burnished neck of verdant gold, erect / Amidst his circling spires, that on the grass/ Floated *redundant: pleasing* was his shape, /And *lovely*" (Byatt 1994: 100 my emphasis).

The act of re-naming and of inventing a new language is perhaps the most important project in recent feminist literary practice. In her essay "When We Dead Awaken" Adrienne Rich describes a sense of claustrophobia and of anger as the overwhelming emotions felt by women. In order to counteract it, she stresses the importance of female creativity and the act of renaming (Rich 2008: 7). In her *Twenty-one Love Poems*, a newly found sense of the self is realized through renaming – volcanoes are given female characteristics and the world in which the two lovers wander is unfamiliar and nameless until they rename it (Rich 1985: 2036). The project of renaming is similar to the concept of *écriture féminine* as the subversion of logocentric signifying practices. Coming from the body, on the borderline with the uncontrollable discourse of the hysteric, such a discourse professes the new politics of *jouissance*, allowing a woman to liberate her many selves.

In Cixous's imaginary, female writing from the body can be likened to the metaphoric serpents moving freely from the medusa's head. The image of a medusa "beautiful and ... laughing" (Cixous 2000: 887) redefines the politics of pleasure, allowing woman new possibilities for self-expression. However, together with Rich's renaming, the subversiveness of the feminist French theorists such as Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva is problematic. Their overturn of the phallo-logo-centric tradition is a poetic phantasm, ideologically ambivalent as it returns women to their already ascribed place in the metaphysical space of cultural imaginary – that of preverbal<sup>13</sup> and primordial. Thus, it emphasizes exactly those attributes of femininity that have been used throughout history to

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<sup>12</sup> Thus, Dr. Gillian Perholt thinks to herself: "No more waiting for meals. No more grumbling and jousting, no more exhausted anticipation of alien feelings, no more snoring, no more farts, no more trace of stubble in the washbasin" (Byatt 1994: 104).

<sup>13</sup> Or, in Lacanian, terms imaginary (Lacan 1978: 179-180).

rationalize their exclusion from the metaphysical. To define *écriture féminine* as the discourse anchored in the female body might be liberating, but it is ambivalent in regard to women's place in society. Since such a theory designates the feminine as natural and biological, as a consequence it suggests that its opposite, the male, is spiritual and metaphysical. Thus, it just perpetuates the dichotomy on which the marginalization of women has been based.

It is exactly for this reason that Byatt's attempt at linguistic re-evaluation is much more culturally and politically relevant. Evoking Milton's semantics in order to oppose the stereotypical, everyday, usage of the term redundant, Byatt shows that there is no need to go beyond canonized artefacts of cultural representation and to locate female language in the realm of biology. The possibility for re-evaluation is always already there – it is inscribed in the language itself. The task of women's writing is just to re-discover and to re-semantize it.

Yet, in spite of this important realization, Gillian's narrative is not a triumphant one; she knows how she could acquire the language, yet she is not quite ready to acquire it. The ghosts from the past prevail. They are everywhere – in the conversation of the women in the audience who have come because their husbands and brothers have encouraged them to do so, in the story of the patient Griselda repeating other female narratives about stopped energies such as those of "Fanny Price, Lucy Snowe, even Gwendolen Harleth" (Byatt 1994: 121), and, most dramatically, in the scary apparition at the end of the lecture hall that suggests that the ghosts from the pasts are not gone as yet. Gillian knows that she should tell about this apparition, that she should name it, just as when she was a child she also knew that she should have described a hag in the lavatory in order to make it vanish. But her tongue, then and now, "lay like lead in her mouth" (Byatt 1994: 122).

As a woman and an author Gillian knows that she must acquire a language, a language in which "to float redundant" does not mean to be unwanted and superfluous, but to be pleasing and lovely; in order to do this, she would first have to point to the ghost from the past, to utter its name. In other words, she would need to enter the prohibited space of the metaphysical and re-articulate it so that it would express her unease and anxiety. But, now, as then, she cannot see, she cannot speak; she remains silent and oblivious to the obvious, just like the character of Gertrude in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that she impersonated in her schooldays. Though she desired to be Ophelia, "beautiful and passionately mad," she had to play the role of Gertrude, "the Queen who could not see the spirit stalking her bedchambers" (Byatt 1994: 123). It is significant that Byatt here evokes the motif of a spirit (ghost) in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In the light of this allusion, it is worth recalling Derrida's reference to *Hamlet* in *Specters of Marx*. The apparition of Hamlet's father, though undecipherable, prompts Hamlet to do his duty. But duty, claims Derrida, is always concerned with the future.

This is why "the time is out of joint" since the time is not mundane, but spectral – it is our responsibility to the memory of the dead. In the case of Hamlet, it is his father; in the case of Gillian, it is all those women, symbolized by the apparition in the lecture hall, whose lives have been stopped, energies wasted,

and who she has the responsibility to give voice to. But if Hamlet's hesitation can be accounted for as the symptom of anamorphism rooted in the failure of the paternal metaphor, in Gillian's case, as in Gertrude's, the apparition is anamorphic because of the prevalence of the paternal metaphor. In other words, it is the Name-of-the-Father that controls the realm of the symbolic.

Certain female texts, such as Adrienne Rich's *Compulsive heterosexuality* or *When We Dead Awaken*, Zora Neal Hurston's *How It Feels to be Colored Me* or Eavan Boland's poetry have destabilized the stereotypical representation of femininity. Boland's concern with female bodies that are anorexic, scarred, or misshaped has de-naturalized certain cultural presuppositions; the term de-naturalizing describing the rhetorical operation of historicizing and thus subverting historical givens that are presented as timeless, thus natural and therefore impossible to change (Barthes:143).

Rich's, Hurston's and Boland's texts are just a few paradigmatic examples of numerous women's texts that have challenged the myths of motherhood, race and heterosexuality; of being an angel in the house and a nurturer as woman's natural instincts, and of female beauty as the ultimate object of artistic inspiration. Yet these texts have always been underwritten with the dominant cultural representation. So, they testify to the inability to move from the prescribed roles (of a mother, a wife, of housework and of uncertainty once freedom is acquired), limited by the prevalent imaginary of gender roles, they kept just modifying the stereotypical representation.

In the recent years the changes in the professional stratification of the woman/man dichotomy, as well as the prevalence of political correctness in relation to all marginal groups, women included, have affected the more variable presentation of women in the cultural imaginary. The interest in women's lives has increased and women have been shown as being more independent, enterprising, and able to take care of themselves. Yet, in the end, the narratives of their lives have always turned out to be post-Freudian – the eternal female lack to be satisfied only through the mediation of the big Other. This fact has thwarted any attempt to present a teleological female narrative (a Bildungsroman) of becoming a woman in the world. To illustrate this I shall briefly discuss two popular films that can tentatively be seen as narratives promoting the notion of female Bildungsroman, since they are structured around the protagonist's self-definition in relation to the social pressures imposed on her. *Bridget Jones's Diary* is the Hollywood-made romantic comedy based on the excellent novel by Helen Fielding. It is written in the form of a diary of a protagonist who is a modern version of Elizabeth, Jane Austen's heroine from *Pride and Prejudice*. Metafictionally dependent on Austen's narrative structure, intertextually interwoven in the discourses of fashion magazines and self-help books, the novel is a funny and ironic deconstruction of the appropriation of the female body by consumerist culture (diet! exercise! depilate! dress sexy! etc). Her inadequacy in dealing with professional and intimate challenges is relieved by the narrative's metafictionality, which substitutes for the absent psychological motivation. However, whereas in the novel Bridget's narrative is true to Austen's by being ironic and funny, the Hollywood reinscription turns it into a not-so-funny romantic comedy.

The action revolves mainly around two topics – love triangles involving Bridget, Natasha and Mark, and Daniel, Mark and Bridget, and around Bridget's situations at work where she ends up as a damsel in distress, rescued by the efficient Mark Darcy. Another obsessive topic is Bridget's weight problem, as her weight gains and losses are a barometer for her social and intimate acceptability. Overweight (most of the time), socially awkward and professionally ineffective, Bridget does not do anything to deserve to be rewarded in the end. But this is not what motivates the plot in this postmodern narrative; its ending is known from the very beginning. From the moment we see that Mr. Darcy is played by Colin Firth, who also played Darcy in 1995 BBC version of Austen's novel, the audience gets a clear signal that the narrative will follow Austen's plot. However, its happy ending is unmotivated and sentimental. In this, it somewhat echoes Daisy's philosophy as expressed in *The Great Gatsby* – in this world, the best a woman can do is to be a pretty fool<sup>14</sup> – fortifying thus the stereotypical representation of women and their role in society as dependent on the male.

Another character that seems to offer a promising story about woman's self-realization is Andrea in the film version of *The Devil Wears Prada*. A Northwestern graduate, intellectually ambitious, casual in her life style, Andrea and her story bear a promise of an insight into realities of social life similar to Rastignac's revelation at the end of *Father Goriot*. Yet, these two cognitions are different in kind. Whereas for Rastignac the moral shallowness of the French high society is a challenge to encounter this society on its own terms, Andrea, it seems, must either play the game by its own rules, or withdraw from it altogether into the sphere of private life. Whatever the case, the ending of the narrative suggests that she has reached new maturity. But she is not able to use it (as Rastignac will) to play the game in her own way.

The other moment that contributes to the stereotypical presentation in the film is the fact that Andrea's professional success is dependent on her looks. To gain authority in the fashion world she must look and dress to its standards. Her brain and her education are irrelevant – she acquires authority when she becomes thinner and assertively fashionable. The narrative thus misses the opportunity to provide space for an alternative choice, but follows the fascination with the fashion world in which you are what you seem to be. The fact that the genre of the romance will be fulfilled in the end as Andrea returns to her former life and partner, does not affect the genre. It is still either/or situation, both choices being limiting, as a woman must choose between a private and a professional life, thus complying to one of the two cultural stereotypes – of being true to her female nature in following her heart or of being a heartless bitch<sup>15</sup>. One way or

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<sup>14</sup> But, differently from Daisy, Bridget does not even cry when she realizes that.

<sup>15</sup> It is possible to read the narrative as a critique of the fashion world and its hypocritical values, but there is much too much fascination with its glamour, Andrea's transformation is a desirable change within the predominant ideological framework as, thus transformed, she gains visibility and respect. Therefore, her decision in the end does not seem to be a happy revelation in her existentialist search for fulfillment, but a necessary compromise within the givens of female social roles.

another, the stereotype of womanliness as a masquerade<sup>16</sup> is confirmed and the possibility of an alternative narrative aborted.

Yet, it is possible to end on a happier note. Claire Keegan's story "Quare Name for a Boy" is a story about a typical female fate. After one short, causal Christmas affair the protagonist has got pregnant. Therefore, she returns to Dublin to meet her boyfriend and discuss the situation. She hopes that when she tells him about the child, he will say he loves her though she does not love him. But after a short silence his first words are: "Well, the damage is done now" (Keegan 1999: 101). In the pub, it becomes clear to her that he would rather be with the boys in the pub than with her, and she decides that she "will not look into /his/ eyes some night years from now and discover a man whose worst regret is six furtive nights spent in his mother's bed with a woman from a Christmas party" (Keegan, 1999: 102). But she also discovers that she has a choice, a choice that was not given to a girl whom she remembered being carried out in a bag from the cabin where her father had locked her rather than to let the neighbours know that she were pregnant. Nor has she to become like her relatives, those tweedy, big-boned women who have given up and call it happiness (Keegan, 1999: 95).

The story ends up with her drinking a pint of beer, containing iron, which is, as her boyfriend remarks, good for a girl in her condition. This ending with such a "matter of the fact" scene (no regrets, no bitterness, no reproach, no self-pity) does not bring a reader a moment of revelation or catharsis. But the story portrays a new woman who is independent, able to choose to be a single mother rather than to be in a bad relationship and thus suggests a possibility of a new narrative structure, one which does not have to end with a "happy ever after" but also not tragically, with a suicide, or at least with the sense of defeat (as do the narratives from "To the Lighthouse" to *The Devil Wears Prada*). This "matter of the fact" ending, appropriate to a short story, but not to the Bildungsroman, underwritten by the patriarchal understanding of a growing up as a process of filling one's diary with the account of one's noble deeds, seems to provide an alternative archetextual possibility, the one which might prove more appropriate for the radical female inscription into the metaphysical space of gender definition.

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<sup>16</sup> Joan Riviere: «Womanliness as Masquerade», 1929. See also Žižek. 1995. However, I am using the term more as a pun than as an insight in the psychological patterns of female behavior.

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## (NE)MOGUĆNOST ŽENSKOG BILDUNGSROMANA

Članak želi pokazati kako je žanr Bildungsromana nespojiv s imaginiranjem ženskosti u zapadnjačkoj kulturi do te mjere da svaki pokušaj pisanja ženskoga Bildungsromana prerasta u negaciju njegove ideologematske strukture, kao što to pokazuju romani V. Woolf "Ka svjetioniku," "Stakleno zvono" S. Plath, te pripovijetka "Džin u 'slavujevu oku'" S. A. Byatt. Upitna je i emancipatornost koncepta *écriture féminine*, jer i on ponavlja tradicionalnu dihotomiju o ženi kao prirodi, a muškarcu kao kulturi. Iako suvremena ženska proza značajno širi tematski opseg i prevrednuje stereotipe u prikazivanju ženskosti, ona ipak svjedoči o nemogućnosti inskripcije ženskoga subjekta u metafizički prostor kulture. Stoga ona ostaje getoizirana u prostoru ženske tematike, dok je dominantna kulturna naracija i dalje ovisna o patrijarhalnoj (muškoj) konceptualizaciji načela ženskosti.

*Keywords:* Bildungroman, *écriture féminine*, re-naming, V. Woolf, S. Plath, A. S. Byatt

*Ključne riječi:* Bildungsroman, žensko pismo, kulturološka zadanost koncepta ženskosti, V. Woolf, S. Plath, A. S. Byatt

