PRISONERS' PROGRESS: DEVELOPMENT IN THE FEMALE BILDUNGSROMAN

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Carolyn Leste Law

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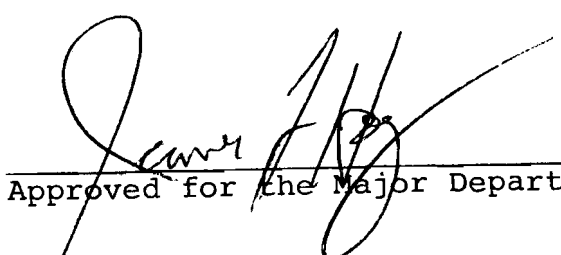

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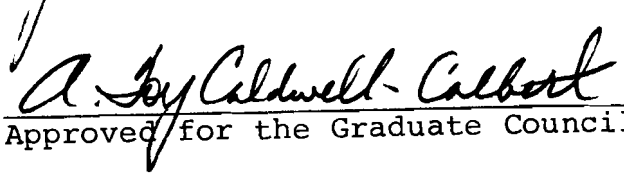

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TO

my mother, Virginia,

and to the memory of

my father

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Charlotte Bronte", Kate Chopin, and Alice Walker each employ a common metaphor to articulate their characters' stories of development. Jane Eyre constantly escapes a series of impending enclosures. Edna Pontellier emerges, as in birthing, from suffocating confinement. Celie, who understands slavery in two ways, as a Black and as a woman, liberates herself from bondage with power she draws from bonding among women.

This thesis illustrates, using three novels from widely separated time periods and featuring three very different protagonists, a characteristic of a significant, but often neglected, literary genre. The female novel of development is distinguished from the male literary tradition not so much by structure or

plot or even theme, but by the social and cultural imperatives inherent in a structure or plot or theme which attempts to express a woman's development. Jane, Edna, and Celie all share a common developmental task. They must assert their individuality, their autonomy, and their independence in a patriarchal system unwilling to accept such.

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Introduction

The Bildungsroman is a genre with a long and distinguished history. Some of the great books in German and, later, English literature are Bildungsromane. The genre is a form grown out of the questing heroes' stories. The word itself, however, is relatively new, especially in English usage. Although the term is subject to much misunderstanding, the Bildungsroman itself is rather simple to summarize: A child or young person's life is traced through numerous experiences to adulthood and moral, spiritual, and vocational maturity. Traditionally, the Bildungsroman features an ambitious young man bounding off independently with a heart full of "great expectations" in search of his true, natural vocation and, in so searching, he discovers his self and an "art of living."

But, what of Bildungsromane which feature young women? Three are discussed in this thesis: Jane Eyre (1847), The Awakening (1899), and The Color Purple (1982). Do the women in these novels walk the same path toward personal and spiritual integrity as, say, Pip or Stephen Dedalus? It does not require great insight to know the answer to that question is "no." The reason, though, is not so simple to assert.

According to Annis Pratt, young women are caught in what she terms a "double bind." Pratt explains, it is a double bind

"derived from the contrary forces of a girl's desire for authenticity and her society's desire for her femininity . . ." (35). Consequently, developing young women, whether in literature or in life, must resolve that contradiction of the double bind in their lives, which puts their individuality as human beings in conflict with their socially mandated roles as mothers and wives, before they can achieve full maturity. The concept of the double bind is central to understanding the characteristic image of female Bildungsromane: movement out of a restrictive environment into a life of autonomy and independence. The movement may be expressed in various ways. This thesis focuses on imagery of escape from enclosure in Jane Eyre, emergence from constriction in The Awakening, and emancipation from slavery in The Color Purple.

Pratt notes, "In the woman's novel of development . . . the hero does not choose life to one side of society after conscious deliberation on the subject [as is the case in male Bildungsromane]; rather she is radically alienated by gender-role norms from the very outset" (36). While young men of the traditional Bildungsroman are often seeking freedom to choose a vocation, a way of living which can reward and enrich them and others, young women in Bildungsromane seek freedom from an already determined vocation, as wife, help-mete, "mother-woman," or whore, and a way of living that demotes and devalues them.

The three novels considered in this thesis represent three different expressions of the distinctively female Bildungsroman.

They were chosen to illustrate a movement through history which may be termed "the development of the female novel of development." That movement reflects, necessarily, the socio-cultural development of women as an oppressed group.

Jane Eyre is most conventional in that it most closely parallels the male traditional model, Goethe's Wilhelm Meister. The Awakening illustrates the development of an adult woman who must struggle with the developmental tasks which face a child. The Color Purple traces the movement of a young woman from a situation of abuse and virtual slavery to freedom through the empowering support of a community of women.

Virginia Woolf observes in A Room of One's Own that the world bears a "notorious indifference" (53) to writers and their work: Keats, Flaubert, and "other men of genius" (54). But, she recognizes, also, that the world is more than indifferent to women writers and their work; it is actually hostile (54). The three novels in this thesis, then, though separated by 150 years, express, perhaps in radically different terms, a single theme: the liberation of a female character demanding her right to grow and become in the face of a rigid and antithetical social system. That is the female Bildungsroman.

Chapter One

The Tradition

> "My life is to be a wandering;
> singular duties of the wanderer
> I have to practise and to with-
> stand altogether peculiar trials."
> (Wilhelm Meister, II, 13)

"Bildungsroman" is a term which has only recently come into the English scholarly vocabulary. Although Susanne Nobbe Howe was writing about the genre using the term in the early 1930s[1], G.B. Tennyson, in "The Bildungsroman in Nineteenth-Century English Literature" (1968), notes that it did not come into what he calls "common usage" till the 1950s (135). Even today, some American scholars do not immediately recognize the word or only vaguely understand its meaning. Its use in German literary criticism, however, enjoys a considerably longer history and more precise definition.

The term "Bildungsroman" was coined by Wilhelm Dilthey in 1870 to describe Johann Wolfgang Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lahrjarhe (1795-96) and Wanderjarhe (1821) and a number of other German novels of the period 1795-1825. Dilthey wrote, "I should like to call those novels of the school of Wilhelm Meister Bildungsromane[.] . . . Goethe's novel depicts the development of a human being in various stages, forms, and periods of life" (trans. and qtd. by Tennyson 135). Thus, Wilhelm Dilthey offered

the first definition of "Bildungsroman" nearly three-quarters of a century after the first example was written.

The term literally translated means "formation-" or "shaping-novel," an apt name for the genre. According to the originator of the word, Dilthey, the Bildungsroman has five components:

(1) the idea of Bildung, or formation, cultivation, education, shaping of a single main character, normally a young man;

(2) individualism, especially the emphasis on the uniqueness of the protagonist and the primacy of his private life and thoughts, although these are at the same time representative of an age or a culture;

(3) the biographical element, usually supplied from the author's own life . . . the "conscious and artistic presentation of what is typically human through the depiction of a particular individual's life";

(4) the connection with psychology, especially the . . . psychology of development;

(5) the ideal of humanity, of the full realization of all human potential as the goal of life. (Tennyson 136)

This five-point standard, as Dilthey recognized, accurately describes many German novels around the turn of the nineteenth century, among them: Hölderlin's Hyperion (1797), Jean Paul's

Hesperus (1795) and Titan (1800-1803), Tieck's Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen (1798), and Novalis' Heinrich von Ofterdingen (1802). But Wilhelm Meister in its full two-volume form, Larhjarhe or "Learning Years" and Wanderjarhe or "Travel Years," is "viewed as the most comprehensive and authoritative of them all" (Tennyson 136).

Of course, even Wilhelm Meister has ancestors in literature. Susanne Nobbe Howe plots his genealogy from the "recalcitrant" hero of the moral allegories, the picaresque hero, the "universal man" of the Renaissance, and Parcifal who learned painfully through experience (5).

In the first volume, most commonly translated as Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship, Wilhelm aspires to be an actor. As a boy he fashioned puppets and made them perform plays and entertainments which he wrote. Wilhelm's father, however, wishes his son to take a place in the respectable family business. But Wilhelm's love for the stage and its art is stronger than his sense of familial duty. Only when Wilhelm is utterly despondent, thinking his actress-lover is unfaithful to him, does he agree to try his hand at business. He sets off into the provinces to solicit business and collect debts for his father's interests.

Wilhelm meets a troupe of traveling actors and performers in one of the towns he visits. A new acting company is organized from among some of these performers which Wilhelm enthusiastically joins. He soon discovers, though, that his talents lie less on stage than in writing and managing. His days are filled with

philosophical conversations, rowdy amusements, and sexual temptations. Now in charge of the troupe, Wilhelm inadvertantly leads the company into an ambush of robbers. Wilhelm fights gallantly, but is badly injured. His life is saved by a mysterious "Amazon" who disappears, yet haunts him daily thereafter. Wilhelm recovers and is led to the home of a man, Lothario, the ex-lover of one of the actresses, to petition support for her and her anonymous child. At Lothario's is a secret society of men which has apparently been following Wilhelm's progress all along. These men explain to Wilhelm a great deal about his life, including the fact that the anonymous child, Felix, is actually his own son, born to the actress-lover back home. The boy is then placed in a cloistered school where he is educated according to his natural inclinations. Wilhelm also discovers that the beautiful "Amazon" is the sister of Lothario. Wilhelm and this woman, Natalia, are married, but Wilhelm almost immediately leaves his bride to begin his second long journey.

Volume Two, The Travel Years, is a collection of loosely connected episodes. Wilhelm and his son, Felix, have become renunciants, vowed never to spend three nights in one place. Wilhelm comes to realize during these wanderings that his true vocation is to be a physician. At the end of the Travel Years, Wilhelm proves the correctness of his choice by saving his own son's life.

R.O. Moon admits in the Preface to his 1947 translation of Wilhelm Meister that "it may hardly be correct to speak of Wilhelm Meister as a novel, for the main point of it is the importance

of discovering one's vocation and then strenuously carrying it out. In that sense," Moon writes, "it might be called a novel with a purpose . . ." (5). Just what that purpose is, though, has been variously identified by various commentators. In G.B. Tennyson's words, Wilhelm Meister "contains a God's plenty of everything, and it would be an unimaginative reader indeed who could not find just about anything he wanted in that immense and varied work" (136). Consequently, with each different opinion of Wilhelm Meister's object or the novel's purpose, the Bildungsroman as a genre is variously defined.

As we have seen, Wilhelm Dilthey outlined a quite specific standard of the genre in 1870. Tennyson points out that that standard emphasizes "the cultivation and harmonious development of the whole personality, the attaining of a goal that is a happy blend of the material and spiritual" (137). This is, obviously, rather different from what the twentieth-century translator, Moon, emphasizes about the book. In the Preface to Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship he writes,

> The object of education is . . . to discover what their [young men's] own aptitudes really are, so that by selecting some occupation in which they can exercise themselves, they will not only be more helpful and effective citizens, but will be free from the mental restlessness depicted in the character of Wilhelm Meister and attain what Goethe calls "the inward harmony" or unity with oneself. (6)

It is significant, however, that two very divergent opinions

do converge on a single elemental point: a "blend of the material and spiritual" and the "inward harmony" or "unity with oneself."

By 1958, Hans Heinrich Borcherdt, in an article titled "Bildungsroman,"[2] merges both Dilthey's and Moon's areas of emphasis to explain, according to G.B. Tennyson's translated summary,

> . . . first there is a cultural goal, which is the complete unfolding of all natural qualities; then there is a clear path toward that goal, a path . . . as itself both the means to and the realization of the goal; in sum, the movement in the Bildungsroman is a reasonably direct line from error to truth, from confusion to clarity, from uncertainty to certainty, from, as the Germans have it, nature to spirit. (137)

Perhaps the really significant portion of Borcherdt's descriptive definition is the phrase, "as the Germans have it." Up to this point in this discussion, the commentators have all been addressing German literature. Since entering the English language in the twentieth century, the term "Bildungsroman" has been awkwardly translated and very imprecisely applied to English literature. Jerome Buckley, in Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding (1974), complains of the "awkwardness of the German term as applied to English literature" (vii). He writes, "I have therefore considered--and sometimes for the sake of convenience and variation, accepted--several possible synonyms: the novel of youth, the novel of education, of apprenticeship, of ad-

olescence, of initiation, even the life-novel" (vii). The term has come to be used, as I think Buckley illustrates, as an umbrella-word to refer to a great many different kinds of English books.

G.B. Tennyson, too, complains of the imprecision with which the term has been, and still is, applied, but his concern is primarily the way the word is applied to Victorian English literature. He points out, "Almost any English novel of the nineteenth century that depicts the growth and development of a central figure is like to find itself called a Bildungsroman . . ." (140). That such is the case is, of course, the result of the kind of catch-all meaning which English speaking scholars have assigned the term. Part of the difficulty is that there is in English no distinction, as there is in German, between "Bildungsroman" and the variations within that genre: Entwicklungsroman, Erziehungsroman, and Künstlerroman. Although many handbooks of English literary terms offer "Bildungsroman" and "Entwicklungsroman" as synonyms, if they list them at all, Tennyson explains that the Bildungsroman implies development toward the goal of full, harmonious personality, unlike the Entwicklungsroman which suggests development of almost any kind (138). The Erziehungsroman emphasizes formal education; the Künstlerroman focuses on the development of the artist.

Although Tennyson believes it is unlikely that the term will ever be used in English with the same degree of precision it is in German (138), English scholars since Susanne Howe have attempted to clear up very unclear definitions and translations

by concerning themselves less with literal definitions and more with descriptive definitions, pinpointing characteristics of the genre in an effort to distinguish the Bildungsroman from other sorts of books in which the protagonists learn and develop through experience.

C. Hugh Holman's 4th edition Handbook to Literature (1980) describes under the heading "Apprenticeship Novel" a book "which recounts the youth and young adulthood of a sensitive protagonist who is attempting to learn the nature of the world, discover its meaning and pattern, and acquire a philosophy of life and the 'art of living'" (33). The entry cites Goethe's Wilhelm Meister as the archetype. Jerome Buckley offers by far the most specific, if not the most prescriptive, outline of the characteristics of the genre in English:

> 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. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy, antagonistic to his ambitions, and quite impervious to the new ideas he has gained from unprescribed reading. His first schooling, even if not totally inadequate, may be frustrating insofar as it may suggest options not available to him in his present setting. He therefore, sometimes at a quite early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home (and also the relative innocence), to make his way independently in the city (in the English

> novels, usually London). There his real "education" begins, not only his preparation for a career but also--and often more importantly--his direct experience of urban life. The latter involves at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values. By the time he has decided, after painful soulsearching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. His initiation complete, he may then visit his old home, to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success or the wisdom of his choice. (17-18)

Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship stands at the source of Buckley's English plot outline. Wilhelm's artistic "fancies" are neither encouraged not seriously accepted by his father. Later, even Wilhelm's friend and brother-in-law, Werner, proves to be unsympathetic to his desires. Wilhelm leaves his family and in his travels is free to indulge himself. He experiences numerous hardships and temptations and finally stumbles upon the men at Lothario's who initiate him into his maturity (or at least, adulthood). With the discovery of his son, Felix, Wilhelm closes forever his age of innocence and childhood. In Volume Two, the Travel Years, Wilhelm constantly moves to discover his vocation as a physician--a spiritual as well as occupational endeavor--and finally proves the "success" and "wisdom of his choice" in the act of saving his drowning son's life.

The Bildungsroman entered English through Thomas Carlyle's translations of Wilhelm Meister: Volume I in 1824 and Volume II in 1827. (The two volumes were not published together in English till 1839.) Although G.B. Tennyson considers Dickens' Great Expectations (1860-61) to be the "most complete expression of the English Bildungsroman" (143), Wilhelm Meister's "English kinsmen" are many. Carlyle's own Teufelsdröckh in Sartor Resartus, Book II (1833-34), is a notable example. He is followed "from birth, through childhood, to and through the educational process; he falls in love, suffers, and wanders, experiences doubt and negation, denies it, reaches a plateau of indifference, and finally affirms a belief and a mission" (Tennyson 141). Other examples of the English Victorian Bildungsroman include: Edward Bulwar-Lytton's Pelham (1828) and Ernest Maltravers (1837); Benjamin Disreali's Vivian Grey (1826-27), Contarini Fleming (1832), and Lothair (1870); Thackerey's Pendennis (1848); Dickens David Copperfield (1849-50); Sterling's Arthur Coningsby (1833): G.H. Lewes' Ranthorpe (1842) and Apprenticeship of Life (1850); J.A. Fronde's The Nemisis of Faith (1849); Geraldine Jewsbury's Zoë (1845) and The Half-Sisters (1848); Charles Kingsley's Alton Locke (1850); Thomas Hughes' Tom Brown's Schooldays (1849); George Eliot's The Mill of the Floss (1860); George Meredith's The Ordeal of Richard Feverel (1859), Evan Harrington (1861), and Beauchamp's Career (1874-75); Butler's The Way of All Flesh (1884); Hardy's Jude the Obscure (1895); and George Gissing's Born in Exile (1892).[3]

This partial list of English Bildungsromane betrays a peculiar characteristic of the genre--most often the books are written by

men and the protagonists are male. This latter characteristic is part of Dilthey's first criterion, "a single main character, normally a young man" [italics mine], and is inherent in almost all discussions of the genre. Moon writes, "The occupation to which a man is to give his life is not only a matter for serious thought, but a matter of poetry and philosophy" (5-6) [italics mine]; Buckley writes, "Each of these young men [Pip, David Copperfield, et. al.] experiences privileged moments of insight, epiphanies, spots of time when the reality of things breaks through the fog of delusion. And each then feels a responsibility for change of heart and conduct. For each is what we should call 'inner-directed' . . ." (22-23) [italics mine]. Earlier in his book, Buckley points out that "one of [the Bildungsroman's] recurrent themes is the making of a gentleman" (20) [italics mine].

It is quite possible that there is a perfectly reasonable explanation for this male imperative in the genre. It is commonly understood that, in Buckley's words, "most of the English Bildungsromane are highly autobiographical" (viii); so consequently, it is not surprising that most of the protagonists should be boys and young men because their creators were usually once boys and young men, too. But I think, more accurately, the source of the masculine norm in the Bildungsroman is a social and cultural reality in a patriarchal system. Susanne Howe writes:

> After all--putting aside for the moment Miss Austen's Emma and a few other magnificent exceptions--no one can learn much of anything at home. Going somewhere is the thing. And there--in all sorts of tempting variety--

> is your story. You cannot come to grips with the world and be balked and disappointed and disciplined by it, and finally reach the Celestial City or become a Master in the art of living, or make your choice of life and return quietly to Abyssinia, without at least doing the grand tour or having a few adventures. (1-2)

Using the criteria for the form and content of Bildungsromane provided by Buckley and others, women simply cannot write a "novel of development" because girls and young women, as Howe suggests, are generally not permitted the mobility or independence that young men and boys enjoy--economically, intellectually, sexually, or vocationally. Annis Pratt maintains that "in the Bildungsroman proper, with its expectations that the hero is learning to be an adult [where "adult" is defined by male norms], there is the hidden agenda of gender norms . . ." (16) which define for the female character the scope of her growth.

Howe's emphasis on freedom and mobility in the Bildungsroman is at the heart of why the novel of development, spiritual and personal development, by women about female protagonists cannot be understood completely through a traditional understanding of the term, "Bildungsroman." The Bildungsroman is concerned with socialization, but not social conformity, making an accommodation to the world while at the same time retaining an individual or spiritual integrity. Because guides for socialization are not the same for men as for women at any time in history, the gender of the protagonist is an essential element in the Bildungsroman. What a male protagonist is able to learn of the "nature of the

world," "its meaning and pattern," and "the 'art of living'" is socially and culturally a quite different education than the lessons a female protagonist may learn. She learns her roles in society through elimination of all the things she cannot be because of her sex: she cannot be assertive, intellectual, or productive (other than re-productive).

Instead of these "mature," male-normed qualities, the young woman is told that the nature of the world is for women another sort of nature altogether. Her "mature" nature is to be nurturing, submissive, and weak. Consequently, the meaning and pattern she may reasonably find in the world is not equally valued as a man's. The message she hears for all her life is that her place in the world is as mate, child-bearer, and care-taker and is only incidentally significant to the premier place of men. She must recognize very early, then, that the "art of living" requires of a woman very different preparation. She must first discover herself as a valuable, autonomous person before venturing to develop an art of living. For these reasons, Annis Pratt explains, "Women's fiction reflects an experience radically different from men's because our drive toward growth as persons is thwarted by our society's prescriptions concerning gender" (6).

The quest is the structural foundation of the traditional Bildungsroman, but questing as the male literary tradition defines it is historically available only to males. Carol Christ maintains, "Because female social roles are different from men's, the content of the female quest differs from that of the male" (9). Consequently, the "female quest" in literature must be constructed

from the female experience which is partly formed by the peculiar social circumstances assigned to women. Christ explains that the female quest consists of a series of developmental tasks which are not uncommonly resolved for males as very little boys but which females sometimes never resolve:

> [The female] must break long-standing habits of seeking approval, of trying to please parents, lovers, husbands, friends, children, but never herself. In probing her experience and asking basic questions, a woman may begin to wonder whether she has ever chosen anything she has done. (Christ 9)

Frequently she realizes that she indeed has not "ever chosen anything she has done." So, as a male often begins his quest with an acute sense of purpose, a female often begins her quest with an equally acute sense of "nothingness." Christ writes:

> Women experience emptiness in their own lives--in self-hatred, in self-negation, and in being a victim; in relationships with men; and in the values that have shaped their lives. Experiencing nothingness, women reject conventional solutions and question the meaning of their lives, thus opening themselves to the revelation of deeper sources of power and value. (13)

The female quest, then, is more, sometimes almost exclusively, an interior journey and less an external or physical one. The traditional questing hero, by contrast, may travel inner and outer landscapes with equal accessibility. Women do not have the same range of possible experiences that men have been en-

couraged to pursue. For example, only very recently in history has a woman's geography extended beyond her house, her economics beyond her husband's salary, or her intrinsic worth beyond her offspring. Women who denied those limits or betrayed their assigned "nature" suffered ostracism.

The problem, then, of working with women's fiction using the critical vocabulary of the male literary tradition is a problem of experience. Elaine Showalter contends, "There is clearly a difference between books that happen to have been written by women, and a 'female literature' . . . which purposefully and collectively concerns itself with the articulation of women's experience, and which guides itself 'by its own impulses' to autonomous self-expression" (4). The female Bildungsroman is the sort of female literature which has in the course of 150 years sought to articulate women's experience at different times in history.

All creatures grow up and creatures develop. Therefore, there can be, and there have been, female Bildungsromane. Spiritual, moral, vocational development, and the coming to personhood is not soley the process of becoming men. Women develop in these ways, too, but women must overcome economic dependence, must find value in themselves apart from the family, must assert their individuality before they can be free to start that sort of development. Women must refuse to believe the nature that society attributes them, a nature called weaker, trivial, ownable, or created to serve or be abused. In this is the fundamental difference between male and female Bildungsromane. This thesis

shows how novels of women's development have in different ways through the course of a century and a half created, from the bare skeleton of the traditional male Bildungsroman, stories of female development which reflect, or at least acknowledge, the social and cultural demands of female gender.

There exists in the traditional Bildungsroman "the bold assumption that the 'I' may speak for all humanity and that a painstaking account of the growth of the [writer's] own mind will necessarily reveal much that is characteristic of the whole of man" (Buckley 7). Inadvertantly, perhaps Buckley has revealed the problem: the traditional Bildungsroman may reveal the whole mind of man, but certainly not of women. Again, experience is the issue. It is very clear, I think, that the traditional Bildungsroman is about sensitive boys growing up to be whole men; however, the content of the process by which girls grow up, much less by which they grow up to be whole, does not parallel the process by which young men achieve that sort of wholeness. Annis Pratt states, ". . . the Bildungsroman is essentially a novel of self-hood rather than social conformity" (37), yet historically women have been politically, economically, and socially discouraged from pursuing self-hood. In fact, women's success has ordinarily been measured according to exactly how well they deny self. Pratt explains that according to the tradition of the Bildungsroman, women's novels of development actually pursue the "opposite of [their] generic intent--[the genre] provides models for 'growing down' rather than for 'growing up'" (4).

The three works in this thesis, Jane Eyre, The Awakening,

and The Color Purple, are evidence that the time John Stuart Mill spoke of when women's literature emanicipates itself from "the influence of accepted models, and guide[s] itself by its own impulses" (207) has come. Each novel marks a different kind of development within a uniquely feminine genre--the female Bildungsroman. The chronological outlines of Jane Eyre and The Color Purple follow closely Jerome Buckley's framework. On that basis, the works are recognizable examples of a traditional model. But more important than sequence, they are not of the tradition by virtue of the gender of their central figures. The female protagonist may move in time beside her questing brothers, but she can by no means follow where or how they go and grow because of the primarily social and cultural imperatives of her sex.

The Awakening may not appear to qualify as a Bildungsroman in structure, but it spans a period of time when women were growing increasingly dissatisfied with constraints placed upon them which kept them child-like forever. An adult woman like Edna Pontellier was never expected to grow up. Her development in The Awakening, then, traces her growth, social and cultural growth rather than physical, from childhood to self-hood.

Women's literature since Charlotte Brontë has not simply appropriated or feminized a masculine genre in writing the stories of Jane or Edna or Celie. Brontë, Chopin, and Walker are examples of writers who consciously created and continue to create a genre of their own, one which articulates female development as a process of female experience influenced by social and cultural roles imposed upon women, a genre which comments upon the environ-

ment which has produced and still propagates gender norms and in that way may be termed a feminist medium.

Chapter Two

Jane Eyre

> It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a constraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.
>
> (Jane Eyre 112-113)

Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847) conforms to virtually every element of plot required by Jerome Buckley's definition of the traditional Bildungsroman. Elizabeth Abel believes that Jane conforms "more than any other heroine" to the male Bildungsheld (15). In fact, a point-by-point comparison of the plot and structure of Jane Eyre to Buckley's criteria reveals the perfection to which Brontë employs the chronology and linear structure (Abel, et. al. 11) characteristic of the male Bildungsroman.

First, according to Buckley, "a child of some sensibility grows up in the country or in a provincial town . . .." When we first meet Jane Eyre she is ten years old. Jane is indeed growing up in the country, on a large aristocratic estate belonging to her maternal Aunt and cousins, the Reed family. The significant portion of this first criterion, though, is in the characteristic of the child's requisite "sensibility." A child of no sensibility or who is grossly insensitive to her nature or her environment is incapable of achieving the sort of maturity which the Bildungsroman traces. Three children of the insensible variety are Jane's own cousins, Eliza, Georgianna, and John Reed. Eliza is cold and avaricious; Georgianna is spoiled and vain; John, the literal master/tyrant of the house, is over-indulged and cruel. By contrast, Jane is quite long-suffering and benevolent, but not too long-suffering nor too benevolent. She is neither malicious nor hypocritical. Although Jane is hardly an ideal little girl, she is at least a natural child: she shouts when she is angry; she cries out when she is frightened; she defends herself when she is attacked, physically and emotionally. The reader applauds her acute sense of justice and empathizes with her desire for affection and approval. But Jane receives no affection or approval at the Reeds' estate, Gateshead, because she is resented and despised by her Aunt for reasons difficult to comprehend. Consequently, Jane is excluded from the family, denied even the privileges of a servant, and punished as an insensible child exactly because she does not imitate the Reeds' villainous insensibility.

The next milestone of Buckley's criteria is the child "finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination." Jane's alienation from the Reed family and all their activities effectively constrains her socially and intellectually. She is reduced to the status of a sort of nursery maid. In that capacity she would naturally be excluded from any society with the Reed children. She is not allowed to participate in any family celebrations or daily occasions and so is socially isolated. This would seem to allow greater opportunity for her "free imagination," but actually her attempts to escape through fantasy are punished, particularly evident in the violent book-throwing scene between John Reed and Jane. This episode is also evidence of Buckley's third criterion. The child's family, "especially [the] father, proves doggedly hostile to [her] creative instincts or flights of fancy, antagonistic to [her] ambitions, and quite impervious to the new ideas [she] has gained from unprescribed reading."

In many Bildungsromane, as in Jane Eyre, the protagonist is orphaned or otherwise alienated from the family. The Reeds become Jane's foster-family after the deaths of her natural parents and indeed do prove to be "doggedly hostile" and "impervious" to Jane's instincts. Most odious of these is Jane's passion, her straightforwardness to the point of bluntness, and her refusal to be demeaned, or at least her attempts at such refusal. In place of an especially hostile father, Jane suffers under an especially hostile male cousin, John, who abuses her violently and arbitrarily.

Jane's first schooling, in accordance with Buckley's criterion,

proves to be "if not totally inadequate," at least "frustrating." The inadequacies of Lowood are painfully tangible. Students are starved and frozen as matters of policy, and they are harangued till they are exhausted and susceptible to illness. The frustrations Jane suffers at Lowood are not caused by options she is forbidden to embrace in her present situation, as Buckley's criteria states, but rather the option which are presented are ones she cannot bring herself to embrace.

Jane witnesses the marriage of her teacher, the revered Miss Temple, and she witnesses the premature death of her classmate and friend, Helen Burns. Each of these represent for Jane, however, impossible ideals (Gilbert & Gubar 345). Jane, although she is unaware of it in her innocence, cannot live the obedient life of Miss Temple, nor can she suffer injustice and hope to die young as a martyr. Both Helen's death and later Miss Temple's marriage prepare Jane to leave Lowood on the first leg of her journey in search of another option. Karen E. Rowe explains, "Acquiescent in her servitudes, she can nurture feminine domestic skills and ventures, while dreamily awaiting the romantic prince and marriage as her promised reward; or, according to masculine archetypes, she can defy larger-than-life authorities and journey into foreign environments, seeking a rugged independence, but sacrificing hearth and family comforts" (75). Jane chooses the latter.

At this juncture in the traditional Bildungsroman, Buckley outlines, the boy "leaves the repressive atmosphere of home [Lowood is Jane's home] (and the relative innocence), to make his way

independently in the city . . . usually London . . . ." Jane does indeed leave the "repressive atmosphere" of Lowood, but a respectable young woman could never do so by fleeing to the city alone, and never, never "make [her] way independently" there. Instead, Jane Eyre must devise another path:

> My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems; now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils. (Jane Eyre 87)

But just when the reader is ready for Jane to leap, she admits instead, "I went to my window, opened it, and looked out" (JE 87). Jane cannot simply leap; she must make her way, because of her gender, another way: by independently advertising for the most she can hope for, an honorable new servitude. Jane confesses:

> I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space: "Then," I cried, half deperate, "grant me at least a new servitude!" (JE 88)

By Jane's natural assertiveness, the same strength of will she was punished for as a child, she initiates her own move to Thorn-

field, as cosmopolitan a place as she can get to.

Once in the world, the protagonist of Buckley's traditional Bildungsroman begins his "real 'education' . . . not only his preparation for a career but also--and often more importantly--his direct experience of . . . life." Like her traditional brothers, Jane Eyre begins her first direct experience with life at Thornfield. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar consider the very house a sort of metaphor for Jane's life, "its floors and walls the architecture of her experience" (347). At Thornfield, the segment of Jane's development which occupies the greatest portion of the novel, she is forced to confront other options available to and expected of her. Both of these new possibilities are equally frustrating to Jane's nature as the two she glimpsed at Lowood. She learns first hand of temptation and sexuality, experiences totally new to her. At Lowood she had lived the life of a nun; upon leaving the school she entered a world full of experiences she knew nothing of. Jane's departure from Lowood is, as Karen Rowe describes it, a "fall from innocence . . . painful, yet nonetheless fortunate, because it completes her separation from parent surrogates [like Miss Temple] and wakens her from romantic illusions" (83). Jane is awakened by Rochester who provides her with images of two more options--madness or a life of ill-repute. She may accept a marriage in which she becomes his property to dress up and squirrel away, or she may accept his second offer of a relationship without marriage. Both are morally repulsive to Jane's instinctive sensibilities.

The process of direct experience, according to Buckley,

"involves at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values." Again, Jane Eyre conforms to this criterion, but within the limits of Victorian decorum. Jane encounters men first at Thornfield and later at Marsh End. At first appearance, the affair with Rochester would seem to be her debasing relationship. After all, it is he who proposes an illegal union before which he attempted to remodel the woman he claims to love by dressing her up in furs and showing her off about town. When the wedding is thwarted upon the revelation of Rochester's wife, Bertha, in the attic, Jane suffers disgrace even though she is innocent of wrongdoing. Then Rochester proposes another equally illicit relationship outside of marriage. Of course, Jane cannot be Rochester's mistress any more than she can be his wife. The law prevents the latter; Jane's own self-esteem prevents the former. She refuses to be debased to the status of Rochester's previous Continental mistresses whom he neither really loved nor respected.

The second of her two encounters is really no love affair at all. Yet, St. John Rivers' proposal would appear to be exalting in all the ways Rochester's propositions were debasing. In St. John's concept of marriage, two transcend the flesh and bind together in the service of God. Jane can accept joining in the service of God, but refuses to marry for that reason alone. Jane's concept of marriage is founded on passionate love and equality. Jane does not love her cousin, St. John, any more than he loves her. She finds him far too emotionally cold and physically repulsive.

After much "painful soulsearching," Jane sees, as the reader sees, that what St. John Rivers suggests is truly "debasing." A marriage without love is a travesty of something sacred; but what Rochester offers Jane is truly exalting because his love is sincere. At this point in Buckley's outline, the hero has decided "the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity." But Jane's task is significantly different. Helene Moglen observes:

> . . . [Jane] must consciously relocate herself in a complex hierarchy of values: redefining her relationship to God, to nature, to a heterogeneous society previously unknown. She must create a personality independent enough to be separate within the unity of love, secure enough sexually to temper the passion that cloaks self-abnegation. (131-132)

The initiation complete, the mature protagonist of the tradition returns to his old home "to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success or the wisdom of his choice." In this respect Jane Eyre deviates slightly from the model. Jane does go home, but she actually does so twice, and neither place is really her "home" at all. The first return is instigated by her Aunt Reed's imminent death. Jane returns to Gateshead only to find the inhabitants there unchanged: John Reed has alledgedly committed suicide brought on by difficulties he encounters due to his excess. Eliza Reed is still cold and unfeeling and even more hardened. She eventually leaves her family to take vows as a

atholic neophyte, withdrawing and dissociating herslf com-
letely. Georgianna is still petty and emotional, but hope-
essly empty of any real feeling or sense. Most unchanged of
ll, however, is Aunt Reed herself, who, though repentent of her
eceit in keeping Jane's inheritance from her, cannot bring
erself to reconciliation with Jane. This homecoming is im-
ortant in Jane's development because it illustrates by her ac-
ions the growth she has accomplished at Thornfield. She demon-
trates that she has grown beyond her hate and unforgiveness of
he family, and by stark contrast, reveals her changes compared
o the stagnation of the Reeds. Jane narrates, ". . . I had
eft this women [Aunt Reed] in bitterness and hate, and I came
ack to her now with no other emotion than a sort of ruth for her
reat sufferings, and a strong yearning to forget and forgive all
injuries--to be reconciled and clasp hands in amity" (JE 232).

The second homecoming for Jane is her return to Thornfield
from Marsh End. She is compelled by supernatural ties to return
to Rochester, but only after all steps of her spiritual progression
are complete. On the verge of accepting St. John Rivers' offer
of marriage and mission, Jane is recalled to Rochester. But
Thornfield is in ruins; she can never return to that place. She
finds Rochester, instead, at Ferndean, and there she demonstrates
the extent of her growth accomplished since fleeing Thornfield
by entering confidently a relationship between equals.

Thus, although it first appears that Jane Eyre is simply an
overlay upon a framework plot which had come ready-made into
Bronte's hand, an appropriation of a masculine genre, Jane Eyre

differs significantly from the male traditional model in a number of fundamental aspects. These points of deviation are required by the primary deviance, the gender of the protagonist.

Joanna Russ notes that there are precious few plots in literature in which a female can figure as the dominant or most interesting character (4). Some plots which traditionally do accommodate female characters, though, are fairy tales, love stories, and allegories. Bronte" blends these genres and motifs in Jane Eyre, but at some point in the novel, and therefore in Jane's development, too, each of these traditions prove to have incomplete or inadequate conclusions for Jane.

The novel begins with one of the traditional genres accessible the female characters, what Russ terms the "Abused Child story" in which the heroine begins life a "Sensitive, Mistreated [Waif]" (8). The most widely recognizable example of this type is Cinderella. Like that fairy tale, Jane Eyre begins in classic fashion, complete with wicked "step-mother" and horrible "step"-siblings at whose hands she suffers unwarranted abuse and subhuman respect. Jane is, like Cinderella, merely a servant to her "family." In the fairy tale, the heroine is rescued by the serendipitous intervention of a Fairy God-mother or a Handsome Prince. Jane has Bessie and the kind apothecary to fulfill these roles at Gateshead, but they rescue her only into a worse condition by instigating the departure to Lowood School. Still, Jane knows she would rather suffer the deprivations of Lowood than be returned to Gateshead's refinements. Consequently, Jane is freed by outside agents from the evil clutches of her foster-

family. Thus, the first step of her independence, the first task of her initiation, is achieved through the aid of others. But, the fairy tale ends there. Cinderella, after a good deal of anguish, is found by her Handsome Prince who marries her, and they live happily ever after. In Cinderella, as in the fairy tale archetype, the heroine is allowed no independent action; all is accomplished for her, and things are done to her. Jane Eyre departs from this genre as Jane grows to discard immature fancies of love and happiness she learned from the worldly Rochester, who is also responsible for her disillusionment. According to Elizabeth R. Baer, Jean Rhys finds:

> The point of Jane Eyre . . . is that Jane's transformation is not magical, temporary, and external, as was Cinderella's, but internal and thorough. And that she gains equality with Rochester not by having the correct shoe size but by heeding the warning of Bertha and refusing marriage until it is based on equality. (147)

Cinderella-endings are not acceptable to Jane Eyre and she breaks with the tradition to actively seek her own course. Baer explains, ". . . Jane Eyre was a revision of the Cinderella story for nineteenth-century readers, suggesting that not only marriage but also autonomy constitutes the happy ending . . ." (132). Jane initiates her own severence from the innocence of fairy tales when she leaves Lowood and completes it at Marsh End ultimately to enter the adult world.

One cannot deny that Jane Eyre is certainly a love story. The boy meets girl, or rather girl meets boy, motif makes up

large part of the action in the novel. But Joanna Russ explains, "For female protagonists," like Jane, "the Love Story includes not only personal relations as such, but bildungsroman, worldly success or worldly failure, career, the exposition of character, crucial learning experiences, the transition to adulthood, rebellion . . . and everything else" (9). But nonetheless, the love story is a variation of the Cinderella-story, and like the Cinderella-ending, the traditional romance ends in marriage and a happy ever after. Although Jane's story does indeed end in marriage, it is a considerably different sort of marriage. The Cinderella sort of marriage is the type which Rochester first proposed. Jane cannot enter it. She must leave Thornfield, instead, and in so doing, renounces that sort of ending because, in Karen Rowe's words, it "subverts [her] independence and human equality" (70). Jane comes to realize on the second phase of her journey, that spent at Marsh End, the sort of alternative necessary for her. She learns that she can only enter marriage as a union between equals.

The third genre in which women often appear as central figures is the Christian or didactic allegory. There is something unreal about parable and the characters who travel in them. Because allegory provides a strong metaphorical framework, Jane Eyre may venture off on her quest in ways she is forbidden to in real life by respectable Victorian standards. The allegorical elements of Jane Eyre permit her to move about without snapping a Victorian's (or Modern's, for that matter) willing suspension of disbelief. Gilbert and Gubar maintain that ". . . Jane Eyre

a parable about an Everywoman who must encounter and triumph over a series of allegorical perils . . ." (380). They go on to explain, ". . . the goal of her pilgrimage [is] maturity, independence, [and] true equality with Rochester (and therefore in a sense the rest of the world). . ." (358).

Glimpses of allegory are scattered throughout the novel. Names of people and places often suggest qualities or conditions, manifestations of trials or tribulations to be overcome by the quester, not Christian of Pilgrim's Progress, but Jane Eyre. This is achieved sometimes by metaphor, sometimes allusion, sometimes onomatopoeia: Thornfield, the stickiest part of Jane's journey, certainly the most painful; Marsh End, where Jane's spiritual march ends; Ferndean, an image of natural growth and fertility (Gilbert & Gubar). Miss Temple, Helen Burns; Grace Poole; St. John, Diana, and Mary Rivers; and the Reeds, all carry significant instruction in their very names. (Compare, for instance, Jane's life among the Reeds" to her life amidst the "Rivers.") Helene Moglen finds:

> . . . the novel is so much the story of the heroine's psychological development that people and situations seem often to be generated as alternative value systems that she [Jane] must explore as aspects of her growth. . . . as in fairy tale or the quest-romance, characters, situations, and symbols must be rehearsed again and again, the heroine experiencing with each new revelation an increment of pressure and intensity, until the ultimate resolution of conflict is achieved. (108)

Allegory also resembles the Bildungsroman in its traditional three stage structure: separation, descent/initiation, and return.[4] At the level of allegory, Jane is able to take on the dimensions of an Everywoman. In that capacity, Arthur Zeiger recognizes, in an Afterword to the Signet Classic Jane Eyre, that readers may find corroboration of their own experiences and "discover much of themselves . . . illumined" (460). Such is the purpose of allegories as well as Bildungsromane.

The single most dominant image throughout Jane Eyre is of enclosure and subsequent escape (Gilbert & Gubar 339). The book begins with such an image, and it is sustained by the action up to the supernatural calling of Rochester to Jane and her final escape from St. John Rivers. The novel opens under the weight of an oppressive atmosphere. Jane's story begins with the matter of fact announcement that "outdoor exercise was out of the question." The very weather at Gateshead, the name itself a meaningful start, contributes to Jane's confinement. On that same afternoon Jane is incarcerated in the Red Room, a cruelly severe punishment for an unjust accusation. The Red Room, its heavy furnishings, locked door, perfect solitude and isolation is the seat of Jane's fear. It comes to represent a space haunted by discontented spirits: for the little girl, they are ghosts; for the reader, they symbolize Jane's own discontented spirit. When Jane spies herself in the mirror she looks pale, like a ghost, a dead thing. Her only escape is through a "species of fit," a brief, temporary insanity.

This kind of enclosure/escape imagery becomes an essential

etaphor of Jane's story and indeed of other female Bildungs-romane. It is more than a symbol of oppression and liberation; it is the process by which Jane's development is achieved, a characteristic peculiar to Bildungsromane by and about women.

The trauma of her imprisonment in the Red Room follows Jane for the rest of her days. Throughout the novel, images of captivity abound, especially those of birds. For example, Jane says, "I see at intervals the glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage: a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there; were it but free, it would soar cloud-high" (JE 142). These images are sharply contrasted by Jane's characteristic attitude: at the window, on the roof, yearning to be away. But none of these images evokes the kind of atmosphere as the incident in the Red Room, which informs all the rest of the story. It stands as an emblem of arbitrary imprisonment and functions as the most literal example of the enclosure/escape imagery in Jane Eyre. The Red Room prepares the reader for the more figurative enclosures and escapes later in the novel.

Ten-year-old Jane laments that she can never be away from Gateshead until she is a woman. She is convinced that escape from the oppressive atmosphere of Gateshead and the Reed family is as impossible as is escaping literally from the Red Room. In a sense, her swoon in the Red Room instigates the "escapes" from both. Such escape, though, is the stuff of Cinderella stories. In this part of Jane's story, her "Prince," the facilitator of many fairy tale escapes, is the apothecary. Actually, then, Jane does not escape; rather, she is rescued.

Of course, at Lowood Jane is incarcerated as she was at Gateshead. We are told that Jane never leaves the grounds or immediate vacinity during her tenure there. It is as though Jane had been rescued only to be placed in a new prison. But at Lowood, Jane is not really unhappy. She has intellectual and spiritual allies there to defend and support her against the oppressive Brockelhurst. But eventually, events at Lowood stir Jane's discontent. Miss Temple's wedding uncovers for Jane the extent of her limitations and spiritual enclosure at Lowood. With Miss Temple at Lowood, Jane's need for respect and equality are met. With Miss Temple goes Jane's intellectual diversion. When Miss Temple leaves to start her marriage, Jane is left with nothing at Lowood. She plots her own escape.

Jane's journey of development, or in Gilbert and Gubar's term, "pilgrimage," is a constant movement or flight from one situation that is or represents enclosure, or the threat of it, to the next. At Thornfield, Jane is made to recognize the enclosures other than her own, and so extends the metaphor beyond herself to women in general.

Thornfield is a literal prison for Bertha Rochester. She is serving a life sentence in the abandoned tower of the house--Grace Poole, her guard; Mrs. Fairfax, the warden in the absence of Rochester himself. Bertha's confinement parallels the confinement of young Jane in the Red Room at Gateshead. Bertha is punished, exactly as Jane was punished, for her passion and her failure to be what the "Master" of the house, either Rochester or John Reed, wished her to be. If Bertha were not mad when she

was locked in the attic, it certainly made her that way. She, too, escapes the confinement only by suffering a "species of fit," albeit a much more tragic one than Jane's.

On the verge of becoming, like Bertha, a permanent resident of the prison/house, Thornfield, Jane is literally awakened to the madwoman's plight. Jane sees what seems to be a spirit in her room which tears her wedding veil. Again, like her experience in the Red Room, Jane loses consciousness in a "species of fit." After recognizing the nature of her situation at Thornfield, Jane again makes an escape, but this time by running alone into an uncertain future. Rather than depending upon some prince or fairy god-mother and rather than running to yet another new imprisonment, Jane is "rescued" this time by herself, calling on a female emblem, the moon, for guidance and instruction. She responds to an internal savior and calls her "Mother."

At Marsh End, although Jane is not completely happy as the schoolmistress of farmers' daughters, she is free and relatively independent. This independence, however, is granted her. Her inheritance and newly discovered position in society mark the means by which Jane may make her final escape.

The enclosure proposed by St. John Rivers is characterized by its permanence. Jane cannot accept St. John's offer to go with him in the service of God as a sister might go because, according to St. John, sisters leave their brothers eventually. Jane must be his wife because that represents a bond that is unbreakable, unescapeable. Jane is very nearly tempted to enter the enclosure St. John offers her at the very moment she is

supernaturally called to flee. Jane demonstrates here, at the end of her journey, her ability to successfully avoid enclosure and asserts her autonomy and mature self-hood by saying "no" to entrapment.

Jane is now free from the threat of St. John's "prison" and returns to Rochester, not at Ferndean. Thornfield, Bertha's prison, has been destroyed just as Jane had dreamed it would be. Jane may stay with Rochester now because Ferndean is no prison. The place is wild and unconstrained as its name suggests. Only in these conditions can Jane abide.

The predominant imagery of enclosure, either physical confinement or spiritual oppression, and successful escape from it suggests the major tasks in Jane's development. Jane must confront a series of enclosing situations, all slightly different from one another, culminating in one which threatens permanence, in order to resolve tensions between equally seductive options of submissiveness/equality, dependence/independence, definition by association/self-definition. These options represent Jane's developmental hurtles. Only after she has successfully chosen equality, independence, and self-definition can she return to Rochester in her full maturity.

These tasks manifest themselves in the plot of Jane Eyre in Jane's conflicts concerning marriage. Jane claims early that she will never marry:

> "What tale do you like best to hear?"
>
> "Oh, I have not much choice! They generally run on the same theme--courtship; and promise to end in the same catastrophe--marriage."

"And do you like that monotonous theme?"

"Positively, I don't care about it: it is nothing to me." (JE 200)

But every reader knows that Jane must marry. The suspense is not if, but how she will marry. The manner in which Jane concludes her developmental tasks will determine the way she will be wed. This plot has its roots in traditional romance, as we have seen. But the union Jane arrives at at Ferndean after her long period of development is what makes this love story very different from others of the period.

Rochester's first marriage proposal presupposes the same sort of socially-correct submissiveness he could expect from a woman-wife like Blanche Ingram. He attempts to change Jane into what he wants similar to the way he changed Antoinette's name to Bertha. Rochester's previous dealings with women have been demeaning to them and all indications point to a similar pattern in his expectations to marry Jane. But, Jane frequently and stubbornly asserts herself by speaking of her equality to Rochester and demanding that she continue Adele's education. She exclaims, "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will . . ." And Rochester replies, "And your will shall decide your destiny" (JE 256). Jane refuses the proposal to be Rochester's possession, a submissive Victorian ideal.

St. John Rivers' marriage proposal is unacceptable because it too requires and presupposes Jane's subbmission. St. John wants her to accompany him not as a partner, but as a helper, an aide, an underling. Jane can consent to a partnership as brother

nd sister, fellow servants of God, but she cannot consent to ecome a servant of St. John. Once again, Jane asserts her utonomy and refuses marriage.

The key to Jane's practical ability to enter a union of equality with Rochester and avoid submission is her inheritance. The money Jane receives from her Uncle allows her greater independence than she could ever hope to earn as a woman. Only after the economic dependence of her sex is lifted, or at least eased, can Jane really choose to rejoin Rochester. Before that happy turn of events when Jane discovers both her wealth and her family, Jane would, by requirement of her gender and social position, depend on someone or else continue to teach cloddish farmers' daughters. As long as she is economically dependent, submissiveness is inevitable. The economic freedom she is given makes her culmination and final assertion possible.

In Victorian society, a woman was defined by her relations to others, most significantly men. She would be judged according to the position and reputation of her father, brothers, uncles, male cousins, many others, but never her own merit. The only position or reputation a woman could make for herself was a bad one. As an adult, a respectable lady was defined by her husband's position and reputation. Consequently, marriage was a very serious matter. But Jane obviously operates from a very different premise. She avers she will marry only because of sincere love, deep emotion, and only when such a union can be between equals. Jane marries Rochester because at the end of her trial she finds those three conditions at Ferndean. Rochester has been made to

recognize his weakness, his dependence. Jane has learned to assert her strength, her independence. She has been "her own mistress," spent time as no one's servant, sister, daughter, niece, or wife. She has defined herself in relation to no one.

Jane Eyre differs from the traditional Bildungsroman in that the major character has no "great expectations" along her way. Her journey is not driven by a wanderlust or thirst for exotic adventures. She is fueled by much more immediate concerns. Jane Eyre's development is driven forward by the desire to free herself, to escape enclosure. Her trek is marked by a certain desperation which does not fit into Buckley's description of the tradition's characteristics. The young men of the tradition are rather leisurely sorts of fellows, stumbling around the country like Wilhelm Meister. Jane is not questing for a suitable vocation as Wilhelm was, but rather searching for a suitable alternative to the only vocation she could reasonably have. Her Bildungsroman is not a matter of what to do with her life, but how to live the life she must.

Chapter Three

The Awakening

> In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her.
>
> (The Awakening 25)

Kate Chopin's The Awakening (1899) appears to be a wholly different sort of book than that which is typically called a Bildungsroman. We may safely assume that Jerome Buckley certainly would not consider it such. Undeniably, The Awakening deviates significantly from his criteria. First, Chopin's book focuses almost entirely on the adult life of the protagonist, Edna Pontellier. Edna's childhood is mentioned only very briefly. Second, the whole of Edna's "awakening" is accomplished in a matter of months, unlike Wilhelm Meister's or Jane Eyre's. Third, Edna makes no lengthy or arduous journeys. Her travels are confined to a relatively small area of Louisiana and the nearby islands. In fact, Edna flatly refuses to make the trips to New York and Europe which her husband, Leonce, proposes. Fourth, Edna is at home in the big city, New Orleans. She experiences no trial associated with a strange metropolis. Fifth, Edna is an established member of a respectable social circle. Outwardly at least, she does not appear to be alienated. Sixth, instead of two contrasting love affairs, Edna has three, in a way, all

of which are debasing. Seventh and eighth, in the end Edna effectively makes no accommodation to the world as is required of the Bildungsroman's central character. (She commits suicide in the Gulf of Mexico.) Consequently, Edna cannot, or so it seems, return home to demonstrate her growth and newly developed wisdom.

Obviously then, The Awakening fails Buckley's criteria in all the ways that Jane Eyre succeeds. The questions may reasonably be asked, then, by what rationale can The Awakening be included among the tradition of the female Bildungsroman which Jane Eyre inaugurated only fifty-two years earlier? And, indeed, how can The Awakening be called a Bildungsroman at all?

The responses to both questions may be found in the fact that a woman's years of shaping and formation are not limited to adolescence and young adulthood because she is traditionally expected to remain child-like all her life. Dependent and deferring, emotional and impetuous, petty and irresponsible are all adjectives often used to describe children, but also frequently applied to adult women. Edna Pontellier's development in the novel is a process of leaving a psychological childhood very much like a chronological child leaves it. This sort of developmental retardation is characteristic of many female Bildungsromane. These are often called "novels of awakening," according to Elizabeth Abel. Chopin's book is the prototype, where, as Abel explains, ". . . development is delayed by inadequate education until adulthood, when it blossoms momentarily, then dissolves" (11). Abel goes on to point out, "For many heroines,

development does not proceed gradually from stage to stage . . ." (11). In the novel of awakening, Abel writes:

> The protagonists grow significantly only after fulfilling the fairy-tale expectation that they will marry and live "happily ever after." Because it frequently portrays a break not from parental but from marital authority, the novel of awakening is often a novel of adultery. Second, development may be compressed into brief epiphanic moments. Since the significant changes are internal, flashes of recognition often replace the continuous unfolding of an action. (12)

It is this pattern which Kate Chopin's book follows, rather than the traditional pattern.

Although Edna Pontellier is twenty-eight years old, she is treated by those around her as if she were a child. She is introduced in the novel and immediately scolded by her husband, Leonce, for swimming so late in the morning and allowing herself to become sunburned. He calls her morning activities "folly," and speaks to her in tones much like the ones he uses with the children. He speaks demands and expects obedience without hesitation. He undercuts her ambitions and feelings by attributing them to a "phase," something she will eventually outgrow. His concern is that she may be associating with a bad crowd, the "pseudo-intellectual women." These attitudes are those of the parent-child relationship, not adult-adult. In addition, her loves before her marriage are dismissed as crushes and melodramatic. She "loves" the jingling soldier and the tragedian. Her loves

after marriage, Robert Lebrun and Alcee Arobin, are consequently not taken very seriously either. As Edna grows more and more dissatisfied with life as a child, the role she is required to play in her station as Leonce Pontellier's wife, she proceeds on a quest much like the children of other Bildungsromane.

In the traditional Bildungsroman, or in books patterned after it, like Jane Eyre, the protagonist is alienated from her or his family either by domestic strife or death. This is not the case in The Awakening. Edna is indeed alienated from her father and sisters, husband and sons, and the extended family of the society she is expected to be a part of as Leonce Pontellier's wife, but by forces and circumstances other than disinheritance or death. Edna is quite disinterested in her sister's wedding not because of any ill-feeling, but because she believes, quite simply, that there is nothing so dismal as a wedding. Although Edna is very polite to her father when he comes to visit in New Orleans, she is noticeably cool. Perhaps more importantly, though, Edna is an outsider among the Creoles, even isolated from her husband and children. In that respect, Edna is simultaneously a part of and apart from those she lives among. Chopin writes in the novel:

> Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles . . .. They all knew each other, and felt like one large family, among whom existed the most amicable relations. A characteristic which distinguished them and which impressed Mrs. Pontellier most forcibly was their en-

> tire absence of prudery. Their freedom of expression was at first incomprehensible to her . . . . (TA 18-19)

Edna is also set apart from her society by her physical appearance, "the graceful severity of poise and movement, which made Edna Pontellier different from the crowd" (TA 27). Madame Ratignolle states it explicitly to Robert Lebrun that Edna Pontellier "is not one of us; she is not like us" (TA 35). So, although Edna is not abused or even treated rudely as Jane Eyre is, and although she is not really on bad terms with any family members as Wilhelm Meister is, she is still very much as isolated and alienated as they.

Physical travel does not play as great a role in the novel of awakening as in the traditional Bildungsroman. Edna, for example, does not really go anywhere. She travels only within a few miles of her home and no further. Yet, it is not the distance but the motion itself that is essential to development. In this sense, Edna moves about a great deal. At the beginning of the novel and Edna's awakening, she is at Grand Isle, a vacation not very different from any other summer of her married years. This summer is very different than others, though, because of Robert Lebrun. Edna returns after the summer to her home, New Orleans, the city, where she is initiated into passion, but not with Robert. Later, Edna moves out of her home while her husband and sons are away. Although she moves only around the corner from her husband's house, in the eyes of her society she may as well have moved a million miles.

In a very real sense, Grand Isle is the birthplace of Edna's

individuality, so when she returns to the island after the birth of Madame Ratignolle's child, she is making a sort of homecoming similar to the ones found in traditional Bildungsromane. The act of her suicide there is a peculiar demonstration of her wisdom and greater knowledge, but in the very act of destroying herself she in commenting on the sort of accommodation to the world she can reasonably make. The suicide of Edna Pontellier at the end of The Awakening has been variously interpreted. Marianne Hirsch points out points out, "In her conscious ambivalence, Chopin skirts the issue of whether the suicide is a triumph or a failure. What she does emphasize very clearly, however, is that it is a repetition and therefore a culmination of Edna's initial moment of awakening, a logical outcome of her inward growth" (44). Apart from arguments as to the strength or weakness, success or failure, exhibited in Edna's suicide, the act is a sign of everything she has learned or come to understand in the few months of her awaking. She recognizes and then acts on the truth that for her there can be no satisfactory accommodation to the world; her suicide is a renunciation of the world, the society, which allows her only limited possibilities. Per Seyersted believes:

> . . . her suicide is the crowning glory of her development from the bewilderment which accompanied her early emancipation to the clarity with which she understands her own nature and the possibilities of her life as she decides to end it. Edna's victory lies in her awakening to an independence that includes an act of renunciation. (150)

Elizabeth Abel finds that suicide is a common conclusion of novels of awakening, but that "the deaths in which these fictions so often culminate represent less developmental failures than refusals to accept an adulthood that denies profound convictions and desires" (11). Marianne Hirsch goes further to explain:

> Seen in the context of the Bildungsroman's valorization of progress, heterosexuality, social involvement, healthy disillusionment, "normality," adulthood, these deaths are pointless, violent, self-destructive. Yet if we look at what adulthood and maturity mean for the female protagonists of these texts, at the confinement, discontinuity, and stifling isolation that define marriage and motherhood, they do not present positive options. . . . this withdrawal . . . is a renunciation in a limited sense only: in another, it emerges as a different kind of affirmation. (27-28)

Edna Pontellier's development is one which forces her to recognize the disparity between her spirit and her reality. The narrator tells us that Edna "at a very early period . . . had apprehended instinctively the dual life--that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (TA 26). She was "beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her" (TA 25). This kind of recognition spurs her on to a quest that is at once an inner, spiritual quest and an outer, social quest. Seyersted terms this double quest, "Pontellierism." He goes on to explain that it "represents a

wish for clarity and willingness to understand one's inner and outer reality, besides a desire to dictate one's own role rather than to slip into patterns prescribed by tradition" (139). These two concurrent quests are parts of the larger task of reconciling the two. According to Carol Christ, "While she may not put it into these words, Edna's quest is for wholeness--for a total sexual and creative life as a woman. Like recent feminists, she implicitly rejects the choice of either a conventional sexual life in a marriage that allows no time for her to express her creativity, or the solitary spinsterhood of a woman who is devoted to her art and career" (28). Edna ultimately learns that such reconciliation is not possible for her, nor apparently any woman in that society. This discovery is aided by the manifestations of both facets in pure measures in the women close to her. Much as Jane Eyre encounters human beings who represent alternatives, so Edna encounters two women who represent the polarity of the two facets she is attempting to merge. Adele Ratignolle is the social ideal, the embodiment of the "mother-woman." Madamoiselle Reisz is the spiritual ideal, the embodiment of what Peggy Skaggs calls the "artist-woman." Edna does not desire the middle ground between the two, but all of both in one. Her Bildungsroman traces her attempt to be both in equal purity; her quest is to integrate both ideals, plus sensuality and sexuality, to form a whole, autonomous human being.

In the words of Per Seyersted, ". . . Adele is a striking illustration of the patriarchal ideal of the submissive female who writes her history only through her family" (140). She is

the mother-woman. She does literally nothing for herself: she plays the piano not for the art, as does Madamoiselle Reisz, but only for her family--as part of her elaborate duty to her home and family--fulfilling her role as ideal mother-woman. When Edna responds most deeply to Reisz' playing, Adele is most concerned with social standing and appearances. Or, as Skaggs puts it, ". . . Edna's aesthetic responsiveness continues to deepen in tandem with her unfolding awareness of herself as a discrete individual. Adele, clinging tenaciously to her limited existence as the perfection of motherhood, keeps the door to this sort of response tightly closed" (23).

Adele defers to her husband's every whim; her opinions are stereotyped and unoriginal. At the dinner where Edna learns of Robert's plan to go to Mexico, Chopin writes:

> Madame Ratignolle hoped that [he] would exercise extreme caution in dealing with the Mexicans, who, she considered, were a treacherous people, unscrupulous and revengeful. She trusted she did them no injustice in thus condemning them as a race. She had known personally but one Mexican, who made and sold excellent tamales, and whom she would have trusted implicitly, so soft-spoken was he. One day he was arrested for stabbing his wife. She never knew whether he had been hanged or not. (TA 71-72)

To Adele, people are types, not individuals, because, however charming, she is herself only a type, not an individual. In the Ratignolle's marriage, according to Peggy Skaggs, their "perfect

union results more from the extinction of Adele's individuality than from the union of their two identities" (91). It is this which Edna instinctively understands and desires to avoid.

But in reality, Edna's outer existence, her social life, is not unlike Madame Ratignolle's. In the six years of her marriage to a husband who is admittedly as good as any other, "Mrs. Pontellier was forced to admit that she knew of none better" (TA 15), she has kept reception days, obeyed his demands without question--without even thinking of doing otherwise--, given birth to his sons and adequately cared for them and their home. But the stirrings that summer at Grand Isle make her realize that she cannot be, indeed is not, a mother-woman. In fact, she comes to pity Adele and mother-women because

> the little glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her [the Ratignolles'], gave her no regret, no longing. It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui. She was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle--a pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment in which no moment of anguish ever visited her soul, in which she would never have the taste of life's delirium. (TA 93-94)

Edna's first experience with deep feeling and physical passion that summer, swimming in the ocean, reveals by contrast the lack of passion in her ordinary existence. Edna knows she must constantly repress her deep emotion in order to satisfy those attached

to her--husband, children. She must repress it because passion is an individual matter, a private and most personal feeling. Passion makes a person feel her self, and she must then acknowledge that she is an individual. Peggy Skaggs notes, "As [Edna] 'becomes herself,' she responds more fully to both aesthetic and sexual stimuli. But these responses are secondary; only by developing as a human being can she come to experience fully the deepest human joys" (104). Mother-women, like Adele, however, are cut off from the "deepest human joys" because they are not individuals; they are ministering angels and madonnas. Adele feels her greatest passion when she is in the greatest pain--childbirth.

By contrast to the mother-women, Madamoiselle Reisz is the embodiment of the "artist-woman." She is clearly no ministering angel. She is annoyed by children; she lives a loveless life; people don't even like her. The man at the grocery is glad to hear that she had moved when Edna inquires where she may be found. Even Edna is not very sure she likes her. Reisz is socially inept in all the ways Adele Ratignolle is not. Reisz dresses eccentrically, is not very graceful or pretty, is neither a gracious hostess nor guest. But Madamoiselle Reisz is an artist; she understands dreams and spirit in ways that Adele does not, in ways that Edna Pontellier wishes to. Madamoiselle Reisz also understands the great sacrifice and strength required of the artist-woman. When Edna tells her, "I am becoming an artist," Reisz replies, ". . . to succeed the artist must possess the courageous soul . . .. The brave soul. The soul that dares and defies" (TA

105-106). Much of what Reisz explains to Edna, though, is not understood. Edna is more bewildered than inspired by her: "When I left her today," Edna says, "she put her arms around me and felt my shoulder blades, to see if my wings were strong, she said. 'The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings" (TA 138). But Edna is sure she is "not thinking of any extraordinary flights" (TA 138).

Edna imagines herself an artist. She dedicates herself to more serious painting after returning from the island, and even manages to sell a few pictures. Edna empathizes with the impulse to create; she is moved literally to tears by the artistry of Reisz' playing. Chopin writes in the novel,

> The very first chords which Madamoiselle Reisz struck upon the piano sent a keen tremor down Mrs. Pontellier's spinal column. It was not the first time she had heard an artist at the piano. Perhaps it was the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth. (TA 44)

But Edna cannot be an artist because she does not fully comprehend what in her society she must sacrifice in order to be one. Edna cannot live without love as Madamoiselle Reisz lives. What Edna must do is bring the two extremes together. When she discovers that the two are repellent one to the other because of social imperatives, she realizes, too, that she cannot live at either pole. She is, according to Peggy Skaggs, "more honest in her self-awareness than Adele, more dependent upon human relationships than Madamoiselle Reisz . . ." (96). The resolving of this sort

of conflict is required only of women. Men must not choose between art or career or self-awareness and human relationships. Such dilemmas are unique to the female novel of development.

Edna Pontellier's education is further aided by the three men in her life. Annis Pratt believes, ". . . Edna enjoy[s] green-world ecstasies and visions of naturistic lovers, and . . . perish[es] as a result of trying to pursue [her] apatriarchal vision" (76). Although seemingly very different sorts of men, and although they offer, as least to Edna's romantic perceptions, three very different relationships, Edna is in the end disillusioned to learn that they all lead her toward a single fate. All do, or will, fragment her, force her to reside at one pole or the other, but can never allow her, nor even understand her desire, to merge the poles.

Leonce Pontellier represents the conventional, socially acceptable marriage. Edna felt that "as the devoted wife of a man who worshiped her, . . . she would take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality, closing the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dreams" (TA 33). Indeed, Leonce does provide her with nice things, a flawless reputation. He is kind to her, and he really believes he adores her. But the reader knows from the first page that although he thinks he loves her madly, he is as cold as any respectable husband/protector/authority in his society. He speaks to her as if she were a child. He makes demands and expects nothing short of complete obedience. He regards her as one of his precious possessions and little more, "looking at his wife as one looks as a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered

some damage" (TA 7). He is this way not because he is bad, but because he, too, is playing an elaborate role, behaving in the socially mandated manner of husbands toward their mother-women. It is exactly this sort of role-playing, not-feeling, that Edna learns she hates. There is no real animosity in her marriage, but neither is there any real love, and certainly no passion. Leonce, of course, does not understand Edna's dissatisfaction in the least, rather he wonders if maybe she is crazy:

> It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier's mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world. (TA 96)

Alcee Arobin, the dashing ladies' man, is the object of Edna's sexual awakening. He is the outlet for the sexual passion she has come to feel, brought to the surface with her sensuality in the swim at Grand Isle. Yet, even the carefree Arobin, the one with the reputation for ruining women's reputations, begins to slip into the very mode of behavior which Edna is trying to extract herself from, the one represented by her husband. Arobin begins by taking liberties with her privacy, walking uninvited into her house. He plops down in her own space, the small house, as if he were the master there and not she the mistress. Although he is a rather thoughtful lover, Arobin begins to assume the same attitude as Leonce Pontellier. By his sex, Arobin believes he has somehow purchased Edna's individuality. Very soon

Edna comes to understand that she can never possibly integrate her inner and outer lives with Arobin, primarily because she feels no real love for him, only sexual attraction.

Robert Lebrun, however, is the man she truly loves. He is young, flirtatious, daring, exciting. He excites her sexuality and respects her sensuality. While they are together at Grand Isle, he seems to understand her changes. He shares her time, unlike Leonce who runs off to the club; he sympathizes with her and allows her to feel freely. But he is frightened of his own emotion and removes himself to Mexico in order to avoid an inevitable affair. All the while Robert is away, Edna fantasizes about him and their relationship. When Robert does return, she believes she is finally on the brink of accomplishing her totality, the integration she has been moving toward. Then, she learns that even Robert is part of the same cloth as Leonce and Arobin. Marianne Hirsch asserts, "Edna can find no external person or place that could contain or comprehend her newfound self, and, ultimately, it is her utter solitude that kills her" (43). Robert considers her property to be acquired from another man, an exchange of ownership. She is a possession, like livestock, to be transferred. Robert confesses to Edna, "Oh! I was demented, dreaming of wild, impossible things, recalling men who had set their wives free, we have heard of such things" (TA 178). Edna comes to realize then the truth. She says to Robert,

> You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of

> Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say "Here, Robert, take her and be happy, she is yours," I should laugh at you both. (TA 178)

This speech betrays Edna's tremendous growth and suggests Robert's hopeless inability to understand. Edna is disillusioned, but, according to Per Seyersted,

> What pains Edna is her realization that the idea of the great passion with its hefty, personal attachment, its oneness with the beloved is largely a fiction, a euphemistic disguise for a basically sexual attraction, an animalistic, impersonal drive. (147)

I have said there are three men in Edna's life which aid her in her development. That is not exactly true. There are two others, Raoul and Ettiene, her sons. As characters in the novel they are hardly important at all, but as factors in Edna's development they become centrally important.

Throughout The Awakening, motherhood is a recurrent theme. Near the end of the novel, Edna is called away just as she is about to explain to Robert what she has discovered about herself. She is summoned to Adele Ratignolle's delivery, a bi-annual affair. Adele exhorts Edna, through her labor pangs, to "remember the children." Edna, who up to this point has been able to "forget" her children--they are away at her mother-in-law's--realizes that the reconciliation she desires, the speech she had only moments earlier made so definitively to Robert, is in reality impossible. True enough, she may give herself to

whomever she chooses; she can divorce herself from whomever. She can move on her own impulses and by her own energy. She can, in some ways, choose. Edna had earlier in the novel said of such autonomy, "I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence," and the narrator adds, ". . . but whatever came, she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself" (TA 133). But the birth scene and Adele's exhortation remind Edna of the one relationship she cannot choose or divorce herself from. She cannot choose to be or not to be her sons' mother. She simply is and all the awakening to her self does not alter or nullify her social responsibility to her children. This realization marks Edna's final moment of awakening. She is now fully conscious of all the impediments to her fulfillment. Karen E. Rowe writes:

> Edna's awakening tells her that she has no existence apart from her children, her husband, or other men. And without "existence," there is no point in living. If she is not a mistress or a wife and mother, if she is unwilling to be a mistress or a wife and mother, what is she? (273)

Consequently, Edna's "consciousness kills her," but as Carol Christ points out, the suicide reflects "spiritual triumph but social defeat" (27). Edna's suicide is, unquestionably, self-destructive and so is an indication of her inability to accommodate the world in the traditional Bildungsroman fashion. Yet, her suicide is also a victorious gesture because it is the culmination of Edna's growth and self-awareness. In that way, the

suicide is a satisfactory ending to this female Bildungsroman.

The scene of Edna's death is the ocean in which she first felt her awakening senses. The ocean becomes, then, the controlling metaphor of the novel, suggesting the structural metaphor of birth, which in turn suggests the theme, emergence.

The ocean in The Awakening, like the moon in Jane Eyre, is the agent for great change in the protagonist. The ocean, also like the moon, is a traditionally female symbol. Per Seyersted writes:

> Mrs. Chopin's ocean suggests a number of primordial qualities which later commentators on this archetypal element have emphasized in it: It is our beginning and our end (Freud); it is a free place, but therefore also a lonely place of alienation (W.H. Auden); and it is an element which inspires to spiritual endeavor (Gaston Bachelard). (151)

The ocean as a metaphor is also associated with the womb, fertility, and cycles. It is simultaneously invigorating and frightening. When Edna first swims, the scene is described this way:

> a feeling of exultation . . . [which overtakes her], as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before.
>
> As she swam, she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself. (TA 47-48)

The ocean and her motion in it awaken her sensuality and begin her quest.

Birth, suggested by the amniotic ocean, is both a literal and symbolic element in The Awakening. Adele's period of gestation results, naturally, in the birth of a child. Peggy Skaggs notes, too, that "Edna's 'awakening' progresses simultaneously with Adele's pregnancy; thus the structure of the novel is related to the basic, natural rhythm of the human gestation cycle" (89). Edna's gestation culminates, however, not in the birth of a child, but in her own birth as an adult, the emergence of a mature human being. The language used to describe the suicide scene is the language of birthing: "How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! how delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known" (TA 189).

Birth is a process of emerging, a very painful emerging. Adele's labor is a literal reinforcement of the anguish involved, what Edna describes as "ecstatic pain," to the metaphoric emerging of Edna. Emergence is a movement from confinement and sleep, like in the womb, into consciousness and freedom. In that sense, the imagery of waking from sleep which runs all through the novel is appropriately associated with Edna's own birth process and is a reinforcement of her emergence process as well. Carol Christ believes:

> "Awakening" . . . is an appropriate term for describing change in women's consciousness. "Awakening" is a metaphor that mystics and seekers frequently use

> to describe the experience of enlightenment--the movement from conventional notions of the meaning of life to a more direct experience of the "really real" or ground of being, from ordinary to extraordinary consciousness, from bondage to freedom. [italics mine] (18)

The Awakening is a very special novel of development, a most unique female Bildungsroman. It is not like the tradition or even like Jane Eyre in very many ways. But The Awakening is a noteworthy example of the female Bildungsroman because it shares with Jane Eyre a single, defining thematic image, although the language differs. In Jane Eyre the controlling metaphor is movement from terror to security, escape from enclosure. In The Awakening, the movement is from sleep into wakefulness, from the womb into the world, emergence from confinement. Both Jane Eyre and Edna Pontellier are immediately and vitally concerned with procuring freedom. But as women, their struggle is essentially different than the struggles of men in traditional Bildungsromane. The women share a reality in which, in Per Seyersted's words, ". . . emancipation is [their] goal rather than [their] birthright" (149). In this respect, Jane Eyre and The Awakening express in radically different terms the stories of a great many women. Their stories require first, an assertion of individuality, then a reconciliation between social expectation and spiritual necessity. Or, as Elizabeth Abel explains, ". . . the essence of female Bildung is a moment of simultaneous awakening to inner aspirations and social limitations . . ." (15). The difference between the two female novels of development so

far considered here is that Brontë's fiction entertains the hope of reconciliation through a relationship founded on equality, plus some timely coincidences like the inheritance and the fire. Chopin's protagonist has no such luck, and so the novel ends without Brontë's hopefulness. But, Carol Christ observes,

> The real tragedy of [The Awakening] is that spiritual and social quests could not be united in [Edna's] life. Chopin's novel shows that spiritual awakening without social support can lead to tragedy, and provides convincing testimony that women's quest must be for full spiritual and social liberation. (27)

Chapter Four

The Color Purple

> And then, just when I know I can live content without Shug, just when Mr. ____ done ast me to marry him again, this time in the spirit as well as in the flesh, and just after I say Naw, I still don't like frogs, but let's us be friends, Shug write me she coming home.
>
> Now. Is this life or not?
>
> I be so calm.
>
> If she come, I be happy. If she don't, I be content.
>
> And then I figure this the lesson I was suppose to learn.
>
> (The Color Purple 247-248)

Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1982) is a novel I am confident even Jerome Buckley would recognize as a contemporary Bildungsroman. Like Jane Eyre, The Color Purple moves smoothly along a chronological framework that roughly parallels that of the traditional Bildungsroman. Celie, the protagonist in Walker's novel, meets each of the core requirements which constitute that frame, according to Buckley, for the developing central figure. But The Color Purple is a unique novel of development because it is a culmination of 135 years of women's literature since Jane Eyre. Unlike Brontë, who could see in literature before her only developing boys and men (after all, Brontë's book expresses a story that was not a likely reality for a "Jane" in the 1840s), and unlike Chopin, who could not fathom a satisfactory accommodation to the modern world for her female character in

The Awakening and thus ends Edna's story with her ambiguous suicide, Walker synthesizes materials and themes of both these works in The Color Purple.

Jane Eyre and Celie have very much in common, although one would never suspect so at first appearance. Jane--white, Victorian English, hovering near the upper-middle class, fairly well-educated, single for nearly all her story--would seem to be as distant from Celie--Black, twentieth-century American, poor Southern rural, practically illiterate, married for nearly all her story--as two women could possibly be. Obviously, then, Jane Eyre and Celie have very few tangible commonalities. But the characters' and the books' structural and thematic similarities far outmeasure the mere details of the characters' or the books' circumstances. In spirit, Celie and Jane are actually sisters.

Both books open upon scenes of gross physical and emotional abuse. At age ten, Jane Eyre is the scapegoat of people who are not her family. At age fourteen, Celie, too, is chosen to be the object of sexual and psychological abuse at the hands of a man who is not her kin. This man, who is the father of Celie's two children, and whom she believes to be her father also, is really her step-father. Celie, like Jane, sees little hope of ever escaping her situation. But arrangements are made which allow Celie, as arrangements allow Jane, to leave her first home. Unfortunately, for Jane and Celie both, the move is into a situation of still greater abuse. At Lowood, Jane Eyre encounters new horrors; in marriage, Celie, too, encounters new horrors.

In the second phase of Celie's, and Jane's, development, other people, both positive and negative role models, begin to influence the protagonist's attitudes and thinking about her circumstances. Both Celie and Jane learn about the world and their roles in it by observing how other people, most importantly other women, have accommodated the world. Jane learns from Miss Temple, Helen Burns, the Rivers sisters. Celie learns truths about her society , her sexuality, and her spirituality from her step-son's wife, Sofia; her husband's and later her own lover, Shug; her sister, Nettie; and even her step-son's girlfriend, Squeak.

Both Jane Eyre and The Color Purple contain certain supernatural strokes of good fortune which nearly stretch the reader's willing suspension of disbelief beyond its limits. That Celie's sister, Nettie, should be united with Celie's children who were taken from her immediately after birth seems almost too happy a coincidence. And, although Celie's discovery of the truth about her real father--his success in business and farming which led to his lynching--and her inheritance of a home may be miraculous, it is certainly no more so than Jane Eyre's stumbling upon her true family and inheritance at Marsh End. These structural contrivances are actually very significant in the two books, and in many female Bildungsromane, because by means of them the women, who are otherwise quite powerless, are able to live independently with people whom they have chosen. Such devices, though admittedly serendipitous, allow the women to be free of the necessity of physical, emotional, or economic de-

pendence, and the vulnerability to bondage in which such dependence often results. Consequently, relationships like the ones between Celie and her husband, Mister, and Jane and Rochester, founded between equals, may be begun only at the ends of the books, but not before.

The chronology, the plot, of both Celie's and Jane's development relates them closely to the traditional Bildungsroman, but Celie and Jane are far more closely related to one another than either is to the male traditional model because they share gender. They develop the same sensibilities and overcome the same social obstacles, even when their societies are so different. It is the circumstance of gender which looms over any other and bonds Celie and Jane together as spiritual sisters on a common quest, and which makes their stories female Bildungsromane.

The Awakening's Edna Pontellier is also sister to these women, yet she is part of a different world still. She is white, solidly aristocratic, and apparently happily married the entire time of the novel. She suffers no physical abuse. But again, the tangible circumstances of the three lives of Jane, Edna, and Celie are deceptive. Celie is more like Edna than one might realize.

Like Edna, Celie is a mother and a wife. These are the only roles within acceptable bounds for them in either of their societies. Women who refuse these bounds, like Madamoiselle Reisz and Shug, are ostracized and punished for it. But these are the women who move the protagonists in both cases toward greater and greater dissatisfaction with the status quo. Celie

and Edna are also alike in that their sensual maturity, achieved outside their marriages, is not so much a physical awakening as a spiritual one.

Edna's husband, Leonce, and Celie's, Mister, are basically the same sort of man, only their societies tell them different things to do, different roles to play. Clearly, though, Edna is looked on by the men around her as property, as Celie is also just as clearly the property of men who "purchase" her. When Celie is bartered by her step-father to Mister, neither are the least bit concerned with Celie. Alfonso, her step-father, is concerned with inventory control, and Mister is in need of a servant for his children and himself. Celie, unfortunately, is particularly marketable--she's a good worker, she is sterile, and she comes with a cow. Mr. Pontellier, for all his refinement, harbors exactly that sort of attitude toward his wife.

What ultimately binds Celie and Edna together is their struggle to extract themselves from the constrictions in which they find themselves trapped. One could also say that Jane Eyre struggles with the same conflict, but she is more concerned with the avoidance of constriction, and so her story becomes a series of escapes rather than one ultimate "breakout." This point is the element of similarity among all three works, and it is the element which characterizes more than any other, the female Bildungsroman. We have seen it in the controlling metaphor of Jane Eyre as escape from enclosure; in The Awakening as emergence from constriction. In The Color Purple the functional, thematic metaphor is freedom from slavery.

The Color Purple, though, is obviously no modern-day Jane Eyre, nor is it a Black Awakening. Instead, it is a structural and thematic synthesis of elements in common with those books, but different as to be a wholly original creation.

Celie begins as a sensitive protagonist who is affected deeply by things around her, but who has trained herself to be insensitive. Celie has de-sensitized herself in certain respects in order to survive. When Mister does "his bidness" on her, she pretends to be a tree, and says that she understands why trees fear men (CP 30).

Although Celie loved school, she was taken out at fourteen because her step-father thought her too stupid to go. But her teacher noticed that no one ever wanted to learn so badly as Celie. So, Celie must take her lessons from those around her. Celie's education, like any Bildungsroman, is the central concern of The Color Purple. However, it is not the structure of Celie's education, but what she learns that makes this book a female Bildungsroman.

Celie's world is very, very limited. As Susanne Nobbe Howe recognized fifty years before The Color Purple, one cannot learn very much at home. But Celie does learn of the world outside her close-knit society through Shug from the big city and from her sister Nettie's letters from Africa. From these and others Celie gradually learns of the fundamental duality of the world--physical nature and spiritual nature.

Celie had given birth twice before a girl at church taught her the relationship between menstruation and pregnancy. With

Shug's help, Celie discovers what makes her physically female (as opposed to being a tree). She learns with love, not violence, what touches in what places excite her. They are secret, hidden places, and Celie might never have known her own physical existence without Shug Avery.

Early in the novel, Celie believes, because of what she has learned through the rapes by her step-father and the beatings by Mister, that man's nature is to abuse and woman's nature is to be abused. She has so internalized these false notions that she advises Harpo, her step-son, to beat Sofia, his wife, because it is the only way Celie knows to handle a domestic situation. Physical abuse is for Celie the nature of life, certainly the nature of married life. Celie, because she is a good student, knows what she has been taught through experience about domestic strife and passes the knowledge of her life on to her step-son like an ugly heirloom. But, Celie knows intuitively, also, that this advice is a betrayal of a spiritual sister and is ashamed of her involvement in the very oppression and abuse she hates:

> Dear God,
>
> For over a month I have trouble sleeping. I stay up late as I can before Mister. _____ start complaining bout the price of kerosene. . ..
>
> What it is? I ast myself.
>
> A little voice say, Something you done wrong. Somebody spirit you sin against. Maybe.
>
> Way late one night it come to me. Sofia. I sin against Sofia spirit. (CP 45)

The rest of the novel becomes a process actually of re-education. The men Celie lived with and under taught her first; the community of women around her teach her otherwise. Sofia first confronts Celie about her hateful advice to Harpo, and so forces her to question the nature of her life:

> You told Harpo to beat me, she said.
>
> No I didn't, I said.
>
> Don't lie, she said.
>
> I didn't mean it, I said.
>
> Then what you say it for? she ast.
>
> . . .
>
> I say it cause I'm a fool, I say. I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't.
>
> What that? she say.
>
> Fight. I say. (CP 45-46)

Celie is forced to question again and again by Shug or Sofia or Nettie, and she begins to see what the nature of the world can be and in fact comes to learn by the end of the novel to be assertive and responsible for her own happiness.

Celie's liberation is accomplished through the empowering influence of the community of women from which she draws confidence and support. The phenomenon of bonding, like that among the women in The Color Purple, is not unusual among oppressed people. The women in Celie's community, like Blacks in the larger American community, must bond together for life-sustaining support against the oppressor. Celie, then, is never really an outsider as long as she is part of a generally oppressed group.

In The Color Purple the black women are the enslaved people of an enslaved people. Their masters are the white men's slaves. The women form a strong web of support for each other. This is seen in the dinner-table scene where Celie rises to announce that she is going to Memphis with Shug. She is leaving Mister:

> You bitch, he say. What will people say, you running off to Memphis like you don't have a house to look after?
>
> Shug say, Albert. Try to think like you got some sense. Why any woman give a shit what people think is a mystery to me.
>
> Well, say Grady, trying to bring light. A woman can't git a man if people's talk.
>
> Shug look at me and us giggle. Then us laugh sure nuff. Then Squeak start to laugh. Then Sofia. All us laugh and laugh. (CP 182)

The support system these women create for one another is a survival tactic characteristic of oppressed people and so, paradoxically, reinforces the theme of freedom from bondage which marks the novel. That theme makes Sofia's story, her defiance and defeat in the white world, a very important part of Celie's story, also, showing that there is more than one type of slavery. Celie's emancipation proclamation at the dinner-table empowers the other women there--Squeak affirms her name, Mary Agnes.

In Memphis, Celie very nearly replaces dependence on Mister with dependence on Shug. But she learns, in the painful way that real people learn, that she does have a life independent of others, even those she truly loves. Like Jane Eyre who must

establish her independence at the school in Marsh End before she can with good conscience return to Ferndean, Celie must find her own value before she can return to her home.

Celie discovers her value as an autonomous human being when she begins to make pants. People value her work; therefore, she, too, is valuable. Celie writes to her sister Nettie in Africa:

> Then Shug want two more pair just like the first. Then everybody in her band want some. Then orders start to come in from everywhere Shug sing. Pretty soon I'm swamp.
>
> One day when Shug come home, I say, You know, I love doing this, but I got to git out and make a living pretty soon. Look like this just holding me back.
>
> She laugh. Let's us put a few advertisements in the paper, she say. And let's us raise your prices a hefty notch. And let's us just go ahead and give you this diningroom for your factory and git you some more women in here to cut and sew, while you sit back and design. You making your living, Celie, she say. Girl, you on your way. (CP 192)

Celie can make money for herself. She has freed herself. Soon she is strong enough in her independence to return home.

The Color Purple ends with Celie's personal emancipation. Not only has she effectively found her freedom from the slavery she suffered under Mister, but she has also discovered through her separation from Shug that she is not dependent on that (or

any other) relationship, either. Celie is able at the conclusion of her Bildungsroman to write:

> . . . just when I know I can live content without Shug, just when Mr. _____ done ast me to marry him again, this time in the spirit as well as in the flesh, and just after I say Naw, I still don't like frogs, but let's us be friends, Shug write me she coming home.
>
> Now. Is this life or not?
>
> I be so calm.
>
> If she come, I be happy. If she don't, I be content.
>
> And then I figure this the lesson I was suppose to learn. (CP 247-248)

This conclusion is quite different from the one Edna Pontellier reaches at the end of The Awakening where she simply cannot extract herself from the social strictures which require certain behavior from her. Even if Edna does come to personhood, society will not allow her to live in it. Edna is deprived of the life support systen, the bonding, that Celie enjoys, and so she must destroy herself. Celie is nurtured and empowered by the women around her.

Celie's Bildungsroman is a process of flight from slavery to freedom. Unlike Jane Eyre or The Awakening which employ female symbols, the moon and the ocean, The Color Purple emphasizes the importance of women in each other's coming to wholeness. Celie's reunion with her children and Nettie complete Celie and her story. Walker's novel ends with no ambiguity.

Conclusion

Charlotte Brontë, Kate Chopin, and Alice Walker each employ a common metaphor to articulate their characters' stories of development. Jane Eyre constantly escapes a series of impending enclosures. Edna Pontellier emerges, as in birthing, from suffocating confinement. Celie, who understands slavery in two ways, as a Black and as a woman, liberates herself from bondage with power she draws from bonding among women.

This thesis has illustrated, using three novels from widely separated time periods and featuring three very different protagonists, a characteristic of a significant, but often neglected, literary genre. The female novel of development is distinguished from the male literary tradition not so much by structure or plot or even theme, but by the social and cultural imperatives inherent in a structure or plot or theme which attempts to express a woman's development. Jane, Edna, and Celie all share a common developmental task. They must assert their individuality, their autonomy, and their independence in a patriarchal system unwilling to accept such.

NOTES

[1]Howe, Susanne Nobbe. Wilhelm Meister and His English Kinsmen: Apprentices to Life. NY: Columbia UP, 1930.

[2]An article which appeared in Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte, 2nd ed., Stammler Merker, et. al., eds., Berlin, 1958: I 177.

[3]Compiled by G.B. Tennyson from Susanne Howe's and Hans Wagner's works. See Works Consulted for Tennyson and Howe. Wagner, Hans. Der englische Bildungsroman bis in die Zeit des ersten Weltkrieges, "Schweizer Anglistische Arbeiten," No. 27 (Bern, 1951).

[4]See Campbell, Joseph. Hero of a Thousand Faces. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1949.

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