



**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**"Gender and Genre": A Feminist Exploration of  
the Bildungsroman in A Portrait of the Artist As a  
Young Man and Martha Quest**

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The predominant focus on the male protagonist in the *Bildungsroman* genre has provoked feminist critics to offer a re-definition of the genre, claiming that the female protagonist's development differs in significant ways from the traditionally expected course of development (i.e. male). A feminist comparison between *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* and *Martha Quest* found, unexpectedly, that the female protagonist follows the traditional *Bildungsroman* trajectory in several respects, whereas the male protagonist deviates from it. *A Portrait* emphasizes the themes of childhood, formal education and religion, while in *Martha Quest* the themes of family relations, informal education, sexuality and marriage are treated at length. *Martha Quest* as an example of a female *Bildungsroman* deals specifically with the issues of role models, gender roles and gender inequality, which neither the traditional *Bildungsroman* nor *A Portrait* does.

Key words: *Bildungsroman*, development, adolescence, *Bildung*, identity, independence, feminist literary critique, Doris Lessing, James Joyce.

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## Introduction

If adolescence for boys represents a rite of passage (much celebrated in the Western literature in the form of the *bildungsroman*), and an ascension to some version (however attenuated) of social power, for girls, adolescence is a lesson in restraint, punishment, and repression.

Judith Halberstam, 938

There are a great many definitions of the literary genre *Bildungsroman*. It can be defined as “[a] novel whose principal subject is the moral, psychological, and intellectual development of a usually youthful main character” (The Free Dictionary), or as “the novel of personal development or of education” (The Literary Encyclopaedia). Novels that are characteristic of the *Bildungsroman* genre describe a young protagonist’s developmental trajectory, or overall development, from childhood to maturity. The literary prototype of the *Bildungsroman* protagonist is the German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s 19<sup>th</sup> century hero Wilhelm Meister, who embarks on a spiritual journey “...to seek self-realization in the service of art...” (Buckley, 9). The aim of the young artist’s quest is self-development through a series of hardships encountered along the way. The *Bildungsroman* genre encompasses the Entwicklungsroman (novel of general growth), the Erziehungsroman (novel of educational development) and the Künstlerroman (novel of artistic realization). However, the focus of this essay will be the *Bildungsroman*, or the novel of development, per se.

The autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (first published in 1916) by the Irish author James Joyce (1882-1941) is a typical example of a *Bildungsroman*. The novel follows the protagonist Stephen Dedalus’ educational and psychological development from his childhood years at boarding schools until he is a young university student who is about to leave his home country and go abroad. Although Stephen is not an exact literary imitation of Joyce, the similarities are there, concerning religious, educational, sexual as well as psychological experiences (Buckley, 230-31). As part of the modernist movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Joyce’s style of writing is characterised by “...a movement from narrative driven plot to internalised rhythmic moods” (The James Joyce Centre). The internal processes of Stephen’s psyche are thus more important than what goes on around Stephen in the external world.

The British Nobel Price laureate Doris Lessing's (b.1919) *Children of Violence* series can also be characterised as belonging to the *Bildungsroman* genre, of which *Martha Quest* (first published in 1952) is the first novel of the series. The narrative follows the young, rebellious woman Martha's adolescent years in the British colony Zimbabwe (termed Zambesia in the novel) in Africa. *Martha Quest* is a semi-autobiographical novel; there are obvious similarities between the author and the protagonist. Lessing, like Martha, had a problematic relationship with her mother, which she escaped by leaving home at a very young age. Moreover, like her main character, Lessing was eager to learn as an adolescent girl and educated herself by reading books on sociology and politics as well as novels by Dickens, Dostojevskij and Lawrence to name but a few. As a child, Lessing lived in Zimbabwe, a British colony at the time; quite a few of her novels are situated in Africa and *Martha Quest* is no exception (Doris Lessing: A Retrospective).

As mentioned above, the original model for the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* is the male hero as the genre has been male dominated. In Jerome Hamilton Buckley's classic study *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (1974) the development of the English *Bildungsroman* is discussed. However, Buckley focuses exclusively on male novels of development; such neglect of the female *Bildungsroman* has produced criticism from feminist quarters. In 1983 Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland published *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, a collection of essays on the female novel of development. Their anthology was a reaction to the neglect of women authors in general, and in particular, the female protagonists, in the *Bildungsroman* genre. The authors state "[e]ven the broadest definitions of the *Bildungsroman* presuppose a range of social options available only to men" (7); thus, women could not occupy a site within the traditional genre as narrowly defined. As social constraints work differently for men and women, female development was not characterized by the possibility to explore a social environment. Specifically criticizing Buckley's definition, the critics claim among other things that rarely does a female novel of a development begin in childhood nor does it include the opportunity for formal education or a move from home into the city in search for independence. Consequently they require a new definition.

Abel et al's feminist study of novels of female development has been considered "[a] groundbreaking contribution", and the critic Tobias Boes highlights the fact that the anthology focuses predominantly on the 20<sup>th</sup> century contemporary and modernist texts, for instance Lessing's *Children of Violence* (234). Abel et al claim "[b]y examining fictional representations of female development, this volume integrates gender with the genre and

identifies distinctively female versions of the *Bildungsroman*” (5). Exclusively focusing on the developmental processes of female protagonists, the authors bring in the gender perspective into their discussion, rendering their anthology a pioneering critical work of the genre. It is interesting to note, however, that although the authors repeatedly refer to the ‘male *Bildungsroman*’, they do not use the concept ‘female *Bildungsroman*’ in their introductory part.

In Abel et al’s anthology, Mary Anne Ferguson discusses gender differences as regards the pattern for the male and female novels of development. The male *Bildungsroman* describes the protagonist’s development as spiral; at the end of the novel, the protagonist has more often than not achieved self-realization after his spiritual and psychological journey in the external world. In contrast the female protagonist’s development is circular; remaining at home in order to learn the ways of her mother, she does not have the same possibility as her male counterpart to go out into the world to find herself. Women in fiction who violate the norms and refuse to follow this female pattern of development are perceived as rebels and they end up unhappy or insane.

Ferguson argues “[t]his ‘natural’ female development is viewed as inferior to the male’s. Perceived as part of nature, women in most novels are presented as incapable of autonomy and integrity. They simply *are* ...” (Abel et al, 229). Regrettably, this traditional view of women as passive, as less capable than and inferior to men, has been shared by male and female authors alike. Importantly, Ferguson states that “literature reflects reality”, which is why it is only to be expected that novels portraying women as having the same capabilities to learn and develop as men began to see the light of day in the 1970s when women started to leave their traditional place in the home to join the ‘outside world’ (ibid). Ferguson’s claim might come across as an over-simplified view of reality. However, to my mind she wants to emphasize the fact that, in the 1970s women in great numbers challenged their confining gender roles and wanted to gain access to the public sphere.

In 1986 Esther Kleinbord Labovitz published her study *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century* as a response to the missing female protagonist in the *Bildungsroman* genre. Labovitz states that as the *Bildungsroman* describes “... the period when the person works out questions of identity, career and marriage, it is a highly suggestive genre for studying formation of character” (2). She thus finds it remarkable that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the novel of development flourished, so few novels portraying the self-development of a female protagonist were published. However, being of the same opinion as Ferguson that reality is reflected in literature, Labovitz argues “... this new genre

[the female *Bildungsroman*] was made possible only when *Bildung* became a reality for women, in general, and for the fictional heroine, in particular” (6-7). Only when social and cultural changes made it possible for women to leave their place in the home and join the men’s world, to engage in exploration and self-development, only then did the same possibilities lie open for the female protagonist. Lessing could thus be considered groundbreaking in that she portrays a female protagonist as having by and large the same developmental opportunities as her male counterpart.

In her annotated bibliography *The Female Bildungsroman in English* (1990), Laura Sue Fuderer maintains “[d]iscussions of the female bildungsroman [sic] began to appear in the critical literature in the early 1970s, when critics recognized its rise as a reflection of the contemporary feminist movement” (2). As reality is reflected in literature, according to Ferguson and Labovitz, the female novel of development not only had an upswing but in earnest was put on the literary critical agenda in the aftermath of the feminist movement of the 1970s. In a similar vein, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan emphasize the importance of political activism for development in literary critique. In the introductory chapter on feminism in their *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, first published in 1998, they state “[c]ontemporary feminist literary criticism begins as much in the women’s movement of the late 1960s and the early 1970s as it does in the academy” (765). To rephrase somewhat it could be said that reality is reflected in the academia as well, and that the advent of feminist criticism goes hand in hand with the commencement of the feminist movement.

A few years earlier, in 1983, the feminist critic Susan Fraiman published her study of female novels of development, in which she highlights the issue of marriage. There are different circumstances for the choice of marriage for the male hero and female heroine: whereas the hero typically marries when he is a mature young man who has decided upon a career choice and has found his place in society, the heroine typically marries when she is still a young woman who has not yet found her identity. Fraiman observes that “[f]or the male protagonist, marriage is not a goal so much as a reward for having reached his goal; it symbolizes his gratification” (129). Consequently, marriage does not in general imply a hindrance to self-development for the male protagonist, which it does for his female counterpart. There is thus a gender difference to be found between the male *Bildungsroman* and the female variant as far as marriage is concerned. Linked to such an important gender difference is the role of mentors. Fraiman notes that as the female protagonist typically has difficulties finding representative female role models, what she generally finds is a ‘mentor’ whom she eventually marries: “... when the mentor is a husband and when apprenticeship

reduces to a process of marital binding, it never leads the heroine to mastery but only to a lifetime as perennial novice” (6). To the female heroine marriage thus signifies a halted growth process.

Feminist critic Rita Felski makes a similar observation. She devotes a chapter to the novel of self-discovery in her overview of feminist literary theory and feminist literature *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (1989). She observes that the 19<sup>th</sup> century female protagonist’s “... trajectory remains limited to the journey from the parental to the marital home and ... [her] destiny remains permanently linked to that of her male companion” (125). Compared to her male counterpart who leaves home in search for an independent life, the female heroine typically leaves her parents’ house for the home of the man she marries. As she comes to identify with her husband, making his destiny her own, her self-development is thus halted. In 19<sup>th</sup> century literature there are only two choices available to the female heroine, which must be characterized as negative: either to lead an unhappy married life, or to lead a life in solitude and withdrawal from the world which often ends self-destructively. Felski makes a comparison to the male hero’s quest for self-discovery, and concludes, like Fraiman, that there is a marked gender difference to be found.

However, there has been a positive development in the genre. Felski makes the observation that the contemporary female novel of self-discovery is a fundamentally optimistic literary form, which bears witness to women’s identification of themselves as an oppressed group, and thus as a possible challenge to existing societal norms. She divides the genre into two models: the self-discovery narrative and the feminist *Bildungsroman*, of which the latter is of interest in this essay. Felski notes that there are important differences between the feminist *Bildungsroman* and its male counterpart. For instance, in contrast to the male hero who is free to embark on his quest for self-discovery, the female protagonist has to struggle to gain a sense of self by freeing herself from marital subordination and dependence. Another gender difference is that while the male *Bildungsroman* mainly covers the protagonist’s childhood and adolescence, the female variant has a wider time span. Thus, whereas the hero’s quest ends in early manhood, the heroine’s journey continues well into middle age.

The aim of this essay is to analyse and make a contrastive comparison based on gender between the two literary texts: Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (male author, male protagonist) and Lessing’s *Martha Quest* (female author, female protagonist). There are several motives for my choice of these two texts. Firstly, both novels are generally recognized as belonging to the *Bildungsroman* genre. For instance, Buckley uses *A Portrait* as an



example of the male variant, and Labovitz uses *Children of Violence* as an example of the female form. Moreover, both Joyce and Lessing have influenced the *Bildungsroman* genre. While Buckley states that *A Portrait* "... is developed within the recognizable general framework of the Bildungsroman [sic]" (230), and as such is a typical example of the genre, Boes considers Joyce an important author in the development of the *Bildungsroman* genre to include post-colonial and minority writing. Similarly, Labovitz claims that Lessing has contributed to the evolution of the female novel of development. Lessing is seen as groundbreaking because she extends the female protagonist's journey beyond the 'normal' quest, that is, the male protagonist's developmental period. Labovitz argues that this possibility "... lends another dimension to the whole concept of *Bildung* and the *Bildungsroman* ..." (145). Here, self-development is not a process which ends in early adulthood, but continues well into middle age. In addition, both authors are well known and have been very productive; Lessing received the Nobel Prize for literature in 2007.

Another important reason for selecting these authors and novels is that Joyce and Lessing are both of British decent, although born and bred in different parts of the British Empire. Not only nationality then, but also time of publication, link these novels as they were both published in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, *A Portrait* appeared in printing during the "period of high modernism" (Barry, 82), while *Martha Quest* is an early second wave feminist text. Importantly, the latter novel explicitly highlights the female gender perspective in that it allows a politically conscious woman protagonist to explore and develop herself. Claire Sprague and Virginia Tiger consider Lessing innovative in that "...she wrote the first bildungsroman [sic] whose central consciousness is a female ..." (5). Lastly, neither protagonist's life ends with the respective novels. *Martha Quest* is the first novel of five in Lessing's series, and Stephen continues his quest in Joyce's sequel (see Gordon, 698). This last aspect suggests future research in the *Bildungsroman* genre. Moreover, as is typical of *Bildungsromane*, both novels are (semi)autobiographical. However, this aspect will be left out of the discussion.

As Joyce's and Lessing's novels deal with the pains and pleasures of growing up, they share some common themes (such as religion, love, sexuality, friendship, education, social/political issues, parental relationships, psychological/spiritual "seeking" (for identity, meaning etc)), which constitute a solid basis for comparison. However, gender differences will be expected due to the fundamental distinction between the novels, i. e. that one is a male *Bildungsroman* and the other a female *Bildungsroman*. This distinction will be reflected in the way I will treat the themes of the respective novels, which is evident in the table of contents.

This essay will deal with the hypothesis that the protagonists' experiences differ markedly as well as their developmental trajectories (i.e. the traditionally expected male and female course of development respectively). It will also be expected that the authors will deal with not only the themes of their novels but also with their characters in a different manner. The following research questions will be explored: Does Stephen's development follow the traditional male trajectory? Does Martha's development follow the typical female trajectory? Are there any exceptions? What are the main differences between Stephen and Martha's major life experiences and climaxes? Does Martha have the same opportunities for self-development and exploration as Stephen?

I will apply a feminist critical perspective to my discussion. In my analysis I will draw upon the arguments of the above mentioned feminist critics who have clearly demonstrated actual gender differences in the *Bildungsroman* genre. Abel, Hirsch and Langland react to the genre's missing gender perspective; Ferguson observes the commonly held view of the inferiority of female development; Labovitz explores the missing female protagonist in the *Bildungsroman* genre; Felski and Fraiman note marked gender differences, for instance as regards marriage, between the feminist/female *Bildungsroman* and its male counterpart.

I will also draw upon Patrocinio P. Schweickart's distinction between a male text (male author, male protagonist) and a female text (female author, female protagonist). According to Schweickart, it is important to make this distinction when analysing texts from a feminist or gender perspective. In her article "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading", Schweickart quotes a passage (in chapter four) from *A Portrait* to highlight the fact that the same text influences a male and a female reader differently. The quoted passage relates how Stephen has a vision of a young girl by the sea and how this image affects him. A man reading this text is, according to Schweickart, "... invited to feel his *difference* (concretely, *from the girl*) and to equate that with the universal" (Lodge and Wood, 490). A male reader is thus invited to identify with Stephen, to experience his sameness with the male protagonist; however, so is a female reader and consequently she is invited to equate universality with maleness, that is with *not* being female. There is a parallel here to Ferguson's emphasis on the commonly held view in the past that women are not only passive but also inferior to and less capable than men. Moreover, Schweickart states: "For feminists, the question of *how* we read is inextricably linked with the question of *what* we read" (Lodge and Wood, 488). As it might not be possible for a female reader to escape male texts, she does have the option to choose actively how to read such texts and to reflect upon her reading experience.

## **The *Bildungsroman* genre; a brief historical introduction**

In his article “Modernist Studies and the *Bildungsroman*: A Historical Survey of Critical Trends” (2006), Boes claims that the novel of development has mainly been regarded as a phenomenon of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but that “[t]he rise of feminist, post-colonial and minority studies during the 1980s and 90s led to an expansion of the traditional *Bildungsroman* definition”... (231). A far cry from traditional definitions, which focused exclusively on the development of the male hero, the *Bildungsroman* genre has expanded to include the development of first the white female protagonist, and then also non-white ones.

Boes states further that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the focus of studies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century novel of development has been geared toward minority and post-colonial literature. Given that the *Bildungsroman* continues to flourish in minority and post-colonial writing on a global scale, “... critics have begun to reconceptualize the modernist era as a period of transition from metropolitan, nationalist discourses to post-colonial and post-imperial ones” (Boes, 240). Previously perceived as a period of nationalist writing, the modernist period has come to be viewed as an era of re-orientation toward post-colonial writing. According to Boes, a ““semi-colonial”” author like James Joyce has played a major role in this conceptual development (ibid). In summary, the *Bildungsroman* genre has become more inclusive and thus changed its character; from having focused solely on the 19<sup>th</sup> century white male hero, it has expanded to include not only the development of the white female protagonist but also the post-colonial protagonist, male as well as female.

## **The male *Bildungsroman*: the typical male trajectory**

In his study *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, Buckley offers a definition of the male novel of development. He lists a number of requirements that all but two or three have to be met in order for a novel to be classified as a *Bildungsroman*. Typical of the *Bildungsroman* plot is that “[a] child of some sensibility grows up in the country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination” (17). There are three important features to this requirement: that the child in question is emotionally/artistically endowed, was born and brought up in a rural rather than an urban area, and that he feels unable to express his talents freely. As a sensible child he is prone to reading, but the literature he prefers is regarded with disinterested eyes by his family. Neither are they impressed by his creative abilities and ambition. Moreover, the young boy is

often an orphan or, if his father is alive, he is fatherless in the sense that his father has rejected him due to his 'improper' ambitions, which provokes him to seek a substitute parent.

As far as education is concerned, the boy's formal schooling might be unsatisfactory which is why he leaves home (when he is young) to lead a life of independence in the city, usually London in the English *Bildungsroman*. The strongest motivator in his search for independence is the parental loss the boy has experienced. According to Buckley, "[t]here [in the city] his real 'education' begins, not only his preparation for a career but also – and often more importantly – his direct experience of urban life" (ibid). The young man's 'education', or *Bildung*, includes the achievement of formal education, but also the gaining of experiences in other areas of life, including sexual initiation. In this latter respect, the protagonist should have two sexual rendezvous/love affairs of opposite nature, one positive, the other negative; these encounters, "one debasing, one exalting", provoke moral and emotional re-evaluation (ibid). Contrary to expectation, urban life usually brings disillusionment to the young hero as does the insight that money is important. Yet the young protagonist's sensibility might provoke him to reject the materialistic society altogether.

When the male hero, after painful 'reality-testing' in the outside world, has completed his sexual and overall initiation and feels satisfied with the choices he has made, he has become a mature young man. Buckley states that in general the primary conflict of the *Bildungsroman* is personal in nature: "... the problem lies within the hero himself" (22). He might misunderstand his true vocation, or experience a need to evaluate and change his inappropriate behaviour. During his adolescent quest, then, the young man is "'inner-directed'"; he feels he has an obligation both to himself and to others (23). Regarding the ending of a *Bildungsroman*, the reader tends to be left with an open question and thus to speculation about what happens to the hero.

### **The missing gender perspective**

As mentioned above, Abel, Hirsch and Langland criticize the exclusion of the gender perspective in Buckley's definition of "a typical *Bildungsroman* [sic] plot" on a number of instances, as Buckley, unlike them, fails to consider texts also by women authors with female protagonists from the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Buckley, 17). Firstly, the male *Bildungsroman* usually begins in childhood, whereas fictions of female development (with a few exceptions) begin when the protagonist is older and has already married and perhaps given birth; her self-development is then motivated by her feeling frustrated with her life as it

is. Secondly, unlike the young boy, most female protagonists do not receive formal schooling. The critics contend that “[e]ven those directly involved in formal education ... do not significantly expand their options, but learn instead to consolidate their female nurturing roles rather than to take a more active part in the shaping of society” (Abel et al, 7). Consequently, there is a marked gender difference as regards formal education and position in society: the heroine’s place is still in the home.

Thirdly, the male hero has the possibility to leave his home in quest for an independent life in the city, an option usually not available to the female heroine. However, if she does have the chance to leave home, her aim is still not to explore or to learn how to be independent, like her male counterpart. Fourthly, the two love affairs/sexual encounters, one positive the other negative, that the male protagonist should experience as a minimum requirement, is not an option for the female protagonist: “Even one such affair, no matter how exalting, would assure a woman’s expulsion from society” (Abel et al, 8). Paradoxically, what is seen as beneficial to the young man’s emotional and moral development, would result in punishment for the young woman in the shape of ostracism from social life. Lastly, when the male hero’s reaches the end of his spiritual and psychological journey he is a mature man; by then he has made the resolution to accommodate to the world, or alternately to withdraw from it or rebel against it.

In contrast, the female protagonist does not have the same choices, as her only option is to concentrate on her internal world rather than engaging with society. Moreover, the price she might have to pay for psychological development is a loss of social life, the authors claim. “Even if allowed spiritual growth, female protagonists who are barred from public experience must grapple with a pervasive threat of extinction” (Abel et al, 9). The cost for self-development is remarkably higher for the female protagonist; although the young man might experience “painful soul-searching” before he reaches maturity (Buckley, 17), a woman not only experiences the threat of social isolation but also of death.

### **The female *Bildungsroman*: the typical female trajectory**

Labovitz’ study *The Myth of the Heroine: the Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century* focuses on the heretofore “missing female heroine” in the *Bildungsroman* genre, and thus on the development of the female protagonist (1). She lists a number of characteristics of the female novel of development: self-realization, inner and outer directedness, education, career, sex roles, attitude toward marriage, philosophical questions, religious crisis and

autobiographical elements, which testify to the “different developmental process” of the female protagonist (8). Although there are common themes in the male and female *Bildungsroman*, such as relationships to family and friends, formal/informal education, sexuality/love and the overall goal of self-development, there is a marked gender difference between the aims of the spiritual and psychological quest of the male hero and female heroine respectively, which needs to be recognized and realized in a proper (re)definition of the *Bildungsroman* genre.

Labovitz claims that one gender difference is that “[e]very male hero of the *Bildungsroman* is guided by a mentor; something that the female heroine rarely acquires” (24). Lacking proper guidance in life by a mentor, in contrast to her male counterpart who has reached the end of his journey as well as important career choices when he is but a young man, the female protagonist’s developmental quest is both procrastinated and prolonged into middle age. Consequently, “... the female *Bildungsroman* requires expansion beyond the point when the heroine is married, for up until this point of maturation the heroine has no sharp delineation of her self or her role, taking her identity from the man she marries, and wavering between self-narrowing and growth” (194). In contrast to the male hero who has modelled himself on his mentor, the female protagonist, lacking a representative model, has not yet found her role in society by the time she marries when still a young woman. As she has not yet found her own identity but instead models herself on her husband, thus hesitating between narrowing and developing her self, the female protagonist’s growth continues well beyond matrimony. The theme of role models hence reveals clear gender differences between the male and the female *Bildungsroman*.

However, to my mind, it is somewhat unclear what the difference between a mentor and a role model is in Labovitz’s view. On the one hand, it seems as if she treats the concepts ‘mentor’ and ‘role model’ as synonymous: “... *Bildung* is aided by a role model and the male hero attempts to fashion his life after a model” (181). On the other hand, as she applies the traditional *Bildungsroman* as a reference point, it seems as if a mentor is by definition a male character. For instance, she refers to Martha’s two intellectual male friends as her “earliest mentors” (155), and when she discusses role models in *Martha Quest*, she considers only female characters. If I understand Labovitz correctly, a mentor is a male figure in both the male *Bildungsroman* and the female variant. A role model, however, is connected with identity and consequently should have the same sex as the protagonist. It follows, then, that in the traditional *Bildungsroman* a mentor would be synonymous to a role model. Support for this viewpoint comes from Labovitz’s emphasis on the significance of the theme of role

models (and gender roles) as a defining feature of the female *Bildungsroman*: “This thematic aspect above all helps to differentiate their [sic] narrative structure from its male counterpart” (180).

A third difference between the male and the female *Bildungsroman* concerns the issue of gender and sexual inequality. Labovitz highlights the fact that patriarchy plays a rather significant role in the female *Bildungsroman*, as well as the heroines’ repudiation of male power. Consequently, “... the theme of equality between sexes is one sharply raised in the female *Bildungsroman*, alone” (251). Whereas gender equality is a major concern in the female novel of development exclusively, the male hero, in contrast, will “grapple with social equality”; by means of his vocation the male protagonist starts to climb the social ladder, while his female counterpart rebels against the structure of society and its injustices (ibid). Drawing parallels to this essay’s epigraph by Halberstam, it follows that the male adolescent has a freedom of career choice that the young woman lacks. For instance, while it is more often than not self-evident in the male *Bildungsroman* that the protagonist should go to university to pursue his career, this option is not as a rule available to his female counterpart. Upon realizing existing gender injustices the female protagonist, if she rebels against societal norms, risks punishment in the form of social ostracism.

Moreover, there is a marked gender difference between the male and the female *Bildungsroman* as far as sexuality is concerned. Labovitz, as well as Abel et al, note that the male protagonist is expected to defy societal norms in his sexual initiation. However, if a female protagonist would venture to do the same, she would be ostracized from society for rebelling against her assigned female role. Although sexual initiation is a necessary step of the male hero’s development and thus important in the male *Bildungsroman*, issues related to sexuality and sex roles, Labovitz observes, are dealt with predominantly in the female equivalent. As a consequence, the theme of sex roles must be included in a definition of the female *Bildungsroman* because it helps to distinguish it from the male variant; whereas this aspect is considered a dilemma in the female *Bildungsroman*, it is rarely perceived as problematic in its male counterpart. Another difference is that while formal schooling is an actual possibility for the male protagonist, the female heroine often has no choice but to educate herself, which is a way of ‘getting access’ to the external world.

Labovitz refers to a process she terms ‘shedding’, which is a specific feature of the female *Bildungsroman*. Shedding is “... a significant act whereby the heroines rid themselves of excess baggage as they proceed in their life’s journey”, hence it is connected with the female protagonist’s *Bildung* and general growth process (253). Shedding might imply getting

rid of anything from feelings of guilt, fear, self-hatred and nothingness to freeing oneself from familial bonds or the burdening yoke of ideology/religion. Consequently, a specific characteristic of the female *Bildungsroman* is that it is associated with different ideologies and political movements. “By definition, the female heroine seeks equality where it has not before existed, even as she enters spheres where she was formerly excluded in fiction as in life”, Labovitz argues (255). Striving for equality, be it between the sexes or between races, the female protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* breaks new ground both physically and socially in her quest for self-development.

A feature characteristic of the female *Bildungsroman* is, according to Labovitz, the heroines’, “... loss of self, efforts to gain control over their own minds, to win their freedom without hindrance, and to further their self-development” (248). In contrast to the male protagonist, the female heroine has to regain a sense of self that was lost in childhood. Unlike him, she also has to gain her freedom in order for her spiritual and psychological growth to be successful. It is noteworthy that the heroine’s search for selfhood is more often than not completed either in solitude, or in the company of other women. If she chooses the latter option, “... the model of the female community offers an alternative form of intimacy grounded in gender identification”, according to Felski (132). By socialising with other women, by modelling herself on other female figures, the young heroine acquires increased self-knowledge; not only her lost sense of self but also a gendered identity.

In her concluding chapter Labovitz approaches a definition of the female *Bildungsroman*, which follows a female protagonist from her adolescence to maturity focusing mainly on friendship and family, education and career, love and marriage. Like her male counterpart, the female protagonist, in her search for self-development and self-knowledge, goes through experiences that are both necessary and desirable. Unlike the male hero, however, the female heroine’s quest for growth takes place under completely different circumstances: “*Bildung* would function from her life experience rather than from *a priori* lessons to be learned”, Labovitz maintains (246). Instead of learning by reason, by basing decisions on previous knowledge, like the male hero, the female protagonist grows by learning from life itself. According to Labovitz, a defining characteristic of the female *Bildungsroman*, is thus that “*Bildung* takes a greater toll from [sic] the heroine in that she embarks upon a quest of self-discovery, of discovering things she has known but cannot yet act upon” (150). The female protagonist’s search for self-knowledge has a more negative effect on her because she feels burdened by social injustices, as she cannot yet take action to solve the problems. However, once she discovers her identity and place in society, then she



can begin to develop. Her journey towards self-realization will be promoted or hampered by her self-education and ideological testing.

Here I find that it is somewhat unclear in Labovitz what the major differences between the respective growth processes of the male hero and the female heroine are. It is possible that Labovitz wants to emphasize that as the female protagonist in general embarks upon her quest later in life than the male protagonist, she has accumulated more (negative) experiences than he has; among other things, she has typically experienced a marriage and most likely childbirth. It is also possible that Labovitz wants to highlight another significant gender difference: whereas the typical hero has modelled himself on a mentor, the typical heroine has modelled herself on her husband and thus has not yet found her identity. Consequently her quest is procrastinated. Being a female, the heroine feels burdened by the inequalities between the sexes that she becomes aware of, which does not bother the hero to the same extent. Experiencing a double burden, the heroine must leave social issues open, temporarily anyway, as her primary goal is to find her self. Drawing parallels to Ferguson's discussion above, the heroine's quest, then, is essentially circular, while the hero's is spiral, that is, more straightforward.

### **Stephen's developmental trajectory: The young aesthete**

#### **Plot summary: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man***

The novel is set in Ireland at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, approximately between the years 1882-1903 (see Gibson, 697). As an exemplary *Bildungsroman*, *A Portrait* invites the reader to follow the protagonist Stephen Dedalus, a son of Irish middle-class parents of small means, from his younger years as a student at Jesuit colleges to his university years in Dublin. It describes his family relationships, his educational years, his career choice, his romantic and other fancies during adolescence, and his road towards increased independence and maturity. Stephen is portrayed as a virtuous young man who sets an example to his fellow students, which is why he is offered to join the Jesuit order to become a priest. Yet he secretly visits prostitutes as a 16-year-old, and for this lecherous behaviour he pays dearly with religious agony. Stephen indeed experiences a crisis, and he forces himself to go to confession to be forgiven his sins; he subsequently leads a life of religious obedience. However, the novel ends with Stephen having decided to leave both the church and Ireland, in search for an independent life and exploration of his artistic aspirations.

## Childhood years

Buckley finds that *A Portrait* is an exemplary *Bildungsroman* in its depiction of a boy's childhood. He maintains that Joyce was of the opinion "... that the child was father of the man, that the formative early years forever set the pattern of the personality" (Buckley, 231). Consequently, Joyce portrays Stephen's childhood experiences in great detail as they form the basis of the personality of the young adult man he is when the novel ends. Joyce highlights the fact that Stephen is marked by certain episodes at Clongowes (a college), for instance when he is bullied by an older boy. There is also the incident when Stephen accidentally breaks his glasses and is unjustly punished for it by the prefect of studies, Father Dolan:

A hot burning stinging tingling blow like the loud crack of a broken stick made his trembling hand crumple together like a leaf in the fire: and at the sound and the pain scalding tears were driven into his eyes. His whole body was shaking with fright, his arm was snaking and his crumpled burning livid hand shook like a loose leaf in the air. A cry sprang to his lips, a prayer to be let off. But though the tears scalded his eyes and his limbs quivered with pain and fright he held back the hot tears and the cry that scalded his throat (*AP*, 50-51)

The reader undoubtedly experiences Stephen's agony, both the physical and psychic pain he experiences during the beating; although he desperately wants to cry, he holds back his tears in front of his fellow classmates and the priest, his tormentor. The reader is early on informed that Stephen is a sensitive child, that "he was sick in his heart" because he longs for his home and especially for his mother (*AP*, 12).

Yet Stephen is also a child of action. He feels that he has been unjustly punished by the prefect of studies because he broke his glasses by accident. Joyce repeatedly emphasizes that it was "cruel" and "unfair", in Stephen's opinion, to be treated in such a cold-hearted manner by a priest, who seemingly acted with the sole intention to cause little Stephen pain: "... he had steadied the hand first with his firm soft fingers and that was to hit it better and louder" (*AP*, 52). Encouraged by his classmates, Stephen decides to go the rector: "Yes, he would do what the fellows had told him. He would go up and tell the rector that he had been wrongly punished" (*AP*, 53). Although Stephen hesitates to go, he does so, and it must be considered a personal victory for him when the rector acknowledges that the prefect has made a mistake: "... I excuse you from your lessons for a few days ... and I shall speak to Father Dolan myself" (*AP*, 58). Afterwards Stephen is looked upon with admiration from his classmates for his courage and determination. The fact that Stephen obtains redress has a positive effect on his self-esteem: "He was happy and free ..." (*AP*, 59). Stephen rightly feels proud of himself for having obtained social justice by manipulating rigid hierarchical structures. In agreement

with Labovitz's distinction between the male and the female *Bildungsroman*, *A Portrait* here deals with the issue of social inequality.

As previously mentioned, Buckley finds that *A Portrait*, as a novel of development, portrays childhood in a very successful manner. Nevertheless, to my mind, whether his first requirement of "[a] child of some sensibility" who is not free to express himself, is fulfilled or not is debatable (17). Granted, it is understood that Stephen is an emotional child, and the fact that he enjoys writing essays and excels in it is an indication of his artistic endowment. However, that he feels unable to express his artistic talents is more hinted at than clearly stated. On the one hand, there are scholastic constraints in the Jesuit colleges; on one occasion Stephen is even accused of having expressed heretic beliefs in one of his essays, and his sensitive nature makes him feel guilt and shame: "He was conscious of failure and of detection..." (*AP*, 80). On the other hand, he is an ardent writer of poetry and thus has the opportunity to express his imagination freely.

In my opinion *A Portrait* rather depicts Stephen's sensitivity in order for the reader to understand that he is a special child. Early in life Stephen realizes that he is not like other children: "The noise of children at play annoyed him and their silly voices made him feel ... that he was different from others. He did not want to play" (*AP*, 65). The young Stephen chooses to devote his time to brooding about things and his future to playing with peers; he prefers to concentrate on his internal world rather than the external one. Consequently, according to J. I. M Stewart, "... we are locked up firmly inside Stephen's head; and there are times when we feel like shouting to be let out" (Schutte, 17). In agreement with Stewart, Buckley claims that *A Portrait* is more "narrowly focused" than the typical male *Bildungsroman* (Buckley, 234). Buckley further observes that Stephen's absorption in himself and his "difference from others" renders *A Portrait* more subjective than other novels in the genre (*ibid*).

It seems as if Stephen cannot grow up fast enough and leave his childhood behind him: "The hour when he too would take part in the life of that world seemed drawing near and in secret he began to make ready for the great part which he felt awaited him, the nature of which he only dimly apprehended" (*AP*, 62-63). The greatness and mystery of adulthood excites Stephen and he feels eager to embark on his road towards discovery of self and the world, like the typical male hero. Besides being an ambitious child, it is worth noting that Stephen does not come across as an optimistic one: "... his mood of embittered silence did not leave him" (*AP*, 67). Quite the contrary, the reader is provided with an image of a serious child who is prone to melancholy, a child who prefers his own company.

*A Portrait*, then, follows the typical pattern of the male *Bildungsroman* in its depiction of a sensible child who has artistic endowment and ambitions. However, it deviates in its predominant focus on Stephen's inner world, his broodings and reveries, at the expense of the 'objectivity' of the outer world. Moreover, it is questionable whether the requirement is fulfilled in *A Portrait* that the male hero should experience that he cannot express his artistic talents freely. Granted, there are scholarly constraints, yet Stephen has the possibility to express his imagination freely in his spare time.

### **Relationship to family and friends**

Regarding family relationships, it is noteworthy that Stephen seems to feel alienated from his family: "He felt that he was hardly of one blood with them but stood to them rather in the mystical kinship of fosterage, fosterchild and fosterbrother" (*AP*, 100). He feels like an outsider who he does not fit in. More often than not Stephen chooses solitude before his family's company. According to Buckley, a typical feature of the *Bildungsroman* is that the male hero is supposed to seek a substitute parent due to a symbolic or actual loss of his real father. Moreover, the young man's relationship with his father is strained because of diverging interests between father and son. In *A Portrait* this latter requirement is fulfilled, but not the former since Stephen's father remains an important presence in his life.

Stephen's father seems to be a sensitive man and he cries openly on a few occasions; hence like father like son. Moreover, Mr Dedalus is a rather unconventional man in his childrearing habits, as is made explicit in his statement: "I don't believe in playing the stern father. I don't believe a son should be afraid of his father" (*AP*, 93). Thus, Buckley's requirement that the young man is fatherless in a real or metaphorical sense is not fulfilled in *A Portrait*. Stephen's father is very much alive and there is no indication that he has any intentions of disowning his son. On the contrary, he takes an interest in Stephen's education and future. However, it is true that he might not embrace his son's artistic ambitions, in concordance with Buckley's requirement, as he urges him to embark upon a juridical career.

Stephen is thus not provoked to seek a substitute parent, like the typical hero. On the whole Mr Dedalus seems to be a kind man and a good father, who is politically engaged; however, he has a rather dubious career and experiences difficulties to provide for his family. Consequently, the Dedalus family falls deeper and deeper into poverty, which affects Stephen's feelings towards his father: "He was angry ... with the change of fortune which was reshaping the world about him ..." (*AP*, 67). Stephen's life is affected by his father's diminishing means, which in turn provokes feelings of embitterment in him. In accordance

with Buckley's definition of the male *Bildungsroman*, the father-son relationship becomes strained when Stephen realizes that money matters. As in most *Bildungsromane*, money is important in *A Portrait*, and Buckley points to the fact that Stephen must resist the menace of real poverty.

According to Buckley's definition, the male hero's parents are not impressed by their son's reading preferences. Here *A Portrait* follows the *Bildungsroman* pattern in that Stephen's mother criticizes his inclination to be shaped by the literature he reads: "Mother indulgent. Said I have a queer mind and have read too much", Stephen writes in his diary (*AP*, 257). Nevertheless, like her husband, Mrs Dedalus seems to be a committed parent who is a haven of safety for the young Stephen: "He longed to be at home and lay his head on his mother's lap" (*AP*, 11). Yet Stephen has his clashes with his mother. When Stephen is an adolescent at the university, he discusses his mother with one of his friends. Mrs Dedalus wants Stephen to join the priesthood, but he refuses: "I will not serve ...", he declares to his friend (*AP*, 247). Not only does Stephen's mother object to her son's decision to reject the church, but she also dislikes his ambition to go to the university: "Yes, his mother was hostile to the idea, as he had read from her listless silence ... A dim antagonism gathered force within him and darkened his mind as a cloud against her disloyalty ..." (*AP*, 169). Stephen feels that his mother, despite her concern for his future well-being, lets him down as she does not have faith in his judgement and ability to choose for himself.

Thus, like typical parents of the *Bildungsroman* hero, Mr and Mrs Dedalus have a rather strained relationship with their adolescent son. According to Buckley, Stephen's parents are only vaguely portrayed and therefore come across as insubstantial characters, in contrast to the description of other "full-bodied" parental figures in the genre (231). I agree with Buckley that, since Stephen's parents are not described at all as far as their looks is concerned, they become vague characters. However, to my mind the reader does get a picture, although not a very clear one, of what Stephen's parents are like.

Buckley characterises Stephen as "self-absorbed", as preoccupied with himself (234). It follows, then, that *A Portrait* deviates from the typical *Bildungsroman* pattern in that Stephen finds his inner world, his thoughts and feelings, more interesting than the outer world, the people that occupy it and occurring events. Buckley maintains that "... Stephen's impressions, ideas, and reveries ... dominate the entire novel; physical events count for less than images, and episodes crystallize into moments of vision" (235). On the whole I agree with Buckley, however, Joyce makes references to certain external events, such as the significant historical moment of the politician Parnell's death, which is discussed at Christmas

dinner in the Dedalus' home. Being a sensitive child, what affects Stephen the most is his father's emotional reaction: "Stephen, raising his terrorstricken face, saw that his father's eyes were full of tears" (*AP*, 39). Yet Stephen probably remembers the heated political discussions as he is old enough to join the adults for dinner.

In a recent article, "'Time Drops in Decay': *A Portrait of the Artist* in History (ii), Chapter 2" (2008), which is part of a larger study on Joyce's novel, Andrew Gibson argues that "Joyce is completely aware of the degree to which Stephen's development is about much more than Stephen himself" (697). *A Portrait* is not only about the growth of Joyce's fictional hero, but through his 'alter ego' Stephen, Joyce is intentionally informing the reader of his own intellectual development in a colonial context. Gibson thus, like Boes, emphasizes the importance of contemporary Irish history in *A Portrait*. Focusing on Joyce's main character, Gibson claims that "... as he enters adolescence, two increasingly powerful forces drive Stephen – intellect on the one hand and sexuality on the other" (706). The two primary motivators of Stephen's adolescent years, sexuality and intellect, bring him into conflict with Irish Catholicism and eventually triggers him to leave his home country.<sup>1</sup>

As previously mentioned, Joyce does refer to historical/political events, and Stephen's discussions with his friends about (aesthetic) philosophy, religion, politics, education and nationalism are quite thoroughly related in *A Portrait* (curiously, their conversations are commonly interspersed with Latin phrases). As noted by Gibson, in his novel Joyce wants to inform the reader of his own intellectual formation by portraying the development of his young hero as "a colonial Irish subject" (698). Stephen feels that he cannot develop his artistic ambitions freely within the context of religious constraints of the church and social/

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<sup>1</sup> Boes discusses *A Portrait* as a *Bildungsroman* and observes that the novel is contradictory in its dynamics: "... at times it moves forward by leaps and bounds ... at others it seems to merely spin around in circles ..." (767).

On the one hand, there are abrupt temporal shifts as certain periods of Stephen's life are left out, on the other, new events seem to be similar to previously related ones. The contradicting, dynamic narrative form of *A Portrait* is seen as analogous to the conflicting historical context of Ireland at the time. Boes points to an interesting phenomenon regarding Stephen's growth, which parallels the narrative structure of the novel, that "Stephen oscillates back and forth between those influences that urge him to move forward in life and those which encourage him to linger and thus see his identity as essentially predetermined by the past" (771). Stephen is constantly moving from one environment to another; from the Jesuit colleges and the university, which have a positive influence on his development, to the Dedalus' home and the downtown brothels, which provoke him to halt and reflect upon who he is, to perceive his identity as predominantly shaped in advance by past influences. According to Boes, *A Portrait* breaks with the conventional teleological structure of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, which ends in a moment of insight as the hero reaches maturity.

intellectual constraints of Ireland, which is why he leaves both. Joyce thus has his protagonist follow in his footsteps as Stephen eventually leaves his home country, affected by its tumultuous political situation.

Described by Buckley as a *Bildungsroman* with a narrow focus, that is, predominantly on Stephen's internal world rather than the external one, it follows that Stephen's fellow students are not described by their looks but by their manners, mainly verbal (as is true of Mr and Mrs Dedalus). Stephen has a reputation of an exemplary adolescent among his fellow students: "... Dedalus is a model youth. He doesn't smoke and he doesn't go to bazaars and he doesn't flirt and he doesn't damn anything or damn all" (*AP*, 77). Stephen is thus looked up to by his friends. It could be argued that Stephen does not feel a need to find a mentor in his life since he acts as a model himself to his fellow students.

*A Portrait*, then, deviates from the typical male *Bildungsroman* pattern in its vague depiction of Stephen's family and friends. The narrative effect is that the characters in question come across as flat rather than round. Moreover, Stephen is not provoked so seek a substitute parent or a mentor, like the typical male hero, which is another atypical feature of *A Portrait* compared to other novels in the genre. *A Portrait*, however, follows the typical pattern of the traditional *Bildungsroman* in that Stephen has a strained relationship with his parents and seems to feel alienated from them. An interesting observation made by Gibson is that Stephen's development not only echoes Joyce's own intellectual formation, but also the historical contemporary situation of Ireland.

### **Education/career**

According to Buckley, *A Portrait* does not follow the pattern of the typical male *Bildungsroman* in that formal education is given a great deal of space in the novel: "... Joyce associates the main events of Stephen's life with his schooling" (232). Stephen's experiences during his years at the Jesuit boarding schools and his university years are considered to be the climaxes of his life. Thus, Stephen is shaped by his formal schooling. He experiences difficulties learning mathematics and geography: "... the sum was too hard and he felt confused" (*AP*, 10), [and] "... he could not learn the names of places in America" (*AP*, 14), which probably has a negative effect on his self-esteem. Yet he has acquired the reputation of an essay-writer who is awarded money for his work, which must be considered an ego boost. Moreover, Stephen's teachers, the Jesuit priests, affect the formation of his moral character by teaching him right from wrong: "... it was they who had taught him Christian doctrine and

urged him to live a good life and, when he had fallen into grievous sin, it was they who had led him back to grace” (*AP*, 160).

According to Buckley’s definition, the young man typically leaves home for an independent life in the city due to inadequate formal education; however, this does not happen in *A Portrait*. Nor is Stephen motivated to search for an independent life due to parental loss. Rather Stephen moves to Dublin with his family while he is still a boy, and he continues to live with them when he studies at the university. In fact, Stephen’s independent life begins when he leaves Ireland and goes abroad, by which the novel ends. In contrast to formal schooling, “...the freer ‘education’ by experience of work or play, travel, nature, adolescent romance, and imaginative reading receives far less emphasis than in most *Bildungsromane*” [sic] (Buckley, 232). Atypically then, learning by leisure time and work experiences is by comparison devoted little space in the novel. However, it could be argued that Stephen learns by romantic love as will be obvious in the discussion that follows below.

Thus, *A Portrait* differs somewhat from the typical male *Bildungsroman* in that the primary focus is on formal education at the expense of informal education, as Joyce finds formal schooling significant to Stephen’s character building. The fact that Stephen does not move to the city in search for an independent life is another atypical feature of *A Portrait* compared to other novels in the genre.

### **Sexuality and love**

Concerning the two fundamental love/sexual affairs that the typical *Bildungsroman* hero should have, *A Portrait* also differs from other novels in the genre. Buckley states that Stephen experiences both a debasing sexual encounter and an exalting love affair, as required, but they are related only superficially. Stephen’s first sexual experience with a prostitute represents his “‘lower’, fleshly love”, whereas his “‘higher’ love” is symbolised by Emma Clery, who is not even mentioned by name her full name (233). According to Buckley, “[s]exuality ... is illicit, indecent and vaguely repulsive, important only for the vividly delineated feelings of guilt it inspires in Stephen” (ibid). Sexuality indeed has a negative connotation in *A Portrait*. Stephen’s devaluing sexual rendezvous with the prostitute has serious and adverse effects on his self-image: it provokes such agony in him that he is forced to go to confession to ask for forgiveness. Like the typical male hero, Stephen is provoked to revalue his moral standards and change his immoral conduct, as required by Buckley. Consequently, Stephen decides to lead a chaste, obedient life and to follow very strict rules of his own making with the aim of mortifying his senses (i.e. to abstain from sinning). In my



opinion, Stephen's sexual debut is a developmental climax in his life as it has serious effects on his self-image.

Stephen indeed experiences a religious crisis, which is internal in nature in accordance with Buckley's definition, after his sexual encounter with the prostitute: "Against his sin, foul and secret, the whole wrath of God was aimed" (*AP*, 118). He becomes so afraid of God's punishment that he experiences mortal dread. Yet Stephen's encounter with the prostitute is also of a partly positive nature for him: "In her arms he felt that he had suddenly become strong and fearless and sure of himself" (*AP*, 103). Nevertheless this very temporary ego boost for Stephen during the sex act is rapidly replaced by an urgent need to confess his sins. At the same time the guilt and shame he experiences makes him hesitate, and he has to muster all his courage to be able to face his confessor. Afterwards, when Stephen has heard the words of absolution uttered by the priest, he feels relief and happiness: "His soul was made fair and happy once more, holy and happy" (*AP*, 149).

Ironically enough, Stephen is subsequently invited to join the Jesuit order to become a priest because of his virtuous behaviour: "Such a boy is marked off from his companions by his piety, by the good example he shows to others ... Perhaps you are the boy in this college whom God designs to call to Himself", the priest tells him (*AP*, 162). Stephen ponders the possibility of devoting his life to serving God, and he is attracted by the *power* it would yield to him. Lee T Lemon remarks "[t]he priest, in effect, has offered Stephen power, knowledge, and the possibility of a life of sinless chastity. Now, all of this is precisely what he has been searching for" (Schutte, 43). Given that Stephen has suffered in agony for his adolescent sinning and truly repented his faux pas by choosing to lead a life of purity, why does he after thoughtful consideration decide that he does not have a vocation to the priesthood?

It is likely that Stephen's first debasing sexual experience has something to do with his decision to refuse the priest's offer. However, Barbara Seward suggests that "[d]edication to art fills the place left vacant by his repudiation of the priesthood ..." (Schutte, 58). I agree with Seward that Stephen's commitment to art is actualised when he decides not to devote his life to serving God. I would moreover like to add that Stephen declines to enter the priesthood as he comes to the realization that it is predetermined that he should learn by experience, by making mistakes: "He was destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others or to learn the wisdom of others himself wandering among the snares of the world" (*AP*, 167). His journey towards self-knowledge will be lined by possibilities to commit sins, but he accepts that he might fall. Like the typical *Bildungsroman* hero, he wants to gain knowledge of himself and the world by exploring both, on his own terms.

As required of the typical male hero, Stephen's experiences romantic love in his relationship with his beloved Emma. In contrast to Stephen's parents and friends, her appearance is described in some detail at the end of the novel: "her small ripe mouth", "those dark eyes ... her long lashes" (*AP*, 228), "her frail pallor"; "[h]er eyes, dark and with a look of languor" (*AP*, 230). Significantly it is only Emma's face, especially her eyes, that is described, not her body, which reinforces the impression that it is indeed a 'higher' love Stephen is experiencing. He often thinks about Emma and he secretly expresses his feelings for her by writing love poems, which he fantasizes about showing to her but refrains from doing.

Although at first glance satisfying Buckley's requirement, it is my opinion that Stephen's relationship with Emma should be considered as unhappy love rather than a love affair. *A Portrait* thus deviates somewhat from other novels in the genre in that Stephen's experiences with Emma could be regarded as more profound than the typical male hero's love affair. She has a genuine place in his heart and his feelings for her are long-lasting: "He had written verses for her again after ten years" (*AP*, 229). Stephen idealises Emma; not only his encounter with the prostitute but also his private acts of 'sinning' (masturbation) makes him feel guilt and shame towards her: "The image of Emma appeared before him and, under her eyes, the flood of shame rushed forth anew from his heart" (*AP*, 118). The reader gets the impression that Stephen has violated her innocence and thus betrayed her: he feels guilty towards her for having wronged her. In accordance with Buckley's definition of the male hero's trajectory, Stephen's immoral behaviour provokes him to moral re-evaluation, and thus to vow in confession that he will not commit sins in the future.

Yet Emma hurts Stephen by not reciprocating his feelings. However, whether she understands what he feels for her remains an open question. On the one hand, she flirts with him openly: "She came up to his steps many times and went down to hers again ... and once or twice stood close beside him for some moments ... forgetting to go down ..." (*AP*, 70). Stephen feels exhilarated by Emma's attention, and although he has an impulse to kiss and embrace her, he does not. On the other hand, she flirts with other boys too. It seems that Emma's feelings are not as strong as Stephen's, and the fact that she does not choose him like he has chosen her makes him angry and jealous: "His anger against her found vent in coarse railing at her paramour ..." (*AP*, 228). The angry feelings Emma evokes in Stephen are directed towards her lover in whose shoes he would like to be. Thus, Stephen's higher love-experience is atypical in that it is both genuine and long-lasting.

In my opinion it is not clear whether Emma and Stephen's relationship is also of a sexual nature; if it is not then *A Portrait* does not follow the typical pattern of the male *Bildungsroman*, viz. that the hero should have an exalting sexual affair. Joyce relates one episode which hints at that possibility: "... he remembered ... her eyes, humbled and saddened by the dark shame of womanhood ... [h]er nakedness yielded to him, radiant, warm, odorous and lavishlimbed, enfolded him ..." (*AP*, 230). It could be that Stephen and Emma do make love to each other and that he takes her virginity. Support for this point of view is that Stephen repeatedly refers to Emma's innocence and acknowledges to himself that he has done her wrong; however, the reason for this could be his adolescent 'sinning'. Another possibility is that the episode related represents Stephen's sexual fantasies. According to Buckley, in *A Portrait* the young hero's "'higher' love", that is Stephen's relationship with Emma, is given less emphasis than in other male *Bildungsromane* (233). However, although Emma does not come across as a round character in the novel, to my mind she plays a significant role in young Stephen's (internal) life as his first love.

Thus *A Portrait* does not follow the typical pattern of the male *Bildungsroman* in that the two sexual experiences that the young hero should have, one debasing, the other exalting, are given only little space in the novel. Moreover, it is debatable whether Stephen has an exalting sexual affair, like the typical hero. From Joyce's portrayal of Stephen's involvement with Emma it is difficult to characterize the nature of their relationship. Nevertheless, Stephen's relationship with Emma, his 'higher' love, provokes an internal conflict in him as does his negative sexual experience with the prostitute, which is in agreement with Buckley's requirements.

### **Journey of self-exploration**

As a typical *Bildungsroman* hero who is dissatisfied with his present circumstances, Stephen is a restless spirit, which is intimated rather early in the novel: "... a strange unrest crept into his blood" (*AP*, 65); "... wakened again in him the unrest which had sent him wandering ..." (*AP*, 67). When he is but a boy he feels an urge to explore the outer world, and he sometimes walks the streets alone at night. His nightly walks are motivated by an inner drive to search for Mercedes, a fictional character about whom he fantasizes. His childhood fancies are transformed into a 'mature' longing to face this idealized character in real life: "He wanted to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld" (*AP*, 65). It could be argued that Mercedes' counterpart in the external world is his beloved Emma; the difference is that whereas he can keep his idealized image of Mercedes unspoiled in his

internal world, his image of Emma, although he at first idealizes her too, is soiled by her not reciprocating his feelings.

In accordance with Buckley's definition, Stephen's *Bildung* does begin in the city where he experiences the required debasing sexual affair. Moreover, like the typical *Bildungsroman* hero, Stephen acquires a formal education in Dublin and decides that he will pursue a career in arts: "To discover the mode of life or of art whereby your spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom", his friend echoes Stephen's own words about his aim in life when they discuss his future ambitions and decision to leave Ireland (*AP*, 255). Buckley considers the moment when Stephen decides to dedicate his life to art his developmental climax. However, that Stephen has artistic aspirations is evidenced more by what he says (theory) than by what he accomplishes (practice). I agree with Buckley; Stephen obviously enjoys expanding on aesthetic and art theory, and his friends are interested in learning his opinions on these subjects. It is obvious that he has educated himself by reading works by authors who has set the tone in their respective areas of expertise. However, to my mind, Stephen's ambitions are also evidenced by his skills at writing essays and his passion for composing poems.

Concerning *Bildung* in the form of travelling, Stephen's trajectory does not follow that of the typical male hero for whom travelling is a part of his informal education. Rather *A Portrait* ends with Stephen's decision to embark on life's journey by going abroad: "There was a lust of wandering in his feet that burned to set out for the ends of the earth. On! On!..." (*AP*, 175). As previously mentioned, Stephen seems to be in a hurry to leave his childhood behind him. Interestingly, when he is but a boy he feels grown-up and mature in the company of his drunk father and the latter's drinking companions: "His mind seemed older than theirs ... No life or youth stirred in him as it had stirred in them ... His childhood was dead or lost ..." (*AP*, 97). That Stephen feels old, and not youthful as he ought to, is an expression of his melancholic tendencies. A few years later he gives expression to quite a different state of mind: "Where was his boyhood now? ... He was alone and young and wilful and wildhearted ..." (*AP*, 176). Stephen acknowledges that he has left his childhood behind him, but he does it with a light and happy heart. At the end of the novel Stephen seems to have found peace in his life. Joyce lets Stephen conclude his diary notes with the hopeful words: "I do not fear to be alone or to be spurned for another or to leave whatever I have to leave. And I am not afraid to make a mistake, even a great mistake ..." (*AP*, 256).

Yet Buckley concludes his discussion on *A Portrait* in rather uninspiring words regarding the faith of Joyce's hero: "... Stephen as the committed aesthete has no will to change his mind or enlarge his vision, and his renewed search for the 'reality of experience'

inspires little confidence in us that he will recognize the truth when he finds it” (247). Buckley’s judgement is that Stephen’s spiritual and psychological journey is more or less predetermined; although committed to art, he is not interested in expanding his internal world at the present time, and most likely he will be incapable of doing so in the future despite continued reality-testing in the external world. I cannot fully agree with Buckley. In my opinion Stephen seems satisfied with the choices he has made to leave Ireland and the church, and to devote his life to a career as an artist: “I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call [sic] itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can ...”, he tells his friend (*AP*, 255-56).

Consequently, I have to disagree with Boes who claims that *A Portrait* breaks with the conventional narrative structure of the *Bildungsroman*, as I feel that Stephen indeed has a moment of insight about his future prospects. To my mind, Stephen seems to have reached maturity after “painful soul-searching” during adolescence (Buckley, 17). When discussing his decision not to serve God with his friend, Stephen declares: “I was someone else then ... I was not myself as I am now, as I had to become” (*AP*, 249). Having experienced and resolved his internal conflict, both of a religious and an amorous kind, Stephen seems to have found himself, his identity. He is ready to embark upon his journey towards artistic fulfilment, and to continue his quest for self-development. By way of conclusion, *A Portrait* thus ends in a characteristic *Bildungsroman* fashion with an open question about the hero’s final destiny.

Thus, *A Portrait* is a typical male *Bildungsroman* in its portrayal of a restless spirit who has reached the decision to pursue a career in the arts. Moreover, *A Portrait* follows the male *Bildungsroman* pattern in its depiction of the young hero as receiving his formal education in the city, as well as experiencing his sexual initiation there. However, unlike the typical male hero, Stephen begins his search for a life of independence only when he leaves his fatherland, by which the novel ends, and thus it could be argued that his quest is procrastinated.

## **Martha’s developmental trajectory: The latter-day heroine**

### **Plot summary: *Martha Quest***

The novel is set in Zambesia (Zimbabwe), Africa at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it ends in the wake of WW II in 1939. When the novel begins Martha is a 15-year-old girl who lives with her British parents on a colonial farm. Martha has to quit her formal schooling due to an eye-sickness, but she is eager to learn and spends most of her time reading. Martha has

two friends in the city, two Jewish boys who are bibliophiles like her, from whom she borrows books on sociology, sexuality and politics. She acquires her values and beliefs from the literature she reads, and she is not only a socialist but also an atheist. Martha has a very complicated relationship with her mother, who is a controlling and rather cold person. Martha is, in fact, ostensibly rejected by her own mother. Luckily, Martha is closer to her father with whom she sometimes has rather intimate discussions; yet he is more emotionally absent than present in her life. Martha thus has no choice but to distance herself in turn from her parents. After a few years Martha moves into the town and supports herself by working as an assistant in a law firm. Finally on her own she starts to lead a very different life; not only does she start dating men but she also spends most nights out partying. Interestingly, Martha is torn between two opposite poles of living: a serious life of social commitment and a superficial life of pleasure and dancing. Thus, two different ways of telling Martha's story run parallel throughout the novel.

### **Relationship to family and friends**

In contrast to the male *Bildungsroman* and *A Portrait*, *Martha Quest* does not begin in childhood but in adolescence, which, according to Abel et al, is characteristic of the female novel of development. Moreover, in contrast to *A Portrait*, relationships with family and friends are given a great deal of space in Lessing's novel. There are thorough, colourful descriptions of most of the characters, both their appearances and manners. It will be remembered that this was not so in *A Portrait* where most characters come across as vague and shadowlike.

Feminist critics Labovitz and Catharine R. Stimpson discuss whether Lessing intentionally set out to write a female *Bildungsroman*. According to Stimpson, "... Lessing would resist, rather than celebrate, the placing of *Children of Violence* in a tradition of a female novel of development" (Abel et al, 186). Labovitz is at first glance of the opposite opinion, claiming that Lessing "... consciously set out to write a female *Bildungsroman*" (247). It is difficult to judge whether Labovitz and Stimpson disagree or not. Both critics mention a note Lessing appended to the fifth and last volume of her series, in which she refers to it as a *Bildungsroman*: "This book is what the Germans call a *Bildungsroman*. We don't have a word for it. This kind of novel has been out of fashion for some time. This does not mean that there is anything wrong with this kind of novel" (qt. in Labovitz, p. 247). However, to my mind, it is not clear whether Labovitz means that Lessing intended to write just one *Bildungsroman* (the last volume), or whether she means that her whole series is to be regarded

as such. In my opinion *Martha Quest*, as well as the *Children of Violence* series, is a *Bildungsroman* in that it describes the development of a female protagonist.

In her essay "Doris Lessing and the Parables of Growth", Stimpson argues further that the beginning of Martha's quest is neither simple nor straightforward, which is characteristic of novels in the female *Bildungsroman* genre. Stimpson maintains that because Martha "... thinks too much in a culture that dislikes thought, she must repress herself. To do that, she drinks too much, and plays too hard" (Abel et al, 187). Living in a segregated patriarchal society in which free thought is not appreciated, Martha must quell her awareness of racial and gender inequalities by trying to escape reality. Consequently, Martha experiences what Halberstam states in her introductory quote, the typical repression and punishment of the adolescent girl. Yet Martha has a cognitive tool that aids her process of self-discovery, "the Watcher", which protects her against self-deception; this cognitive capacity is thus a positive aspect of her personality (Abel et al, 196). However, the Watcher also has a negative side, self-hatred, which is the result of Martha's knowing that Mr and Mrs Quest wanted a son instead; the origins of the Watcher stems in part from Martha's knowledge that she was unwanted.

Martha's parents indeed make her feel unwanted in their covert preference for another son: "Since her earliest years Martha had been offered the information that she was unwanted in the first place ..." (*MQ*, 310). It is interesting to note that Martha, like the typical male hero, has a strained relationship to her parents. When Martha eventually decides to leave the farm for an independent life in the city, as Buckley's hero typically does, she is driven by an urgent motive of self-preservation: "... she must leave her parents who destroyed her ..." (*MQ*, 90). Martha's parents force her to escape them not only by making her feel unable to express her intellect and imagination freely, which she has in common with her male counterpart; they also suffocate her by making her feel that she was born in the 'wrong' gender. Here Lessing focuses on the gender perspective by highlighting the fact that as a young woman in her society Martha is not given the same prerequisites in life as her brother and other young men.

As a typical female *Bildungsroman*, the theme of family relationships is given great emphasis in Lessing's novel. Labovitz argues that Martha experiences her "initial failure" within her own family: her parental relationships are not resolved in a successful way (147). Martha's relationship with her mother is especially problematic. Martha perceives her mother as an enemy; she is always on guard against her, ready to go to attack: "... a fatal demon always took possession of her, so that at the slightest remark from her mother she was

impelled to take it up, examine it, and hand it back, like a challenge ...” (*MQ*, 8). Consequently mother and daughter fight a great deal; it almost becomes a part of daily routine. The underlying hostility which characterises the mother-daughter relationship takes its toll on Martha; after a fight with her mother over money Lessing remarks: “Martha was exhausted with the violence of what she felt ...” (*MQ*, 86). It seems no one can stir up as negative emotions in Martha as her own mother. Here a parallel can be drawn to the traditional *Bildungsroman* in which a characteristic feature is failure of familial relationships.

A typical feature of the female *Bildungsroman*, according to Labovitz, is shedding. Closely related to the protagonist’s growth process, shedding entails ridding oneself of negative feelings, such as self-hatred, and other burdens, for instance familial bonds. Labovitz claims that Martha’s infectious relationship with her mother is of utmost significance to her journey of self-discovery: “An important aspect of Martha’s quest is to liberate herself from the inhibiting hold of [the] unsatisfactory mother-daughter relationship in order to become a totally realized human being” (148). Martha uses two potent weapons in her strife to break free from her mother’s controlling interference: by acknowledging her sexuality and by escaping to the city toward independence, Martha sheds herself of inhibiting maternal bonds.

When the novel begins the 15-year-old Martha is reluctantly listening to her mother’s discussion with her friend Mrs Van Rensberg about marriage: “That’s right ... A man will never marry a girl he does not respect”, her mother says in agreement to her friend’s previous statement (*MQ*, 9). Martha reacts with anger at their, to her mind, preposterous utterances and calls the two women disgusting. Sprague and Tiger observe that “*Martha Quest* (1952) opens with the resentful fifteen-year-old heroine pitted against two mother figures, fearful that she will be doomed to repeat the ‘dull staple’ of their lives ...” (6). Serving as deterring examples, it is all too obvious that the not-so-lovable Mrs Quest and her uneducated friend are not equipped to function as role models to the young Martha: “She would *not* be like Mrs Van Rensberg, a fat and earthy housekeeping woman; she would *not* be bitter and nagging and dissatisfied like her mother. But then, who was she to be like?” (*MQ*, 14). Martha, desperately craving for representative female figures to model herself on in typical adolescent identity confusion, is forced to seek her role models elsewhere, i.e. in the city, as she refuses to identify with the women in her immediate vicinity.

Yet Martha feelings towards the city must be described as ambivalent: in the beginning she eagerly enjoys the pleasures it offers, however, she rather quickly gets tired of this superficial life and looks forward to her marriage as the beginning of a new life. Nevertheless I would like to claim that Martha’s move to the city is a developmental climax in her life.



“She felt as if a phase of her life had ended, and that now a new one should begin...” (*MQ*, 101). When Martha leaves her parent’s farm she also leaves her childhood behind her, and a new developmental phase of her life begins. That Martha perceives of her move to the city toward independence as a new beginning is evident in the following statement: “She was a new person, and an extraordinary, magnificent, an altogether *new* life was beginning” (*MQ*, 102). Martha has high expectations of the city, feeling excited at the prospect of ridding herself of her parents’, and in particular her mother’s, influence on her life.

It is noteworthy that *Martha Quest* does not represent the typical trajectory of the female protagonist in that Martha has the option to leave home for an independent life in the city, and, importantly, to focus on herself and her development. In this respect the novel is comparable to, and has more in common with, its male counterpart. Martha is thus granted more freedom for adventure and exploration than the typical female heroine. To Martha independence is crucial since she feels that her parents will destroy her if she continues to stay on the farm. The city equals independence for her, as it does for the typical male hero. In contrast, *A Portrait* deviates from the pattern of the male *Bildungsroman* in this respect. Stephen does move to the city, however, when he is still but a child (accompanied by his family). Stephen’s search for independence begins only when he leaves both his home and his country, and by then he is already a young man. Thus in *A Portrait* the city has a different function for the protagonist compared to other novels in the traditional *Bildungsroman* genre, as it does not equal independence for the male hero.

Nevertheless, when Martha has left home for the city her mother still interferes with her ‘boyfriend concerns’, leaving Martha as usual with a bad premonition: “She knew that because of her mother’s interference something unpleasant would happen, because it always did” (*MQ*, 158). Behaving as a typical controlling mother, Mrs Quest meddles into Martha’s affairs which she perceives as her own. Paradoxically, although she has ostensibly rejected her daughter, she is unwilling to let her go. Mrs Quest’s repudiation, however, provokes Martha to find adequate female role models outside her home, as discussed above.

Consequently, in the city Martha finds a potential role model in her landlady Mrs Gunn. This kind, caring woman instructively tells Martha how she should treat men: “... you must keep men in their place, so they know from the start they’re not getting something for nothing” (*MQ*, 118). This lesson in men is taught in a more direct manner than is characteristic of her mother who always tries to laugh off issues concerning sex. Yet, to my mind, Mrs Gunn rather has the function of a substitute mother to Martha, which is evidenced in her statement: “If you want anything, just come to me ... think of me like a mother” (*ibid*).

Mrs Gunn shows maternal concern for Martha in a way she is not used to, and she accepts her landlady's interference in her life far better than her own mother's. In contrast to the typical female heroine, Martha finds herself a substitute mother. It should be noted though, that it is not said in so many words that Martha feels provoked to search for one. However, what she actively searches for are role models.

Luckily, Martha's relationship with her father, Alfred Quest, is less difficult, although he is a sickly man who is caught up in the Great War in which he participated. He spends most of his time in reveries of the war and dislikes being disturbed. It is evident that Martha tries to get her father's attention and approval, but that she more often than not fails: "... to *meet* her father was rather like trying to attract the attention of an irritable spectre" (*MQ*, 69). Feeling ignored, she refers to him as a ghost, as someone who is present but simultaneously absent. The antagonistic home atmosphere upsets Martha's father who gets tired of his two fighting women: "... I simply cannot stand this damned fight, fight, fight", he exclaims when both of them plead to him for help (*MQ*, 71). Martha is disappointed in her father who fails to support her in her maternal conflicts, and the same holds true for Mrs Quest: "Both felt that he let them down ... " (*MQ*, 27). Granted it is a domestic triangle and Mr Quest is caught in a conflict of loyalty between his two women; they both want his support, but he seems unwilling to choose sides.

Although Mr Quest comes across as a rather absent father figure, it is evident that he fills a parental function for the adolescent Martha: "... these two, away from Mrs Quest, were quite easy together" (*MQ*, 74). They sometimes share a private intimacy, discussing different matters. However, when Martha wants to talk about her mother Mr Quest becomes irritated: "What do you want me to do?", he exclaims expressing his frustration of being forever caught in between his two womenfolk (*MQ*, 75). Given Martha's disappointment in her father's inability to be present in her life, I would like to argue that she feels compelled to seek a substitute father figure. Here, again, *Martha Quest* follows the pattern of the traditional *Bildungsroman*.

Martha has a friendship which is very valuable to her, with two Jewish boys, Joss and Solly Cohen. Labovitz refers to them as Martha's "earliest mentors" (155). Here *Martha Quest* deviates from the pattern of the typical female *Bildungsroman* in that Martha has acquired mentors who guide her, which she has in common with the male hero. Providing her with books on psychology, philosophy, sexuality, sociology, politics and religion, they encourage and promote her self-education. Yet Martha's relationship with these two intellectuals is anything but easy and conflict free, for several reasons. One is her mother's

anti-Semite beliefs: “But there was always an uneasiness about this friendship, because of Mrs Quest ...” (*MQ*, 13). Her mother dislikes not only that Martha spends time with Jews, but also that she reads literature of their choosing.

Moreover, Martha has ambivalent feelings towards the Cohen boys. On the one hand, she craves for literature to read which increases her self-knowledge, and she enjoys their company: “... those occasions when she could visit them at the store was the happiest of her life” (*ibid*). On the other hand, when they meet on a threesome the atmosphere is strained: “Conversation was difficult ... it was [the] three of them together that set up the jarring currents” (*MQ*, 55). Martha indeed has her clashes with them. When she finds out from her friend Marnie that Joss has amorous feelings for her, she breaks off her friendship with them. However, after a while she misses them and decides to renew her friendship with them because: “... there was no one else who could help her. She wanted them to tell her what she must read” (*MQ*, 37). As Martha in the Cohen brothers has found valuable mentors to guide her, she wants to be on strictly friendly terms with them.

It is noteworthy that Martha has found *male* mentors, which she thus has in common with Buckley’s hero. I would like to argue, however, that Joss stands out as her primary mentor. Especially when Martha is troubled and at a loss of what to do, she desires his opinion and advice: “... if only she could speak to Joss, he would know at once what it was she ought to do!” (*MQ*, 262). Martha, then, does not follow the traditionally expected female course of development since she finds a mentor and, importantly, a male one (who is not her husband). What Martha admires most in this young man is his self-assurance and capacity to know what he wants and how to get it. That she has faith in his guidance is evidenced by her taking his advice seriously: “Why don’t you be a brave girl and get into town, and learn a thing or two?”, he provokingly asks her (*MQ*, 85). Following his advice, Martha moves to the city and starts earning her own living.

Interestingly, Martha desires Joss’s support and guidance, not her own father’s who at times does act as a parental figure, probably because he is more emotionally absent than present in her life. One difference between the two men, which is important to Martha, is that Joss *sees* her in a way her father does not: “... it seemed to her, just then, that Joss was the only person she had ever known who knew exactly how she felt, with whom she might behave as she liked – *and get away with it ...*” (*MQ*, 145). It could moreover be argued that Martha in Joss has found a father figure who not only accepts her the way she is, but also gives her the mental and emotional guidance she so badly needs. In this respect *Martha Quest*

is again comparable to the male *Bildungsroman* in that the protagonist finds a substitute father.

Relationship to friends is a common theme of the female *Bildungsroman*. Importantly, Martha does not have many friends while still living at the farm. Marnie Van Rensberg, the daughter of her mother's friend, is the only female friend she has. Yet their relationship must be described as an 'atypical' friendship between adolescent girls. When Marnie comes to visit Martha at the farm, the atmosphere between them is awkward, almost hostile: "At the phrase 'get herself a man', Martha flushed, and looked away, frowning. Marnie glanced doubtfully at her, and met at glance of such scorn that she blushed in her turn ..." (*MQ*, 16). The reason for this awkwardness must be attributed to Martha's unwillingness to be intimate with Marnie, whom she feels has different values in life. Later, when they both have moved into the city, they talk about 'old times' when they meet. Yet, although they have known each other since childhood and seem equally unfit to adjust themselves to city life, there seems to be an insurmountable distance between them: "But they liked each other; while they made small talk, their eyes expressed regret - for what? That they could not be friends?" (*MQ*, 266).

Hence following the typical female *Bildungsroman* pattern, Lessing deals at length with her protagonist's relationships to her parents and friends. In contrast to Labovitz' definition of the female *Bildungsroman*, Martha has acquired a mentor, and notably a male one, which she has in common with the protagonist of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. This is interesting to note especially since Stephen does not have a mentor in his life. Another atypical feature of *Martha Quest* is that Martha finds a substitute father in her friend and mentor Joss. Moreover, in my opinion, an atypical feature of *Martha Quest* is that the protagonist, apparently repudiated by her own mother, feels compelled to seek a substitute maternal figure and finds one in her landlady Mrs Gunn. Another atypical feature is that Martha has the opportunity to move into the city in search for independence, which in effect is characteristic of the male protagonist's developmental trajectory. Significantly, by rendering the female protagonist a substitute father figure, a male mentor and the possibility of an independent life in the city, *Martha Quest* in these aspects follows the pattern of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, which notably *A Portrait* does not.

### **Role models**

According to Felski, "[t]he feminist *Bildungsroman* ... narrates a story of development toward coherent selfhood through a process of moving into a wider community" (140). In this regard *Martha Quest* follows the typical pattern of other novels in the genre. In search for

increased self-knowledge, Martha moves from a rather isolated farm life in the countryside to the larger community of the city. Moreover, Felski states that “[w]omen’s relationship to society is ... mediated by a female community ...” (141). It could be argued that Martha’s colleagues in the office, as a female community in which she participates as a co-worker, mediate her integration into society. It could also be claimed that they have the function of role models to her, which promotes her search for selfhood as this quest is facilitated in the company of other women.

Martha admires her colleagues as they have a qualification she lacks, which makes her feel incompetent and out-of-place when she first starts working in the office: “... all the women in the office seemed so immeasurably above her, in their self-assurance and skill ...” (*MQ*, 121). It is obvious that Martha looks up to these women and that she is spurred to becoming as qualified as they are; she is thus motivated to start studying in order to get a certificate. Lessing writes, “[s]he intended, in fact, to emulate the skilled ...” (123). The largely positive picture Martha has of her co-workers, then, is in sharp contrast to her image of her mother and Mrs Van Rensberg whom she finds only lacking. Her boss Mr Cohen’s personal secretary, Mrs Buss, seems especially enviable to Martha, as she has “... visions of herself in Mrs Buss’s place ...” (*MQ*, 124). At that moment anyway, Martha has the ambition to replace her.

Yet the office women offer ambivalent role models to Martha as her aim is to become something more than ‘just’ a secretary. Martha dreams about becoming a freelance writer or journalist. While she admires these women, she allows herself to have more potential than they do. Mr Cohen’s negative statement about his female employers most probably influences Martha’s attitude towards them: “You don’t want to get like these girls here ... just waiting till their boy friends fetch them at half past four, and out all night and then so tired next day they just sit yawning” (*MQ*, 123). Although Martha perceives herself as more ambitious than her female colleagues, she nevertheless comes to follow their example in this respect too, waiting for her boyfriends to pick her up from work and then going dancing all night.

Nevertheless, to my mind, Martha’s colleagues have the function of *temporary* role models, in that they set a professional example to her which she aspires to follow (i.e. in a restricted sense). Theoretically, the women in the office *could* serve as female figures whom Martha *could* identify with. However, Martha’s ambivalence towards her colleagues speaks against such an assumption; she does not genuinely look up to them as feels herself capable of more than simply having a career as a secretary. Incidentally Martha establishes contact with another group of women who have the potential function of role models to her, viz. the

women in the Left Book Club who have similar social values as she has. Following the advice of her friend Joss, Martha attends a gathering with this mixed-sex leftist discussion group. Although Martha finds these women intelligent, she is highly critical of them: "... I will *not* be like this ...” (*MQ*, 151), she silently repeats to herself. As Martha has an altogether negative impression of the women, they do not represent a female community available to her: she does not fit in, nor does she want to.

According to Labovitz, "... the female heroine all too often suffers from a paucity of models to follow; thereby again contributing to a definition of the female *Bildungsroman*" (181). The absence of role models, then, is a characteristic feature of the female novel of development. Felski, on the other hand, argues that the feminist *Bildungsroman* portrays the heroine's self-development as "a process of moving into a wider community" (140). In agreement with Felski's argument, as Martha leaves her farm for the city, she does find a female community in her colleagues at the office. Equally, in accordance with Labovitz argument, Martha is unable to find adequate role models within this wider community of the city, and consequently it could be claimed that *Martha Quest* follows the typical female *Bildungsroman* pattern. Martha chooses the alternative route for the heroine, which is to pursue her quest for self-knowledge in solitude. *Martha Quest*, then, ends with the crucial question "who was she to be like?" unanswered (*MQ*, 14).

Stimpson claims that Lessing emphasizes the human need for development (especially of consciousness) and thus fears repetition, that is, a reproduction of social and mental conditions. For instance, Martha repudiates her own mother as a role model in order to promote her spiritual and social growth process. Leaving Martha thus with a lack of an adequate female figure to model herself on, Lessing nevertheless avoids a repetition of the social pattern of imitation. Having the power of a natural law, the existence of growth is undeniable. However, the individual has the possibility to choose whether to obey the law of development or not: "... growth has the force of natural law. It transcends individual choice. We may choose to obey or neglect that law, to dwell within its imperatives or to deny them, but we cannot decide whether or not it exists" (Abel et al, 191). Obviously, the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* makes the choice to obey it. Martha, for instance, chooses to develop by rejecting her mother as a role model. As the growth of the human mind is of such importance to Lessing, a considerable part of her *Children of Violence* series is devoted to Martha's developmental process, a typical feature of the *Bildungsroman*.

## Education/career

A characteristic feature of the female *Bildungsroman*, according to Labovitz, is that the heroine often has no choice but to educate herself. In the traditional *Bildungsroman*, however, formal education is typically a part of the young hero's *Bildung*. Here *Martha Quest* deviates from the typical female *Bildungsroman* pattern in that Martha is given the opportunity of formal schooling: "Early in her sixteenth year, Martha was expected to pass the matric ..." (*MQ*, 28). However, she does not pass her examination, ostensibly hindered by eyestrain. In a conversation she has with the Cohen boys she is asked: "... what's all this about not going to university?" (*MQ*, 55). Yet Martha is not granted the same educational possibilities as her brother who is sent to a good school. Lessing writes, however, "... nothing would induce her to go to a snob school, even if her eyes did get better" (35). Martha's negative attitude could be attributable to jealousy of her brother. It is also possible that she is angry at the gender inequalities she is already aware of as a 16-year-old. Either or, as Martha spends most of her spare time reading, it is likely that she feels a dislike towards formal education.

According to Labovitz, Martha must "... seek her education outside the family fold where she is met only with strife, pain, and discouragement" (155). As she comes into conflict with her parents who do not encourage her reading, Martha makes sure she is provided with literature from another reliable source, viz. her mentors the Cohen brothers. Nevertheless she is discouraged by her reading too as she comes to learn that her parents' influence on her is immutable, that her life is predetermined and thus no change is possible: "Martha, in violent opposition to her parents, was continually being informed that their influence on her was unalterable, and that it was much too late to change herself" (*MQ*, 13). Martha thus has ambivalent feelings towards self-education: on the one hand, she desperately wants to increase her self-knowledge; on the other hand, she becomes depressed and powerless when she does not find the 'right' answers.

Labovitz maintains that given her unorthodox education, Martha in fact has more in common with the female heroine of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who generally was excluded from formal schooling. Labovitz claims further that "... a whole new arena of education opens up with this twentieth century female heroine of the *Bildungsroman* ..." (157). Lessing is seen as groundbreaking in that she introduces the concept of power, and the lack thereof, in the female *Bildungsroman*. In *Martha Quest* the message comes across that self-education means responsibility; yet feelings of powerlessness is what most burdens the female heroine.

On the other hand, Martha's decision to educate herself also has beneficial effects on her self-development. According to Labovitz, reading has equipped Martha with "a potent

weapon inside”, a power to engage in passionate debates with her mentors Joss and Solly and at the same time to remain an impartial observer of her own mind (158). Jean Pickering refers to this “detached observer” (*MQ*, 12), which Martha developed as an adolescent mainly through self-studies, in her article “Martha Quest and ‘The Anguish of Feminine Fragmentation’”: “This judging observer, critical of herself as well as others, is the one constant factor in her personality ...” (Pickering, 96). Martha’s comprehensive reading has thus provided her with an ability to observe herself critically yet objectively, which remains a permanent characteristic of her personality. Moreover, literature is not only Martha’s means towards independence from her parents, but also has a “therapeutic and religious function” for her (Labovitz, 161). When Martha experiences crises in her life she turns to reading for answers and comfort.

Needless to say, as a young woman of the 1930’s, Martha is subjected to the gender constraints of her society. Yet Martha is an ambitious young woman who attempts to break societal gender boundaries, to challenge her assigned female role. Martha therefore applies for a job at the *Zambesia News*, the local newspaper. At the interview she is informed that she could indeed be granted a position, however, there are restrictions: “... she could certainly have a job with the woman’s page” (*MQ*, 273). Martha indignantly replies: “The *woman’s* page!” (ibid). Martha reacts to the obvious gender limitations inherent in the offer. It is noteworthy that in *A Portrait* Stephen is offered a position as a priest, a position which at the time would have been impossible for a woman to obtain.

Regarding career plans, which is a characteristic theme of the male and female *Bildungsroman* alike, it seems Martha is easily discouraged by setbacks. Upon deciding to become a writer on the assumption that “[i]f others, then why not herself?”, she eagerly starts producing various texts (*MQ*, 274). Yet when one article is refused she seems to resign: “... the rejection slip dismayed Martha so much that she let the idea of being a freelance writer slip away” (*MQ*, 275). One similarity between Martha and Stephen as far as career is concerned, is that they both have artistic aspirations. However, whereas Martha is uncertain and wavering in her choice of a career, like a typical adolescent, Stephen seems to have his mind set on becoming an author rather early in life. Another interesting similarity, as concerns self-education, is the fact that it is both protagonists’ mothers who show overt disapproval of their reading habits. Mrs Quest, quite upset, tells her daughter: “You are ruining your whole life, and you won’t take my advice” (*MQ*, 30). The rebellious Martha reads not only with the aim of gaining self-knowledge, but also with the purpose of defying her controlling mother.



On the other hand, *Martha Quest* follows the pattern of the typical female *Bildungsroman* in its emphasis on issues related to career and marriage. As a woman concerned with keeping up appearances in society, it is important to Mrs Quest that Martha finds herself a good man to marry: "... it's *such* a relief when you get your daughter properly married", she exclaims after Martha has wed Douglas Knowell (*MQ*, 319). At the same time Mrs Quest acknowledges that Martha has potential, and should not be content with married life only. In a discussion she has with her friend Mrs Van Rensberg, Mrs Quest emphasizes that: "... Martha was clever and would have a career" (*MQ*, 6). However, this is a statement to emphasize that her daughter is more intelligent than her friend's offspring who will "only be married"; she does not imply that she wishes Martha to embark on a career as a lawyer or a doctor (*ibid*). Rather it is her inclination to perceive herself and her family as 'better' than other people, although it is obvious that the Quests are far from well off.

Hence, *Martha Quest* follows the typical female *Bildungsroman* pattern in that the protagonist makes the choice to educate herself, as a rule the only option available to the heroine. Importantly, Lessing emphasizes that with self-education comes responsibility and a feeling of powerlessness for the female protagonist. At the same time as Martha craves for increased self-knowledge, her expanded learning causes confusion and a feeling of being at a loss of what to do. Yet Martha's self-studies has the positive effect of making her aware of existing gender inequalities in her society, prompting her to act upon them in order to make a change.

### **Marriage**

According to Labovitz, a major theme in the female *Bildungsroman* is the marriage plot. She states that in this respect "... Lessing is faithful to her society and times", as she has her protagonist marry young (178). As was expected of a young woman at the time in the society into which she was born, Martha succumbs to social pressure and gets married when she is still a teenager. According to Labovitz, Martha marries young for political reasons: "Marriage for this modern questing heroine begins in the iron grip of necessity and ends by providing bonds which prohibit growth" (*ibid*). Martha thus experiences political needs to get married because of the war. However, the bonds of matrimony subsequently comes to hinder her own personal developmental needs.

Early in the novel Martha's feelings towards a marriage proper are negative indeed: "... Marry young? Me? I'd die first. Tie myself down to babies and housekeeping ...", she says in response to her friend Marnie's question (*MQ*, 17). Martha obviously feels that to marry

young is the last thing she would do. Here the argument of Felski and Labovitz, that the female heroine has to emancipate herself from the inhibiting bonds of matrimony before she can begin to develop, is relevant. It could be argued that Martha moves in a somewhat different direction, as her growth process starts prior to wedlock. Her quest for self-definition takes its beginning already when she is in her early teens. The young Martha realizes, even before she is married, that the pursuit of a career does not go together with adolescent marriage. Her opinion is reinforced in a conversation she subsequently has with her future employer Mr Cohen. Yet he insures her that his firm has a different policy: "Some firms dismiss women as soon as they marry, but you will have noticed that all our senior girls are married" (*MQ*, 122). Martha is in effect offered the possibility to combine marriage with a career, although a career as a secretary is not what Martha aspires to; hence there are gender restrictions inherent in Mr Cohen's 'proposal'.

Martha, while still living at home, has a predominantly negative attitude toward marriage, probably because her primary model is her parents relationship which could be characterized as based on mutual dependence and pity: "... she ... became fearful for her own future, which she was determined would never include a marriage whose only basis was that ironic mutual pity" (*MQ*, 78). Martha fears she will end up like her parents in an unloving marriage. It is interesting to note, however, that her opinion changes when she moves to the city. The older and more mature Martha seemingly takes it for granted that a sexual relationship will result in wedlock. However, already when Martha has her first sexual experience, with Adolph, her expectations are come to nought: "Why shouldn't we get married? she asked, her heart sinking at the thought of it" (*MQ*, 241). Martha feels disappointed, although she is not sure what she feels for her lover.

Martha's attitude towards marrying her husband-to-be, Douglas, must be described as wavering. The young couple decides after they have been seeing each other only a couple of weeks and been intimate with each other twice that they will get married. Yet, already the next morning Martha changes her mind: "She did not want to marry Douglas, she did not want to marry at all" (*MQ*, 291-92). Martha indeed has a change of heart, and her decision not to marry Douglas leaves her feeling "spiritually free" (*MQ*, 292). However, after the warm welcome she receives by her colleagues when she goes to work later the same day, she is encouraged to go through with the marriage after all: "She understood ... that she had done well for herself" (*MQ*, 293). The encouraging opinion of her colleagues 'persuades' Martha to change her mind again.

Indeed Martha perceives her marriage to be an escape route, the beginning of a new life, which she longs for. While unconvinced that marrying Douglas is the right thing to do, Martha nevertheless feels reassured as she has another escape hatch clear in her mind: “She ... heard a voice remarking calmly within her that she would not stay married to him ...” (*MQ*, 315). Labovitz is not quite right in her assumption then, as Lessing can be considered only partially faithful to her “society and times” (Labovitz, 178). Since Martha thinks of divorce even before she is married, marriage as her ultimate objective is undermined. It seems as if Martha in adolescent confusion does not really follow her heart when she decides to marry Douglas: “She said to herself that now she could free herself, she need not marry him; at the same time, she knew quite well that she would marry him; she could not help it ...” (*ibid*). On the one hand, she hesitates to marry him as it would mean a loss of freedom; on the other hand, it seems as if an outside force is pushing her towards marriage and so she convinces herself that it will be alright once they are married. To my mind, getting married is a developmental climax in Martha’s life: “...soon that door would be closing on her past; all the mistakes and miseries of her time in town would be forever behind her” (*MQ*, 312). Marriage is a new beginning for Martha as she leaves her superficial adolescent life with pleasure and partying behind her.

Discussing the marriage plot, Sprague and Tiger contend “[o]ur questing heroine begins with a dream of freedom; Martha Quest does journey to a city ... but the novel painfully and paradoxically concludes with Martha’s ‘proper’ marriage” (6). The critics suggest that Martha’s hope of freedom is crushed when she enters into holy matrimony. According to Felski, the heroine typically leaves one home environment (that of the parents) for another (that of her husband), and only after realizing that she must free herself from the inhibiting bonds of marriage, does she begin her quest for independence. Martha, however, moves in a different direction. She leaves her parental home for an independent life in the city, and only thereafter does she get married and goes to live with her husband.

To find herself, her identity and role in society, is the major goal for the protagonist of the female *Bildungsroman*. Yet, as Labovitz and Felski claim, the heroine’s growth process is generally hampered by adolescent marriage; the young woman has not yet found her identity and so she models herself on her husband. Martha’s spiritual and psychological development begins well before she is married. Since the novel ends with her marriage, however, it is difficult to determine whether her quest is hindered as a result. It is interesting to note, though, that Martha chooses to marry a man who has the same social values as she has. It seems she has found her ‘soul mate’, which has a strong effect on her; Lessing writes that Martha

behaves like "... one who has at last come home ... Now her acquired manner dropped from her, and she could be natural. She was herself" (*MQ*, 283). Martha has found her equal in Douglas; she no longer has to play a role but feels free to be who she is. I would like to claim that, like the typical female heroine, Martha models herself on her husband, yet only partly.

*Martha Quest* ends with the adolescent heroine's marriage in the wake of WW II. By letting her protagonist marry young, Lessing represents the cultural code of her society. The novel follows the typical female *Bildungsroman* pattern in that it deals with the protagonist's attitude toward marriage. Martha is convinced that she will never marry young, yet she marries when she is still a teenager, seeing marriage as an escape route. Nevertheless, Martha hesitates to marry her future husband, and perceives divorce as another escape route even before she is properly married. Drawing parallels to the argument of Labovitz, Felski, and also Sprague and Tiger, it could be argued that Martha already 'knows' that she will have to free herself from the inhibiting bonds of matrimony before she can begin (or rather, continue) her journey of self-exploration.

### **Sexuality**

A characteristic feature of the female *Bildungsroman* is the importance given to the theme of sexuality. Labovitz argues that, although granted sexual freedom as a woman of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lessing does not describe Martha as finding this liberty per se satisfactory as it does not cause expected "freedom on other fronts" (176). Regarding career options, for instance, there are obvious societal gender restrictions, as discussed above.

Nevertheless, Martha does embark upon her journey towards parental independence by using her sexuality as a weapon. In the short term, "[s]exuality will mean emancipation from the role of childhood forced upon her by her mother ..." (ibid). As Mrs Quest persists in dressing her daughter's maturing body in childish clothes, Martha, by asserting her sexuality, starts to free herself from her mother's controlling grip. One indication of Martha's incipient liberation is that she goes to a dance at the Van Rensbergs one night, wearing a dress of her own making. Martha's mother perceives the son of the family, Billy Van Rensberg, as a sexual 'threat' to her daughter: "What's all this about Billy? asked Mrs Quest, trying to disinfect sex, as always, with a humorous teasing voice" (*MQ*, 80). Mrs Quest seems to believe that Martha is at risk of losing her virginity at the dance, which is why she tries to make her wear a childish dress in order for her to look sexually unattractive to Billy.

The main reason for the hostile relationship between mother and daughter is thus Martha's aspiring sexuality, which Mrs Quest finds it hard to accept. It is obvious that Martha

begins to feel very distressed by her mother's attempt to control her, and to 'hinder' her natural physical development into a young woman: "Suddenly Martha moved backwards, and involuntarily raised her hand; she was shuddering with disgust at the touch of her own mother, and had been going to slap her across the face. She dropped her hand, amazed at her own violence..." (*MQ*, 23). Martha gives expression to suppressed anger towards her mother; she cannot stand that her mother touches her and reacts by almost hitting her. It could be argued that Martha acts under the influence of subconscious forces, since her own aggressiveness surprises her.

Thus, in agreement with Labovitz's definition of the female *Bildungsroman*, Lessing makes sexuality an important theme in *Martha Quest*. When Martha leaves her parents' farm for an independent life in the city she starts seeing men. Her first boyfriend is Donovan, but their involvement with each other must be described as a love-and-hate relationship. On the one hand, Martha learns that "she [is] Donovan's girl" because he decides they should go to this and that dance together (*MQ*, 137). On the other hand, he makes no moves whatsoever to have a sexual relationship with her, although Martha is "... prepared to accept him in short, as her man, since he had lain that claim on her ..." (ibid). However, to Martha's disappointment, Donovan is merely interested in having a girl to put on display and the beautiful, intelligent and popular Martha suits him perfectly. Donovan decides what Martha should wear and look like, trying to make her into somebody she is not. Probably feeling rejected, Martha begins to find him repulsive: "... the thought of making love with Donovan was rapidly becoming impossible, even indecent ..." (*MQ*, 166). Interestingly, she repeatedly makes a slip of the tongue by calling him Jonathan, which is her brother's name; she probably comes to look upon the asexual Donovan as a brother and therefore finds it appalling to make love to him.

The message comes forth in *Martha Quest* that sexuality is a complicated issue. Related to Ferguson's discussion above on the mainstream view of women as passive, Labovitz observes that Martha plays the role of the passive female in her first sexual affair. Martha takes a Jewish man, Adolph King, as her first lover, motivated by an urge to defy the anti-Semitism at the Sport's Club where she goes dancing at night, and also her parents' sexual attitudes. Choosing to have her first sexual experience with a man she is not in love with, with the purpose of rebelling against wrongly held attitudes, Martha realizes that her idealized image of the sex act, acquired from relevant literature, is at odds with the real experience:

For if the act fell short of her demand, that ideal, the thing-in-itself, that mirage, remained untouched, quivering exquisitely in front of her. Martha ... demanded nothing less than that the quintessence of all experience, all love, all beauty, should explode suddenly in a drenching, saturating moment of illumination. And since this was what she demanded, the man himself seemed positively irrelevant .... For this reason, then, it was easy for her to say she was not disappointed, that everything still awaited her ... her mind had swallowed the moment of disappointment whole ... so that he, the man, and the mirage were able once again to fuse together, in the future (*MQ*, 237)

However, Martha's romantic view induces her to disregard the disappointment she feels with Adolph and to look forward to the 'perfect moment', with another man. It turns out Adolph is a very jealous man who spies on Martha, and their relationship ends dramatically. As a result of her affair with Adolph, Martha has fallen from grace: she is no longer the popular girl: "She was being greeted by the people she knew, but in a muted, watchful way which reminded her again that she was on trial" (*MQ*, 265). It could be argued that Martha, like the typical sexually rebellious female heroine, is socially punished for her sexual debut; however, not because of the affair per se, but because she chooses a Jewish man. *Martha Quest* thus deviates from the typical pattern of the female *Bildungsroman* in that Martha is not ostracized because of her sexual initiation, which she has in common with the male hero. Whereas he is expected to defy the norms of society in his sexual initiation, the female heroine would be punished were she to rebel against the female role she has been assigned.

Martha thus challenges the norms of her society by using her sexuality. In her article "Doris Lessing's *Città Felice*", Ellen Cronan Rose claims that "... young Martha Quest castigates Zambesian society for its inadequacies as she sees them – ethnic compartmentalization, racial segregation, and generational conflict ...", and moreover that Martha rectifies these injustices by dreaming of an ideal society (144). In her mind Martha corrects these wrongs by fantasising about "a noble city" free from racial and sexual inequality: "... its citizens moved, grave and beautiful, black and white and brown together ..." (*MQ*, 15). In real life she acts on her reveries, and principles, in that she challenges the racial and ethnic prejudice of her society by getting sexually involved with a Jewish man, knowing it will have social repercussions.

The typical female *Bildungsroman* illustrates ideological / political commitment. According to Labovitz: "... there emerges a whole new fictional world depicting a female culture of engagement, commitment, and conflicting ideologies ..." (255). The female *Bildungsroman* breaks new ground by describing the heroine's testing of different political/ideological movements, of her moving from one social sphere to another, as a

significant part of her growth process. For instance, Martha, being a pronounced socialist, associates with “the local Reds” for a brief period of time because she expects them to share her social values (*MQ*, 159). In *Martha Quest* the theme of ideological/political engagement is related to sexuality and love. When Martha meets her husband-to-be, Douglas, she feels that he is different from the other men she has met at the Sport’s Club. Martha becomes interested in Douglas because he seems to share her political/ideological beliefs, and he subscribes to the same socialist magazine as she does: “... it’s nice to meet someone who – In the Club, everyone is practically mentally deficient!”, she tells him appreciatively (*MQ*, 282).

Martha is attracted to Douglas because in her eyes he is an intelligent man, not a “silly little boy” (*MQ*, 284). Therefore Martha chooses not to listen to the critical voice inside her head who finds fault in Douglas’s appearance: “... as for his hands, they were large and clumsy, rather red, heavily freckled and covered with hair ... she did not see them; she did not see his forehead, with those unaccountably unpleasant lines, like the lines of worry on an elderly face” (ibid). Martha chooses instead to judge Douglas not by his looks, his unappealing hands and forehead, but by his inner qualities; she chooses to see him as a person: “She saw his eyes, the approving and warm blue eyes. She has never known this easy warm friendliness with anyone before; she could say what she liked; she felt altogether approved ...” (ibid). This unconditional acceptance from another human being is a new experience for Martha. Yet Martha’s first sexual encounter with her future husband is a disappointment to her: “... this was quite different, not at all the same thing as with Adolph” (*MQ*, 288).

As previously mentioned, the theme of inequality between the sexes is a defining feature of the female *Bildungsroman*. Martha enjoys her sexual freedom, yet, according to Labovitz, in the long term it does not yield Martha the same possibilities and opportunities as it does her male counterparts. Nevertheless, Labovitz argues, the theme of sexuality gives a “new dimension”, another dimension, to the female *Bildungsroman*, because it is an essential step in female development (177). Moreover, it is because of this sexual freedom that the female protagonist eventually entered the, heretofore, male genre of the *Bildungsroman*. Hence, this significant contribution revises the gender perspective of this literary form.

Thus, like other novels in the female *Bildungsroman* genre, the theme of sexuality is dealt with at length in Lessing’s novel. However, the typical female protagonist’s sexual initiation would result in social ostracism, yet this does not happen in *Martha Quest*. It is interesting to note that the novel follows the pattern of the traditional *Bildungsroman* in that the protagonist has two sexual experiences, as required by Buckley. Moreover, like the typical

male hero, Martha defies societal norms in her sexual initiation. However, unlike the typical male hero, Martha is socially punished for rebelling against societal norms; it is noteworthy though that she is not punished because of her sexual debut as such, but because she takes a Jewish man as her first lover. Martha, then, unlike the typical heroine of the female *Bildungsroman*, uses her sexuality to rebel against societal norms and values. Being fully aware of the existing racial prejudice of her society, the generally held negative attitudes toward Jews and black people, Martha intentionally chooses to defy these wrongly held views by using the sexual freedom she has been granted as a young woman of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Gender roles

Labovitz celebrates Lessing's "unique contribution" to the female novel of development in that she emphasizes and examines female roles (180). According to Labovitz, the theme of gender roles is a defining characteristic of the female *Bildungsroman*, and it is important in *Martha Quest*. Curiously, Martha's father has a habit of greeting her: "Well, old son?", indicating that he wanted a boy instead of a girl (*MQ*, 73). On the other hand, the fact that he requests his daughter's company when he attends to his car indicates that he wants Martha to act as a 'stand-in' for her brother Jonathan who is away at school. This latter circumstance makes Martha angry: "Why, she asked herself, was it that he, with half her brains, should be sent to a 'good school', why was it he should inevitably be given the advantages?" (*MQ*, 35). Already as a sixteen-year-old still living on the farm, Martha is aware that gender inequalities exist in her society, which is a typical feature of the female *Bildungsroman*. In a discussion she has with Joss about, among other things, university studies she tells him angrily: "It's all very well for you, you're a *man* ..." (*MQ*, 57; emphasis added). Martha reacts to the fact that although she has made "the same intellectual journey" as Joss, it is more or less taken for granted that he should go to university and choose a career *because* he is a man (*MQ*, 56).

Interestingly, Lessing describes Martha as a tomboy: "In her bright-yellow linen dress, her face tinted carefully with cosmetics, she appeared twenty. But ... she was smoking hungrily, and her fingers were already stained with nicotine, her rifle was lying carelessly across her lap ..." (*MQ*, 77-78). Martha is portrayed as a typical young woman wearing a dress and make-up, yet she behaves like a typical adolescent boy by smoking and hunting. I would like to argue that Martha in a way models herself on her father by behaving in a masculine manner; by 'imitating' a young man's behaviour she is trying to earn her father's recognition. It is in addition a way of rebelling against her controlling mother who desires an accomplished and marriageable daughter. In fact, Mrs Quest in desperation prays to God: "...



*please let her be like her brother*” (*MQ*, 77) who is portrayed as “a simple, good-natured boy” (*MQ*, 35), and thus certainly more manageable than the rebellious Martha. Moreover, Martha is challenging the conventional female role of her society, which her mother embraces.

Labovitz claims that, like a typical modern female heroine, Martha consciously tries to figure out what her role in society is and what she can do to change it. She feels very angry at the picture of womanhood she is presented with, and she feels burdened by the task of having to invent a new one. Labovitz claims “[t]he role of the passive female is amply treated in Lessing’s work ...” (183). Martha is portrayed as exaggeratingly passive on the surface, remaining passive as she goes through her different developmental stages. Yet Martha raises the issue of choice and the gender inequality connected with it, like the typical heroine, when she observes that choices concerning developmental experiences that are available to men are not granted her as a female. Besides the role of the passive female, Lessing gives to Martha the role of the quiescent female who is waiting for her “imprisoned self” to be released by a man (Labovitz, 186). Labovitz observes that as the female *Bildungsroman* describes the heroine’s overall growth, Martha’s development is to be found within male-female relations. She develops through her interactions with female characters in her life, as well as through her relationships with the opposite sex.

I agree with Labovitz that Martha does play the role of the passive female, which is evident in the following statements: “... since he had lain that *claim* on her ...” (*MQ*, 137); “... that warm, sleek body, which apparently had such a powerful *claim* on her ...” (*MQ*, 241); “... he had in some way *claimed* her, and they would make love” (*MQ*, 286); “... she was bound to love him, that *claim* had been laid on her” (*MQ*, 287) (emphases added). Obviously, it is the men’s will that governs Martha’s. However, I would like to argue that Martha plays the role of the active female as well in that she has expectations of the men she is seeing; in short, she expects sex. After meeting her boyfriend-to-be, Donovan, for the first time, romantic fantasies are beginning to take form in her mind: “Martha wandered around her room in a state of breathless exhilaration, already picturing Donovan as a lover ...” (*MQ*, 125). Moreover, in her first sexual affair she actively chooses to be with a Jewish man, knowing it is not socially accepted. Their sexual relationship seems to be predominantly on Martha’s terms: “You never come when I want you to, only when you feel like it”, Adolph exclaims accusingly one night when Martha does not want to follow him home (*MQ*, 245). This man on the whole plays the passive role in their relationship as he more often than not leaves it up to Martha to decide what they should do.

Another man she is seeing, Perry, is also a disappointment sexually to her. When they are about to be intimate with each other he does not ‘follow the rules’ according to Martha: “Her mind was schooled in poetic descriptions of the love act from literature, and in scientific descriptions from manuals on sex; it was not prepared for the self-absorbed rite he was following” (*MQ*, 224). Being caught up in himself, she accuses him of only having the experience of getting involved with girls, but not of how to “make love properly”, like adults (*MQ*, 225). Equally, she becomes upset with Douglas, her future husband, when he hesitates to sleep with her (because he is engaged to another girl): “... she was now possessed by a fierce determination not to be deprived of what was *her right*” (*MQ*, 286; emphasis added). This is quite a strong statement from an adolescent girl in the 1930’s. Here Martha comes across as anything but the passive female in that she perceives it as her prerogative to be made love to by a man whom she has been seeing for only a week.

Clearly, the theme of gender roles is a defining feature of the female *Bildungsroman*, and, clearly, *Martha Quest* follows the pattern of the typical female novel of development in that Lessing deals amply with the issue of female roles. The protagonist challenges her assigned role by calling into question developmental choices available to men and women, and thus raises the issue of gender inequality, like the typical heroine.

## Discussion

The literary canon has been male dominated throughout history, and consequently teaching in schools has as a rule focused on male authors and main characters. Rivkin and Ryan state that “[t]o be a woman graduate student in the 1960’s was to hear recognizably male points of view, some of which were noticeably misogynist, declared to be ‘universal’” (766). This quote parallels Schwieckart’s argument that a female reader needs to read male texts with a critical eye in order not to equate maleness, that is not being female, with humanity. The *Bildungsroman* genre has been no exception, and thus it has been equally male dominated with its prototype hero being Wilhelm Meister. Buckley’s 1974 pioneer study of the *Bildungsroman* with a definition of the genre, which excluded both female authors and protagonists, caused reactions from feminist quarters. Claiming that women also write *Bildungsromane* about women, Abel, Hirsch and Langland (1983) and Labovitz (1986) published their studies claiming that a re-definition of the genre is needed since the heroine’s development differs in significant ways from the hero’s growth process.

Drawing upon Schweickart's distinction between a male and a female text, the aim of this essay has been to make a comparison between Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (male author, male protagonist) and Lessing's *Martha Quest* (female author, female protagonist). As both novels can be characterized as *Bildungsromane* depicting a young protagonist's development, there are common themes in the two texts, such as family relationships, formal/informal education, career choice and sexuality, which constitute a solid base for comparison. However, since one is a male text and the other a female one, significant gender differences were found, as expected. However, it is important to note that rather unexpectedly *Martha Quest* in several respects follows the pattern of the traditional *Bildungsroman* established by Buckley, whereas *A Portrait* deviates from it.

*A Portrait* begins in a typical male *Bildungsroman* fashion with a detailed description of Stephen's childhood years. In accordance with Buckley's requirements, Stephen is a sensible child who has artistic endowments. However, whether the requirement that the male hero should experience limitations to expressing his imagination freely is fulfilled or not is debatable, since restriction is more hinted at than clearly stated in the novel. What is clear though, to my mind, is that Stephen is depicted as a sensitive child who is different from other children. Stephen's sensitivity, and thus difference from his peers, is reflected in that Joyce chooses to put focus on his protagonist's internal world rather than the external one, which must be considered an atypical feature of the novel, rendering *A Portrait* more subjective compared to other novels in the genre. Another consequence is the novel's vague characterisation.

*Martha Quest*, like the typical female *Bildungsroman*, takes as its beginning the protagonist's adolescent years. Characteristically, relationships to family and friends are here a significant part of the heroine's development. The controlling Mrs Quest and the absent Mr Quest have an equally destructive effect on Martha, which is why she is forced to leave her parents' farm. The novel is thus typical of the female *Bildungsroman* genre in its portrayal of the protagonist's need of shedding herself from her parents' negative influence on her spiritual and psychological growth. Martha frees herself of inhibiting familial bonds by using her sexuality as a weapon.

*Martha Quest* moreover follows the typical female *Bildungsroman* pattern in its emphasis on issues related to sexuality. Sex is important to Martha, and she takes advantage of her sexual freedom. It is noteworthy that she expects to be made love to by the men she sees and she becomes disappointed when her expectations are not fulfilled. She also becomes disappointed when the sex act falls short of her expectations, acquired from relevant literature.

Interestingly, the novel follows the traditional *Bildungsroman* pattern as Lessing makes Martha's sexual initiation an important event in her life. To highlight this developmental climax, Lessing has her protagonist choose a Jewish man as her first lover which has repercussions in a society marked by racial prejudice. Consequently, like the typical female heroine, Martha is socially punished for her sexual debut. However, importantly, Martha is not punished for the affair per se but because she has sex with a Jewish man. Lessing here unexpectedly draws attention to the issue of social inequality rather than gender inequality.

It is interesting to note that Lessing again follows the traditional *Bildungsroman* pattern in that her protagonist has two sexual experiences, like the typical male hero. However, as opposed to the traditional *Bildungsroman*, it is not clear-cut in *Martha Quest* that the protagonist has one debasing and one exalting experience. Rather, both sexual encounters are more or less negatively tinged for Martha since they do not meet her expectations. Nevertheless, what is noteworthy is that Lessing chooses to have her protagonist follow the traditional *Bildungsroman* trajectory. In so doing, Lessing challenges societal gender boundaries, that is her protagonist's assigned female role. Martha in fact behaves as the *male* protagonist is expected to in his sexual initiation: she defies existing norms of her society. Lessing chooses to put great emphasis on Martha's sexual debut, which is in accordance with Buckley's definition of the male hero's developmental trajectory.

While *Martha Quest* follows the traditional *Bildungsroman* pattern, *A Portrait* deviates from it when it comes to the protagonist's sexual debut. According to Buckley, the negative and positive sexual encounters that the young man is supposed to have as a part of his sexual initiation are only superficially related in Joyce's novel, and thus seemingly given minimal significance to the hero's development. It is true that Stephen does experience a debasing sexual encounter with a prostitute, as is required of Buckley's hero. However, it is difficult to judge whether Stephen experiences an exalting sexual encounter with his beloved Emma, or whether Joyce simply relates his protagonist's fantasies. Consequently, it is difficult to decide whether Buckley's requirements are fulfilled. If Stephen does not have a positive sexual encounter with Emma, then it is a clear deviation from the typical male *Bildungsroman* pattern. What is unquestionable, however, is that Stephen indeed experiences a 'higher' love. Stephen is forced to moral re-evaluation because of his love for Emma, which is in agreement with Buckley's requirements, since he repeatedly feels guilty for violating his idealized image of her.

I would like to argue that *A Portrait* follows the typical male *Bildungsroman* pattern in that the protagonist experiences an internal crisis as a result of his sexual initiation. Stephen's

crisis is religious (not sexual) in nature as he feels extreme agony for having committed the most terrible of sins. Stephen's fright of hell and eternal damnation forces him to confess his sins, which is followed by true repentance on his part. Consequently, Stephen's crisis results in a change of his immoral conduct, which is in accordance with Buckley's definition. Thus his sexual initiation (due to its repercussions) must be considered a developmental climax in his life. Given that Stephen's sexual debut with the prostitute provokes a religious crisis in him, it is noteworthy that the sexual experience per se is merely touched upon in *A Portrait*. Instead Joyce chooses to relate in great detail the detrimental moral and mental effects of his protagonist's debasing sexual encounter.

Hence religion plays a very important part in *A Portrait* and in the young protagonist's life. In fact, religion plays a more significant role in *A Portrait*, and thus in Stephen's life, than sexuality does, which must be considered a deviation from the pattern of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, as sexual initiation is essential to the male hero's development according to Buckley's requirements. Interestingly, the situation is the opposite in *Martha Quest*: sexuality is far more important to Martha than religious matters, which are only casually related. Unexpectedly, then, Lessing follows the traditional *Bildungsroman* pattern more genuinely than Joyce in that she deals thoroughly with the issue of sexual initiation.

Another atypical feature of *A Portrait* is that Stephen's relationships to family and friends are given less emphasis than in the traditional *Bildungsroman*. Consequently, Stephen's parents and friends are not described in any detail but come across as shadowlike figures throughout the novel. *A Portrait* further deviates from the typical pattern in that Stephen does not suffer either an actual or a metaphorical loss of his father and is thus not provoked to seek a substitute parent. Unlike the typical male hero, Stephen does not find a mentor in his life and he seems to have no need of one. In contrast to Joyce, Lessing again chooses to follow the traditional *Bildungsroman* pattern in that her protagonist finds herself two male mentors, Joss and Solly, who are Martha's friends. Equally important to Martha's growth is that she finds a potential role model in her landlady Mrs Gunn. However, to my mind, this warm and kind woman in effect has the function of a substitute mother for Martha. Martha suffers at least a symbolic loss of her own mother who ostensibly rejects her, which is equal to the typical male hero's loss of his father. Here *Martha Quest* again follows the pattern of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, in my opinion, especially since Martha feels provoked to find a substitute father too due to Mr Quest being a rather absent parental figure. I would like to suggest that it is Martha's friend Joss who comes to act as a stand-in for her father, giving her the mature guidance she so badly needs.

Martha thus has an unsatisfactory relationship with her parents. Here a parallel can be drawn to *A Portrait* as Joyce portrays the father-son relationship as becoming more and more strained, partly due to diverging opinions of Stephen's choice of career; like the typical male hero, Stephen chooses to embark upon an artistic career while his father would prefer that his son chooses a career in the law. *A Portrait*, then, follows the traditional *Bildungsroman* pattern in its depiction of a strained child-parent relationship, as does *Martha Quest*. It is noteworthy that both *A Portrait* and *Martha Quest* describe the traditional *Bildungsroman* trajectory in that Stephen and Martha's parents, expressly their mothers, voice their dislike of their offsprings' reading preferences, like the typical male hero's parents. Another similarity between the protagonists is that they both seem to feel alienated from their families, as if they are outsiders.

A notable, and possibly surprising, difference between Stephen and Martha regarding independence is that Martha, but not Stephen, leaves home for the city in quest for an independent life, like the typical male hero. Martha thus rebels against her assigned female role by not remaining at home to imitate her mother, like the typical heroine; Mrs Quest is not equipped to function as a role mother to her, and neither is any other female figure in her home environment. It is interesting to note that *Martha Quest* follows the traditional *Bildungsroman* pattern in its emphasis on the importance of a move to the city and the search for independence to the protagonist's development. Unlike the typical female heroine who remains at home, Martha has the choice to leave home and to focus on her own development, which is important from a feminist perspective. Hence, that Lessing chooses to follow the male *Bildungsroman* tradition can be considered a challenge to normative gender roles.

Although Martha has mixed feelings for the city, it is crucial to her strive for independence, which is why moving to the city must be considered a developmental climax in her life. Martha's move to the city and independence gives her the possibility to locate adequate female role models. The women in the Left Book Club could potentially function as role models for Martha as they share her social/political beliefs, yet she cannot identify with them as they represent what she does not want to be/become. Martha's female colleagues in the law office are also potential role models, and to my mind, they have the function of temporary role models to her. They obviously have qualifications that she lacks but would like to have, and so they spur her to embark upon a career as a secretary. Yet Martha who is an ambitious young woman feels herself capable of accomplishing more, so she tries to break societal gender boundaries by applying for a position as a freelance writer. Lacking adequate role models to imitate, Martha is thus compelled to act as her own 'model'. However, in the

1930's a position as a freelance writer was considered a 'male' job. Here Lessing highlights the issue of inequality between the sexes by describing her protagonist's utter disappointment in that, *because* she is a female, the only option open to her is a position with the woman's page.

Clearly, there are career choices simply not open to her as a woman. Lessing thus follows the pattern of other novels in the female *Bildungsroman* genre in that she deals with gender inequality issues. *Martha Quest* specifically highlights gender differences as regards career choice, as discussed above, and formal education. Because Martha is a female, her parents will not spend as much money on her education as on her brother's. Granted, Martha has the opportunity to study. However, she is not given the same possibilities as her brother who is sent to a good school. Moreover, it is not clearly stated in the novel whether she actually has the option to go to university, like Stephen, if she wanted to. From her feminist perspective, Lessing outlines a patriarchal world in which Martha does not have the same educational and professional options available to her as Stephen: at the time it was not possible for a woman to become a priest.

Closely related to the issue of gender inequality is the theme of gender roles, another defining feature of the female *Bildungsroman*, which Lessing deals with in detail. Martha is partly portrayed as a tomboy who smokes and hunts. In my opinion, she tries to earn her father's recognition by acting as a stand-in for her brother who is away at school. Moreover, she tries to rebel against her mother who desires a marriageable daughter, and also, importantly, against existing gender roles in her society; she does not behave like a typical young woman should. When Martha eventually makes the decision to leave home for an independent life in the city, it is partly an act of self-preservation: she needs to escape the detrimental influence of her parents, predominantly her mother's. Martha's parents make her feel that she was born in the 'wrong' gender and thus unwanted because she is not a male like her brother.

As far as Stephen's *Bildung* is concerned there are a few exceptions from the typical trajectory of the male protagonist. *A Portrait* deviates from the typical male *Bildungsroman* pattern in that Stephen does not move to the city alone in search for an independent life, like the typical male hero does. In contrast, Stephen moves to the city with his family, and his search for independence begins only after he cuts his familial bonds and leaves his fatherland, which is a developmental climax in his life. Another interesting deviation is that formal education is emphasized in the novel, while informal education is de-emphasized. Moreover, *Bildung* in the form of travelling is hardly given any space in *A Portrait* and thus it has little

significance to the protagonist's development. Unlike the typical hero who begins to travel when he leaves his parental home, Stephen begins to travel when he leaves his home country, by which the novel ends. It could be argued that as a result of Stephen's deferral to travel and pursue an independent living, his development is somewhat procrastinated (as the heroine's is due to marriage).

*A Portrait*, however, follows the pattern of the male *Bildungsroman* in that Stephen's *Bildung* in the form of sexual initiation and formal education does begin in the city. Not only does he experience his sexual debut there but also a 'higher' love. Moreover, in the city Stephen acquires his formal education and decides upon a career choice. *A Portrait* ends in a characteristic male *Bildungsroman* fashion with an open question about the fate of the young hero. In my opinion, at the end of the novel Stephen is a quite mature young man who seems to feel satisfied with the choices he has made. In accordance with Buckley's definition, Stephen has taken the decision to accommodate to the external world, after painful 'reality-testing', like the typical male protagonist.

*Martha Quest* ends rather differently, in marriage. In her younger teens Martha is convinced that she will not marry young, as is customary in her society, because she will have a career. To her mind, then, the two do not mix. Lessing puts emphasis on the issue of career choice and marriage, and in this respect the novel follows the typical pattern of the female *Bildungsroman*. Despite Martha's early teenage aversion to marriage, she marries already a few years later when she is still an adolescent. Martha's drastic change of heart must be attributed to her realization that marriage is an escape route from the superficial city life she has led. She sees marriage as the beginning of a new life. Martha's decision to marry is thus a developmental climax in her life.

It is interesting to note that *Martha Quest* deviates from the typical female *Bildungsroman* pattern in that the protagonist has the possibility to move to the city and search for independence before she is married. Characteristically, the typical heroine, upon realizing that marriage hampers her development, subsequently leaves her husband and begins her quest for independence and self-knowledge. The rebellious Martha moves in a different direction: she makes a detour and experiences independent life before married life. She begins to develop in her early teens by reading voraciously and, like the male hero, she discovers the city and the independence there to be found when she is still an adolescent.

Martha's developmental trajectory thus differs from the typical heroine's in that she is given the possibility to locate adequate female role models and so to find her (gender) identity prior to entering into what is typically growth-inhibiting marriage. Martha's self-development



is thus not hampered by marriage, unlike the typical heroine who feels compelled to model herself on her husband as she has not yet found her identity when she marries. As a consequence, Martha has more in common with her male counterpart. Equally interesting is the fact that Martha realizes before she is married that she will not stay married to her husband: she sees divorce as another escape route. Seemingly, Martha uses marriage to her own advantage. Yet, her trajectory ends in marriage, which reinforces normative gender stereotypes.

As expected, Martha and Stephen's developmental trajectories differ markedly. It should be noted that in *Martha Quest* the female protagonist follows the *male* course of development in several regards whereas the male hero in *A Portrait* deviates from it. To Martha not only the city and the search for independence are important, but also sexuality. Equally significant to her overall growth is self-education. In contrast, in *A Portrait* these developmental steps are only of minor importance to the protagonist. Stephen's strive for an independent life begins only when he leaves both his family and Ireland. Although the protagonist's self-education and sexual debut are significant in *A Portrait*, it is formal education and religion that plays the major role in the formation of his character. Labovitz observes that sexual initiation is necessary to the male hero's development, however, issues related to sexuality and sex roles are dealt with mainly in the female *Bildungsroman*. As previously mentioned, the protagonist's sexual experiences are dealt with at length in *Martha Quest*, while Joyce merely casually relates Stephen's sexual initiation, although it is important to his development.

Given that *Martha Quest* follows the traditional *Bildungsroman* pattern in that the protagonist has two sexual experiences which provoke societal norms, finds a male mentor, and moves to the city in search for independence, Martha does not fit neatly into the female developmental trajectory as outlined by feminist critics. By directing Martha to walk in the male hero's footsteps in these respects, Lessing in fact de-emphasizes the female protagonist's *difference* from her male counterpart. Yet, it could be argued that Lessing in this way emphasizes the feminist agenda, since Martha challenges her assigned female role and behaves in a manner which is not expected of her by society. Lessing has her protagonist break existing gender boundaries by claiming her *right* to choose the same developmental path as the male hero regarding sexual initiation, mentorship and independence. Martha thus fights the repression and restriction typically experienced by the female adolescent, according to this essay's introductory quote.

By way of conclusion, Joyce and Lessing deal exhaustively with the pains and pleasures of growing up in a typical *Bildungsroman* fashion. Both authors put focus on characteristic

*Bildungsroman* themes, i.e. family relationships, formal/informal education, sexuality, love, career choice and search for independence, but in a rather different manner. As was expected, gender differences are clearly to be found regarding how the authors treat the themes of their respective novels. While Lessing penetrates her protagonist's family relations, self-education and sexuality in detail, Joyce rather focuses on his protagonist's childhood, formal education and religious dilemmas. Based on the difference between the authors as regards selection and focus in dealing with these typical themes of the *Bildungsroman* genre, this essay's feminist comparison between a male and a female text indicates that Schweickart's distinction is relevant.

An expected gender difference found is that whereas Lessing discusses issues related to gender roles, role models and sexual inequality, these themes are left out of *A Portrait*, which is in agreement with both Buckley's and Labovitz's definitions. Another gender difference is that Lessing extends her female protagonist's quest beyond the traditional (male) developmental trajectory, which must be considered groundbreaking. Referring back to the introduction, it would be interesting to follow the protagonists' trajectories in Lessing and Joyce's sequels: What happens to Stephen's growth when he finds an independent life abroad? Are his artistic aspirations fulfilled? How does Martha's marriage affect her self-development? Does she find adequate female role models, and thus the answer to her compelling question whom she is to be like?

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