

Growing Up a Woman

Growing Up a Woman:

The Private/Public Divide in the Narratives of Female Development

Edited by

Soňa Šnircová and Milena Kostić

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Growing Up a Woman: The Private/Public Divide in the Narratives
of Female Development

Edited by Soňa Šnircová and Milena Kostić

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2015 by Soňa Šnircová, Milena Kostić and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-8111-2

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8111-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Growing up a Woman: The Private/Public Divide in the Narratives of Female Development Soňa Šnircová and Milena Kostić	
Part I: Shedding the Shackles of a Tradition	
Chapter One	12
Female <i>Bildung</i> as a Hermeneutic Quest: Muriel Spark's <i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i> Attila Dósa	
Chapter Two	53
Education as Manipulation in Muriel Spark's <i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i> Milena Kostić	
Chapter Three	74
Break, Broke, Broken: Aborted Journey towards Womanhood in <i>A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing</i> by Eimear McBride Vesna Lopičić	
Chapter Four	100
Third-Generation Nigerian Female Writers and the Bildungsroman: Breaking Free from the Shackles of Patriarchy Cédric Courtois	
Chapter Five	120
The Spiritual Transformation of Jewish Women in the Fiction of Four Jewish American Women Writers Stanislav Kolář	

Chapter Six.....	145
Double Trouble: Female <i>Bildung</i> in Jewish American Fiction— Anzia Yeziarska’s <i>Bread Givers</i> Zuzana Buráková	
Chapter Seven.....	159
(Out And In-) Doors: Identity and Space in Phyllis Barber’s Autobiographies Ángel Chaparro Sainz	
Chapter Eight.....	178
“Everywhere else is America, but in this house it’s China!”: The Role of House and Street in American Female Ethnic Bildungsromane Šárka Bubíková	
Part II: Appropriating a Tradition	
Chapter Nine.....	204
From The Wife of Bath to Neo-Victorian Narratives: Utopias and Nightmares of Character Development Vladislava Gordić Petković	
Chapter Ten.....	223
“The Public Face of this Private Volume”: Feminism, Pornography and the Subversion of the Gendered Public/Private Dichotomy in <i>The Journal Of Dora Damage</i> Danijela Petković	
Chapter Eleven.....	243
Feminist, Post-Feminist, or Anti-Feminist Novel of Development or What Happens if Male Authors Rewrite <i>Jane Eyre</i> : A Reading of D. M. Thomas’s <i>Charlotte</i> and Jasper Fforde’s <i>The Eyre Affair</i> Andrea Kirchknopf	
Chapter Twelve.....	261
Girlhood in Susan Fletcher’s <i>Eve Green</i> and Tiffany Murray’s <i>Happy Accidents</i> : Postfeminist Transformations of the Classic Female Bildungsroman Soňa Šnircová	

Chapter Thirteen	286
“Cat in a tumble dryer”: Amanda Price’s Bumpy Ride of Female Development in <i>Lost in Austen</i> (2008) Zsófia Anna Tóth	
Chapter Fourteen	312
Jane Austen Adapted: Female Lifestyles in <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> and <i>The Lizzie Bennet Diaries</i> Vitana Kostadinova	
Chapter Fifteen	334
Cooking Her Up: Renegotiating the Kitchen in Four Stories of Female Development Silvia Baučeková	
Contributors	357
Index	362

INTRODUCTION

GROWING UP A WOMAN: THE PRIVATE/PUBLIC DIVIDE IN THE NARRATIVES OF FEMALE DEVELOPMENT

SOŇA ŠNIRCOVÁ AND MILENA KOSTIĆ

The present book discusses contemporary transformations of the female Bildungsroman showing that the intersection of the genre and gender brought to critical attention in the context of second wave feminism (e.g. Abel, Hirsch and Langland 1983, Labowitz 1986, Felski 1989) remains equally useful in the era of postfeminism. Female *Bildung* narrative has acquired an important position in twentieth- and twenty-first century literature through its continuing depiction of female self-discovery and emancipation as a process of negotiating the traditional divisions of female and male roles in relation to private and public spaces. Recognizing the seminal contribution of feminist criticism to the definition of the genre and the role of feminist cultural processes in its thematic developments, this volume at the same time intends to explore more recent influences on the female *Bildung* narrative and the influence of the classic female Bildungsroman on contemporary cultural texts. As a collection of fifteen essays written by international scholars, the book offers a representative sample of the narratives of female development, presenting a variety of genres, novel, short story, autobiography, TV series, Internet video blog; and theoretical frameworks, hermeneutic, postcolonial, feminist, and postfeminist. In its diversity, the book reveals that despite the ongoing process of women's emancipation, the heroine's struggle with the private/public divide has remained, throughout the twentieth century and in the first decades of the new millennium, a central issue in the stories about the female quest for self-definition.

The first part of the collection, *Shedding the Shackles of a Tradition*, brings eight essays that explore the narratives in which the heroine's in/ability to shed the shackles of a patriarchal tradition (educational, religious, ethnic, colonial) crucially influences her process of maturation. The authors' approaches in this section range from exploring the destructive effects of patriarchal authorities on female development to mapping successful strategies of the heroine's liberation from the oppressive power structures through her escape into the public space of education and artistic creativity. The first essay **"Female *Bildung* as a Hermeneutic Quest: Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*"** presents Muriel Spark's famous novel as a female *Bildung* narrative with strong links with the detective story and the quest narrative. Reading Sandy's betrayal of Miss Brodie as the climax in her *Bildung* process, Attila Dósa uses Hans-Robert Jauss's hermeneutic model of question and answer and Wolfgang Iser's concept of blank space in fiction to examine the motivation for Sandy's rebellion against her adult female model. Dósa interprets Sandy's story in terms of the double quest: a hermeneutic quest with the aim to recover a lost narrative of Miss Brodie's betrayal of her pupils and a spiritual quest of self-discovery with the aim to construct an authentic self. As a quest heroine and a "detective" who tries to expose Miss Brodie as the culprit, Sandy appears as one of the literary characters created by female authors to redress the imbalance in terms of the distribution of gender functions in various literary subgenres. Her successful investigation into the real nature of Miss Brodie exposes her seemingly emancipated teacher as the female authority guilty of dragging her pupils into the contaminated structures of patriarchal relations. Rejecting Miss Brodie as a false religious-spiritual leader while imitating Miss Brodie's manipulative methods and acknowledging the lasting influence of her role model, Sandy, in Dósa's opinion, illustrates the complex nature of feminine identity formation, characterized by "the fluctuations of symbiosis and separation from the mother".

Miss Brodie's failure as a role model also lies at the centre of the essay **"Education as Manipulation in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*"**, in which Milena Kostić discusses the teacher's manipulative power and its negative effect on her female students' development. Drawing on Alice Miller's characterization of "poisonous pedagogy" as a sum of coercive methods of teaching that prevent the child from "developing a genuine, authentic sense of the self", Kostić maps the signs of this type of education in Miss Brodie's behaviour and aligns it with her preference for radical political strategies, like fascist dictatorship and Machiavellian tactics. In Kostić's reading Miss Brodie functions as

the Althusserian interpellator who manipulates her pupils into being the obedient subjects of “her own vision of superiority, domination and mastery”, which is however not so different from the traditional patriarchal model. Questioning Miss Brodie’s role of “the fearless challenger of gender stereotypes”, Kostić claims that she in fact repeats the pattern of the destructive patriarchal dominance that she seemingly opposes.

In **“Break, Broke, Broken: Aborted Journey towards Womanhood in *A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing* by Eimear McBride”** Vesna Lopičić explores a contemporary coming-of-age narrative by an Irish author to show that patriarchy continues to exert destructive effects on the individuals caught in its oppressive structures. Poverty and religious orthodoxy function as the major factors that shape the pattern of family relations with their restrictive influence on the female protagonist’s development. Analyzing the behaviour of the protagonist’s relatives—grandfather, father, uncle, brother and mother—the author describes a complex network of excessive control, abuse, incest, mortal illness and religious fanaticism that marks the girl’s journey to self-destruction. The girl’s self-loathing and desire for death are interpreted by Vesna Lopičić in the context of Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject, which leads her to the conclusion that MacBride’s novel offers a subversion of the coming-of-age genre. With the female protagonist “unable to bridge the divide between her private misery and public expectations”, McBride’s narrative appears in Lopičić’s reading as a story of abjection in which death must be a logical conclusion.

Cédric Courtois’s work **“Third-Generation Nigerian Female Writers and the Bildungsroman: Breaking Free from the Shackles of Patriarchy”** examines the debut novels of two third-generation Nigerian female writers, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good will Come* (2005) to claim that the postcolonial writers rewrite the traditional male Bildungsroman genre in order to reassess the politics of space that is carved in patriarchal society. The protagonists of these novels negotiate the traditional borders between the private and the public, which in Nigeria have been associated with the imposition of British Victorian culture on the natives. Noticing that the two narratives owe much to the debates about the demands of second wave feminism, Courtois at the same time reads them as *female* postcolonial Bildungsromane in which the development of the protagonists towards personal liberation mirrors the political development of the nation in postcolonial patriarchal societies.

In **“The Spiritual Transformation of Jewish Women in the Fiction of Four Jewish American Women Writers”** Stanislav Kolář compares spiritual development of Jewish women in the works produced in two different time periods—before and after World War II. The author discusses how Mary Antin, in *The Promised Land* (1912), and Anzia Yeziarska, in *Hungry Hearts* (1920), explore the importance of education in the personal development of their female protagonists and states that while Antin’s story about a poor Russian Jewish girl’s metamorphosis into a successful American writer can be interpreted as a celebration of assimilation, Yeziarska appears to be more aware of the difficult position of Jewish immigrant women struggling with alien American culture. In the second part of his essay Kolář moves to the discussions about the important shifts in the representation of spiritual transformation of Jewish women in Rebecca Goldstein’s *Mazel* (1995) and Allegra Goodman’s *Kaaterskill Falls* (1998). Influenced by the American women’s movement, both novels present the (in)compatibility of old Jewish traditions, bound by old patriarchal hierarchy, and feminism and the tension between religious tradition and secular forces from the outside world that influence the life of Jewish communities and break their homogeneity, especially in their intergenerational relations. The specific aspects of female development in the context of Jewish American culture are also discussed in **“Double Trouble: Female *Bildung* in Jewish American Fiction: Anzia Yeziarska’s *Bread Givers*”**. Zuzana Buráková analyzes Yeziarska’s novel as an example of the Ethnic Bildungsroman genre and illustrates that the conventions of the Bildungsroman based on Western European tradition cannot be applied in an American Ethnic context. Noticing how “multiple consciousness” complicates the process of identity formation, Buráková claims that the female protagonist, who struggles to be a daughter, a woman, a Jew and an American, appears to be stranded in “what Homi K. Bhabha calls ‘the third space’—neither one nor the other but forever in between”.

The next work **“(Out and In-) Doors: Identity and Space in Phyllis Barber’s *Autobiographies*”**, likewise, deals with the problem of multiple identity, exploring Phyllis Barber’s *How I Got Cultured: A Nevada Memoir* (1992) and *Raw Edges: A Memoir* (2010). The two autobiographies, Ángel Chaparro Sainz claims, present Barber’s attempts to understand her own identity as a woman, a Mormon and a mother and wife. The author analyzes Barber’s rendition of setting as an exploration of a very specific set of connections that reveals how the place she dwells in influences her own concept of self, specifically, how interior and exterior spaces are strategically used to imply complex readings of the memoirs.

The last essay in the first section of the present volume “**‘Everywhere else is America, but in this house it’s China!’ the Role of House and Street in American Female Ethnic Bildungsromane**” returns to the problem of female ethnic identity in the context of American culture. Šárka Bubíková analyzes the role of houses and streets in a selection of postwar novels which focus on the maturation of protagonists from various backgrounds—African-American, Barbadian-American, Chicana, and Chinese-American. Claiming that houses in these novels are spiritual rather than merely physical locations, Bubíková points out that the house as a literary *topos* often becomes the site of the generational and cultural conflict in the immigrant family that complicates the growing up process of the protagonist. The street, on the other hand, is a *topos* that “metonymically refers to the outside world, the public world a child must grow into”. Reading the street as a sign of class-ridden public space, the author concludes that for lower class protagonists of the earlier works the street often represents “a site of dangerous encounters reminding them of the limits of their racial and gender identity”, while the “affluent protagonist of more recent novel finds her suburban street liberal and safe”.

The second part of the book, *Appropriating a Tradition*, consists of seven essays that discuss contemporary narratives in which the employment of a tradition (literary, cultural, generic) plays a central role in the presentation of female development. Exploring these texts that revive Victorian fiction, rewrite classic female Bildungsromane or renegotiate the traditional understanding of a woman’s role in the kitchen, the essays reveal how these appropriations of a tradition throw light on the contemporary situation in terms of gender, race and class power relations. The section opens with the work “**From the Wife of Bath to Neo-Victorian Narratives: Utopias and Nightmares of Character Development**” in which Vladislava Gordić Petković takes a historical perspective to examine the ways gender representations develop along with the character development and the role of setting in the personal progress of the protagonist. Initially paying her attention to gender representations in the case of such important literary figures as the Wife of Bath and Catherine from *Wuthering Heights*, the author proceeds to explore the representations of lesbian identity in neo-Victorian novels by Sarah Waters. On the basis of the comparison of Waters’s use of setting in *Tipping the Velvet* and *Affinity*, Vladislava Gordić Petković notices how in the first novel the urban space of nineteenth-century London contributes to the protagonist’s identity construction, whereas in the second narrative the restricted space of prison functions as a symbol of the heroine’s imprisonment in the “social and familial conventions”. The neo-Victorian

genre continues to be at the centre of attention in the essay “**The Public Face of this Private Volume’: Feminism, Pornography and the Subversion of the Gendered Public/Private Dichotomy in *The Journal of Dora Damage***”. Danijela Petković reads Belinda Starling’s novel as the author’s twenty-first century investigation and condemnation of “Victorian gender, sexual and racial politics, the ideologies of domesticity and marriage, and normalizing science of medicine from a decidedly feminist perspective”. Petković challenges the interpretation of the novel as a self-conscious parody of neo-Victorian feminist fiction and maintains that Starling examines Victorian pornography and the gendered public/private distinction in the context of gender, class and race power relations to reveal them all as contemporary and burning (feminist) issues.

The rising popularity of contemporary appropriations of nineteenth-century genres is also evidenced by a number of literary, television and Internet texts which use classic female Bildungsromane, like *Jane Eyre* and *Pride and Prejudice*, as their central intertextual sources. There are four essays in our volume that discuss turn-of-the-millennium rewritings, appropriations and transmedia adaptations of the classic books and explore the literary and media representations of the changing nature of gender relations in the postfeminist era. Andrea Kirchnopf in her “**Feminist, Post-feminist, or Anti-feminist Novel of Development or What Happens if Male Authors Rewrite *Jane Eyre*: A Reading of D. M. Thomas’s *Charlotte* and Jasper Fforde’s *The Eyre Affair***” maps the adaptive trends in rewriting *Jane Eyre* and their various attempts to “correct” the “implausibilities of the [novel’s] Victorian ending”. Situating *Charlotte* and *The Eyre Affair* in the context of these adaptive trends, Kirchnopf questions the seemingly feminist meanings that the two male authors present in their adaptations of the original and shows that both novels in fact offer an antifeminist reinstatement of patriarchal norms. The author explores the parallels that Thomas and Fforde create between *Jane Eyre* and their twentieth-century female protagonists that in different ways and for different reasons recreate/adapt Brontë’s story. As she argues, despite their apparent possession of authority as narrators, critics, and rewriters of literary works, the heroines’ decisions and actions are ultimately governed by men.

While Kirchnopf explores the two contemporary adaptations of the classic female text that suggest a relationship between male authorship and the trivialization of feminist issues, Soňa Šnircová in her essay deals with two examples of contemporary appropriations of *Jane Eyre* by female authors that, likewise, appear to include some antifeminist moments. “**Girlhood in Susan Fletcher’s *Eve Green* and Tiffany Murray’s *Happy***

Accidents: Postfeminist Transformations of the Classic Female Bildungsroman” treats these apparently antifeminist elements in the context of postfeminist cultural milieu in which some female authors address the agenda of second wave feminism and create its critical reevaluation. Šnircová reads Susan Fletcher’s appropriation of the romantic motif from *Jane Eyre* as a basis of her participation in the “new traditionalism” promoted by the postfeminist media, while Tiffany Murray’s allusions to the famous Gothic elements in the Brontë classic are seen as a part of her postfeminist response to the discourse of victim feminism. Refraining from reading the novels as the signs of the cultural backlash against the achievements of feminism, Šnircová notices that besides the critical rejection of radical feminist perceptions of motherhood, both texts also reflect the authors’ awareness of the constant relevance of some feminist concerns.

The next two essays in the volume move away from *Jane Eyre*’s influences on contemporary literary texts and discuss transmedia adaptations of another classic female Bildungsroman—Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Zsófia Anna Tóth in “**“Cat in a tumble dryer”: Amanda Price’s Bumpy Ride of Female Development in *Lost in Austen* (2008)**” analyses a 2008 TV mini-series mapping the “multimedial, intertextual, diachronic, transhistorical as well as transcultural process of identity-formation and maturation” that the modern adaptation of the classic text offers. Seeing the female protagonist’s obsession with Austen’s novel and her consequent magic stepping into the textual world of *Pride and Prejudice* as a sign of postmodern nostalgia, Tóth also notices how the authors of the series transform the original text to target contemporary issues, sexuality, sexual orientation, gender, class, race, in “a fake nineteenth-century decorous world”. While inhabiting the postmodern position of the reader/character/writer of her favourite story, Amanda also participates in the more traditional narrative of self-cultivation that leads to her social accommodation. Tóth claims that the presence of some potentially backlash elements in the TV series does not weaken the power of the heroine’s transgressive acts. Ultimately, Amanda Price’s story appears as (re)inscribing the traditional as well as the feminist approaches to the Bildungsroman.

In “**Jane Austen Adapted: Female Lifestyles in *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries***” Vitana Kostadinova deals with a different form of media adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*—the vlog. Posing the question of whether this adaptation should be seen as feminist or postfeminist, she at the same time notices that the answer can be complicated by the contradictory (simultaneously feminist and

antifeminist) nature of postfeminism. Exploring numerous thematic shifts that the authors of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* introduced to transpose Austen's classic story in the post/feminist cultural milieu in which female emancipation is a norm, Kostadinova points out that the motif of romance still remains an integral part of the heroine's personal development. Although the heroine's choices and behaviour waver between the feminist and the non-feminist, Kostadinova shows that the modern adaptation's focus on female solidarity and its promotion of the idea of sisterhood appears to give *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* a strong feminist flavour.

In the final essay of the present volume Silvia Baučeková offers an interesting exploration of the role of food in the process of female identity construction. In her **“Cooking Her Up: Renegotiating the Kitchen in Four Stories of Female Development”** she argues that the private space of the kitchen can be reclaimed as the site where the female protagonists of the analyzed stories can “embrace their womanhood, form relationship with others, and achieve satisfaction within (and beyond) their socially prescribed role”. Baučeková's interpretations present a response to the backlash argument about the reactionary nature of “new traditionalism” promoted by the postfeminist media. She shows that women's escape from the “confinement” in the kitchen and their separation from the traditional role of nurturer may not be so easy (and maybe even not so desirable), as suggested by second wave feminists. Physical and sensual engagement with food, cooking, and eating offers the female protagonists not only a form of empowerment but also a means of closing a gap between the traditional binaries: masculine/feminine, private/public, life/death. This is seen as an inevitable step towards finding their way to the unified self and a place in the cycle of life.

The book is intended for scholars and students in the field of literary, women and gender studies, particularly those interested in the narratives of female development that represent American and British cultural contexts. The authors of the essays work at universities in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Slovakia, Serbia and Spain, specializing in literary, women and gender studies.

Works cited

- Abel, Elizabeth, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, eds. 1983. *Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Hanover and London: UP of New England.
- Felski, Rita. 1989. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics. Feminist Literature and Social Change*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Labovitz, Esther Kleinbord. 1986. *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century*, Dorothy Richardson, Simone de Beauvoir, Doris Lessing, Christa Wolf. New York: Peter Lang.

PART I

SHEDDING THE SHACKLES OF A TRADITION

CHAPTER ONE

FEMALE *BILDUNG* AS A HERMENEUTIC QUEST: MURIEL SPARK'S *THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE*

ATTILA DÓSA

I Killed Laura Palmer
(American Speedway, song title)

Introduction

Criticism of Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) includes readings of her novel as a novel of education (a boarding school story set in 1930s Edinburgh)¹ and as a religious novel (a Catholic parable about knowledge and loyalty).² The plots in both of these novelistic sub-

¹ David Daiches calls *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* "a school story with a difference, about a group of girls at an Edinburgh school and their *brilliant*, frustrated and hence (*surprisingly*) fascist teacher" (1969, 1176; emphases added, related issue shall be discussed below). The boarding school story, also called in German *Erziehungsroman*, "focuses our attention on the way in which education mediates the placing of individuals in class positions. . . . Education is regularly narrated and also frequently thematized in the Bildungsroman. If some novels explore the open possibilities, as also the dangers of education's radical potential, many try to find some way both to acknowledge that shaping force of education and to neutralize its de-individualizing force. . . . From *Tom Jones* forward, the English Bildungsroman especially looks with suspicion on educators and their philosophies. It doesn't like the system, as the satirical look at utilitarian education in Dickens's novel about education and society, *Hard Times* (1854), shows" (Maynard 2002, 289). Maynard regards the *Erziehungsroman* or novel of education as an "alternate term" for the Bildungsroman tradition (2002, 281).

² Shaw points out that Spark's "reputation as a novelist dates from her conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1954" (1987, 279) and that *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* "convey[s] deeply religious meanings" (278) along the lines laid down in Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (281). Burgess suggests that Spark

genres are generally concerned with authority: the former questions it on a secular level while the latter questions or affirms it on a transcendental level. As a boarding school story, *Miss Jean Brodie* appears to question secular authority on a very basic level: the authority of adults. As a religious novel, it seems to challenge religious authority on the topmost level: the authoritative theology of Calvinism, especially the concept of Predestination.³ Problems of representing, identifying with, interrogating, misleading, and rejecting authority are central to both readings of Spark's novel.⁴ Both the plot and the narrative devices concern the key problem of the motivation of the main character, Sandy Stranger: she is the pupil who subverts Miss Jean Brodie's authority as both a teacher and a self-appointed religious leader by giving her up to the headmistress, Miss Mackay, but without submitting herself to the authority represented by Miss Mackay's status in the school's hieratic power structure. However, it is more important that Sandy's skill and capacity to challenge authority through questioning inextricably links up with her moral and spiritual *Bildung*. Therefore this chapter reads Spark's novel as a female *Bildung*

“writes from a Catholic point of view” (1971, 128). Watson, however, argues that “Spark's work is not easily reducible to a matter of her specifically Catholic faith” (2007, 158), whereas Crawford reads it primarily as a religious novel in which Sandy “becomes the instrument of Miss Brodie's ‘betrayal,’ the Judas to her pseudo-Christ,” adding that the novel performs “a mischievous but profoundly ethical variation on the story of Christ and his disciples, and on the pattern of Calvin's chosen few, the elect” (2007, 631). Lodge says that it is a “novel about education and religion,” and passes criticism on the 1969 film version as it failed “to incorporate the strain of religious metaphor which is woven into the texture of the novel, largely through the medium of the authorial voice” (1986, 127; see also 135-38). Bényei argues that Lodge reduces this text of multiple plots and registers to Catholic orthodoxy (2005, 384); Bényei is right but it might be argued that Lodge's strategy can be seen as symptomatic of a native English distrust of institutional education inasmuch as, almost by definition, institutional education imposes team spirit and method on traditional English values such as individualism and common sense respectively.

³ Crawford combines a religious reading with a reading of the novel as a challenge to authority in a boarding-school-story environment when he suggests that it is “about the idea of the Calvinist elect, and about the manipulation of language to control impressionable minds” (2007, 630). Watson follows the same route of interpretation by suggesting that the novel “relates to a clash between two different kinds of authority – indirectly Calvinist and Catholic – played out between a schoolteacher and her disciple” (2007, 158).

⁴ Shaw argues that “[a]ll of Spark's fiction certainly displays a fascination with authority of different kinds and forms,” adding that very often “questions about authority and authorship overlap” (1987, 279).

narrative and examines links between the detective story, the quest narrative and the Bildungsroman in terms of the techniques and strategies applied to draw out missing information and reconstruct a lost narrative. Firstly, I pay close attention to the methods of questioning and to the nature of the questions asked and answers provided in the detective novel and the quest story, arguing that Sandy Stranger's story of formation is a special case in the female version of the Bildungsroman, and in her case female development can be understood as a hermeneutic challenge. I suggest that Sandy's coming of age depends on her ability to unmask Miss Brodie's fraud by finding the right questions and in that sense her character function is very similar to that of the detective and the quest hero. Secondly, I examine her *Bildung* as a hermeneutic challenge and try to provide an answer to a specific question which has been under-investigated in the criticism of Spark's novel: why did Sandy betray Miss Brodie? Though in isolation it might seem an irrelevant question, I suggest that it has wide-ranging consequences for not only the interpretation of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* but also for understanding Spark's procedures in her other novels. And though only raised implicitly in the novel, this question has direct reference to the dialectics of truth–forgery and loyalty–treachery, which repeatedly come up in Spark's fiction. In my exploration of this question, I use Hans-Robert Jauss's hermeneutic model of question and answer and Wolfgang Iser's concept of blank space in fiction. Thirdly, I give consideration to the notion of the hermeneutic quest in order to see whether it has relevance to the female Bildungsroman. I consider whether reading Sandy's character as a female quest hero (that is, a quest heroine) can help uncover the motivation which leads to her disavowal of the authority of a model female figure, and if it can help us fill in the blank space in her *Bildung* story.

1. The Lost Narrative

The song title by the Philadelphian speed-rock band American Speedway cited in the epigraph contains a statement which is an answer to the question “Who killed Laura Palmer?”, the underlying theme in David Lynch's 1990s cult television serial drama *Twin Peaks*. In fact, the statement had become a meme and had appeared in numerous other songs and on various surfaces such as T-shirt fronts long before this song was written. The meme answers a question which is never posed directly in Lynch's series and, as it turns out in season two, does not have a rational answer. The answer contained in the song title performs a comic function. Its comic effect comes from the fact that it provides information which

was never explicitly requested, while it also has a hint of the absurd because only a stupid answer can be given to a stupid question. To put it in another way, behind the evolution of this meme there is the obvious notion that asking a direct question about the identity of a culprit is the wrong thing to do for a detective. Though at first sight there is nothing in common between the stories of Laura Palmer and Miss Brodie, I will argue that in these narratives there is a questioning hero and heroine respectively, whose task is to elicit missing information and their success in accomplishing their quests for a lost narrative depends on their abilities to ask the right questions.

Miss Jean Brodie, a supposedly progressive teacher working at a private school for girls in 1930s Edinburgh, is betrayed by one of her pupils, and is in consequence expelled from her position. She dies without ever learning which of her girls “betrayed” her. Sandy Stranger, the girl who gave her up to the headmistress, becomes a Catholic nun when she grows up, and writes a moral tract based on her experience as Miss Brodie’s pupil. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* makes use of the plot pattern of the boarding-school story which has been employed in such diverse ways in fiction from Alcott and Kipling to J. K. Rowling that it is impossible to even briefly survey all varieties here. Suffice it to say that the plot pattern Spark uses is a popular sub-variety of the boarding-school narrative. In this story type a charismatic teacher⁵ finds followers among the students, establishes a set, and spearheads a rebellion against school authorities. After radically changing the worldview of a few pupils, however, the teacher is betrayed and defeated, and must leave the school.⁶

Spark’s fiction has been looked at from an enormous variety of perspectives but comparatively few essays pay due attention to her interest in the theme of loyalty and betrayal. Though the conflict between loyalty and betrayal is at the conceptual core of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, even fewer studies give careful enough consideration to the causes of Miss Brodie’s betrayal. Some even imply that Sandy’s motivation to give up Miss Brodie is so straightforward that it can be explained in a word. Carruthers’s otherwise splendid work on Spark’s Scottish identity simply hints that the reason for Sandy’s disloyalty comes from selfishness (2008, 500). According to Scottish novelist Ian Rankin, Sandy “defects because

⁵ Lodge suggests Miss Brodie is a familiar type: a “charismatic teacher who leaves an indelible mark on her pupils” (1986, 130). I will argue that she only *seems* charismatic and leaves a lasting impression on Sandy only.

⁶ This plot version was employed in popular productions of Hollywood-type of cinema such as *Dead Poets Society* (1989, dir. Peter Weir) and *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003, dir. Mike Newell).

her loyalty enables insight; and her insight, treason” (quoted in MacKay 2008, 511). Notable Scots gay critic Christopher Whyte provocatively argues that Sandy betrays Miss Brodie “not for her politics, but because she is heterosexual”, suggesting that if Miss Brodie had been “able to respond to Sandy’s feelings, she might have survived” (2004, 160). While there is truth in each, I suggest that the reason for Sandy’s disavowal is more complex than that and deserves cautious investigation.

MacKay notes briefly that “Sandy’s act of treason repays the betrayed in her own currency: Miss Brodie has betrayed the stolidly conservative school of which she is a part and Sandy has betrayed Miss Brodie” (2008, 506). But, in contrast with the categorical statements cited above on possible motivations for Sandy’s disloyalty, she devotes a whole article to the discussion of betrayal in Spark’s fiction. She argues that questions related to the concept of treason are raised not only in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* but, generally, “illicit acquisition and deployment of information is the central obsession” in Spark’s early novels (2008, 507). MacKay discusses Spark’s preoccupation with disloyalty and duplicity, and examines the theological and ethical implications of treachery in Spark’s fiction in the 1960s when she was a fresh Roman Catholic convert (2008, 506). MacKay argues that in Spark’s understanding Catholic theology “overlap[s] with metafictional and fabulist concerns of postmodernism,” and finds fault with Cixous’s “easy” reading of *Miss Jean Brodie* as an Augustine moral parable (2008, 506–507). Rather than reading Spark allegorically, she looks at the biographical context of her involvement in wartime propaganda. She locates Spark’s early fiction in the historical perspective of the prosecution of British traitors after World War II, and extensively discusses her textual influences with special reference to Rebecca West’s *The Meaning of Treason* (1964). To complement MacKay’s historical and biographical exploration of the background to Spark’s treatment of disloyalty, falseness and treachery, this chapter keeps a steady eye on *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* while trying to avoid the pitfall of reading it as an allegory.

The theme of betrayal is a legitimate area to investigate in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. While the identity of Laura Palmer’s killer remains a mystery throughout most of the series in *Twin Peaks*, in Spark’s novel the reader knows the identity of Miss Brodie’s betrayer nearly from the start.⁷ The fact that the identity of the traitor is a given implies that the circumstances of the betrayal pose a more relevant question than the traitor’s identity. David Lodge has pointed out that the central question is

⁷ Cf. Lodge 1986, 129.

not when and how Sandy betrays Miss Brodie but why.⁸ Answering the particular question “Why was Miss Brodie betrayed?”, then, is a relevant enterprise for more than one reason. Firstly, the word “betray” is a keyword, which occurs thirty-three times in a short novel of less than forty thousand words. Secondly, questions pertaining to the fact of the betrayal of Miss Brodie and to the identity and motivation of the person who gave her up are asked, raised and hinted at many times, by various characters as well as the narrator, in both implicit and explicit ways.⁹ The narrator discloses the information that Miss Brodie will be betrayed quite early in the book:¹⁰ in the middle of chapter two there is a flash-forward from 1931 to 1959 when Eunice shares with her husband her memories of Miss Brodie and her betrayal.¹¹

The identity of the traitor is known to the reader and a few characters but it is left hidden from many others.¹² It is known to Miss Mackay, to whom Sandy gives up Miss Brodie, but it is concealed from others, such as the other members of the Brodie set including Eunice, and from Miss Brodie herself, who dies without ever learning who the person who betrayed her was. So, an odd situation arises. On the one hand, the reader is initiated into a secret knowledge of plans, causes and ends which are concealed from nearly everyone to the very end. As a result, the reader assumes a godlike position and shares this position with the omniscient

⁸ The point was noticed independently of Lodge, who moreover has a different interpretation. Lodge claims that the reader’s interest shifts “from Whodunnit? to how did [Sandy] do it and, more importantly, why did she do it” (1986, 129). But his conclusions seem to imply that he reads the novel as a moral allegory about Miss Brodie’s (un-)acceptable teaching practices.

⁹ For instance, Miss Brodie asks these questions: “‘I should like to know who *betrayed* me. . . . I often wonder if it was poor Mary. Perhaps I should have been nicer to Mary. Well, it was tragic about Mary, I picture that fire, that poor girl. I can’t see how Mary could have *betrayed* me, though.’ . . . ‘I wonder, was it Rose who *betrayed* me?’” (Spark 1965, 60; emphases added).

¹⁰ Cf. Lodge: “Great emphasis is put on this act of betrayal, at the expense of narrative surprise” (1986, 128).

¹¹ “‘When did she die?’ ‘Just after the war. She was retired by then. Her retirement was rather a tragedy, she was forced to retire before time. The head never liked her. There’s a long story attached to Miss Brodie’s retirement. She was betrayed by one of her own girls, we were called the Brodie set. I never found out which one betrayed her’” (Spark 1965, 27).

¹² I think this is an important detail with far-reaching consequences on the relationship between the reader and the authorial narrative voice, and it is one which Lodge fails to notice.

and disembodied narrative voice.¹³ On the other hand, since the unidentified narrative voice tells most of the story from the conspirator's point of view, the reader also becomes an accomplice in plotting, and comes to share a position with the conspirator as well as the authorial voice.¹⁴ But it is even more important to note that while the reader is let in to the secret of the traitor's identity, she is refused to let in to the traitor's motivation. The fact that the narrator does not give the reason for Miss Brodie's betrayal is a curious matter for many reasons—the most important being that it frustrates readerly expectations. Though it has been argued that it is problematic to insert Spark's narrative methods in the historical tradition of realist discourse,¹⁵ there have been attempts to do so,¹⁶ because she does exploit certain devices of the realist convention of fiction-making, including that of the omniscient narrator.¹⁷ Consequently, when

¹³ Whittaker speaks about the “analogy” between God and the novelist, explaining Spark's innovations on the realist discourse with her Catholic worldview and with an urge to express transcendental truths through the ordinary world (1979, 162-63). Lodge is of the same opinion: “The whole novel . . . serves as a metaphor for the providence of a just and benevolent God” (1986, 123). Lodge, however, fails to consider the function of the other characters from this aspect and the consequences of their lack of knowledge on the position of the reader.

¹⁴ At this point it would be reasonable to continue a further inquiry into the metafictional and other narrative devices which imply links between the narrator, who has both a godlike authority (being in sole possession of ultimate truths) and is also a plotter (who conceals some and discloses other truths at her own discretion), and the reader, who is allowed in some and denied from other aspects of truths and pieces of information. A deep investigation of Spark's experimental narrative technique sometimes identified as “modernist” and sometimes as “post-modern” is out of the scope of the present study.

¹⁵ Burden notes that, among other English writers, Spark's work shows “parallelism” with French experiments with “the aesthetic, epistemological, and linguistic implications of realism” (1979, 154). Spark herself “acknowledges how poorly she corresponds to the norms of mid-century realism”, MacKay suggests, citing also McQuillan's 1998 interview with the author (2008, 506). Lodge identifies Spark's innovative combination of the non-linear narration with an omniscient narrator a “typically postmodernist strategy” (1992, 77). For further examples, see: Stubbs (1973, 33) and Massie (1979, 9).

¹⁶ Whittaker seems to try to reconcile different moral and poetic strands in Spark and somehow save her, at least partially, for the English tradition of realism when she says that Spark's novels “have an ethical and a realistic bias, but of a strange kind”, arguing that when Spark tries to convince us that “angels and demons are neither metaphoric nor outdated conceits,” she does not “revert . . . to old forms of fantasy, nor utterly succumb[s] to the current pressures against realism” (1979, 158).

¹⁷ See Lodge's discussion of Spark's authorial omniscience (1986, 140-41).

the reader encounters an omniscient narrator who knows more about the characters than they know about themselves and who is supposed to share all that knowledge with the reader, the reader reasonably expects to be let in to the last and probably most enigmatic elements of truth that the whole plot in *Miss Jean Brodie* hinges upon: why did Sandy inform on her teacher? But Sandy's motivation makes up a lost narrative, which remains un-verbalised on the story level. This lost narrative needs to be uncovered, reconstructed and told by the reader, who finds herself pressed to set off on a quest for a missing element of the narrative and for a missing element of the truth kept secret by a godlike narrator who discloses and withholds information at her own discretion. Thus, the reader will find herself in the position of Job "who ever more radically poses the question of why" (Jauss 1989, 54) about reasons that cannot be known and to an utmost authority that shall not be questioned.

The hermeneutic method of question and answer seems a particularly useful critical tool to answer the question about the motivation of betrayal, which is necessary to know in order to achieve a better understanding of Sandy's *Bildung* narrative. The dialectic of question and answer is very probably the oldest of all cognitive methods: Jauss points out that the first question recorded in (western) history—"Adam, where art thou?" (Gen. 3:9)—was posed to man by no less an authority than God, following Adam and Eve's disobedience and starting their cross-examination (1989, 52). Jauss then goes on to give an overview of the historical changes in the forms and uses of questioning: from mythic cosmologies and the Socratic aporia to eighteenth-century secular catechisms and the subversion of the assertive mythic model in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Jauss argues that "questions provide a beginning, though perhaps not the best, to the process of understanding" (1989, 62). But it is more relevant in the present case that questioning is also a versatile instrument of epistemological understanding used universally in education, and is therefore inextricably related to the contextualisation of *Miss Brodie* as a boarding-school story. Collingwood's known maxim informs us on the relevance of questioning and its bearing upon the hiding and disclosing of information in Spark's novelistic discourse, and sheds light upon the limitations of Miss Brodie's educational methods:

Questioning is the cutting edge of knowledge; assertion is the dead weight behind the edge that gives it driving force. Questions undirected by positive information, random questions, cut nothing; they fall in the void and yield no knowledge. Information, when it is not ground to a keen edge of inquiry, is not knowledge but mere pedantry, the talent buried in the earth. (1924, 50-51)

The question and answer method also seems relevant to the rhetorical devices and narrative procedures Spark applies in her novel. There are no less than 195 direct (and many more indirect) questions asked in *Miss Brodie* (even if not all of them perform the function of an interrogative sentence semantically and they fall into several pragmatic categories), and the word “question” is to be found thirty-nine times in the text.¹⁸ As one would foretell in a school story, the teacher, Miss Brodie, asks the most questions (sixty-nine). Her questions include the notorious “Who is the greatest Italian painter?” (Spark 1965, 11), and four others which are overtly related to the theme of betrayal when she speculates on who gave her up.¹⁹ Before doing a comparative analysis of the questions asked by Miss Brodie and Sandy, however, it is at this stage that the significance of two other questions should be noted briefly. The first one is “O where shall I find a virtuous woman, for her price is above rubies” (Spark 1965, 6), which stands without a question mark in the novel and is misquoted from Proverbs (31:10).²⁰ The question contains the basic plot elements of the quest narrative in a germinal form: a riddle, a search, and a reward which is to be understood metaphorically as well as in its material reality. The other is “Why did Sandy betray Miss Brodie?”, which is not even asked explicitly and never gets answered explicitly. This non-verbalised question also contains an element of puzzle whose meaning depends on interpretation and which (as in several other novels by Spark) drives the plot forward. It is such an important question that it is often brought up in critical essays, though, as pointed out, serious attempts at answering it are rarer. These two questions seem to run parallel without ever meeting and to have nothing to do with each other, since the narrator never sets up overt links between them on the story level. But I suggest that they actually meet on the plot level and interpret each other profoundly: not just in theological and ethical terms (as an ironic contrast) but also in terms of

¹⁸ An informative contrast: Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* (a short novel of comparable length of just under 30,000 words) contains ninety-three direct questions and the word “question” comes up only three times.

¹⁹ See note 9.

²⁰ The original verse is: “Who can finde a vertuous woman? for her price is farre above Rubies” (KJV); “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies” (The Cambridge Edition of the KJV). The reason for the misquotation is unclear, though when the seemingly reliable narrator misleads the reader it finds its parallel in Miss Brodie’s reliance on authoritative proverbial wisdom in misleading her pupils. Citing a different example from the novel, Brown points out that we can even dispute the narrator’s “epistemic authority” (2006, 232) and he concedes that such disputes in fact back Spark’s claim according to which her narrators are characters and characters, like people, are fallible (233).

Spark's poetics of fiction (raising further questions about the epistemological limits as reflected in her narrative experiments).

The fact that the second of these questions brings about an element of ambiguity or a semantic fissure in the text by remaining unasked and unanswered is in sharp contrast with the certainties that appear all over the narrative in different forms. But rather than simply building up tension out of the dialectics of certainty and ambiguity, Spark weaves a whole web of interaction where doubts and certainties reciprocally (mis-)inform each other. On the one hand, the reader is made to believe that the story is told by an omniscient narrator. The narrator has godlike knowledge regarding the lives and deaths of her characters, which she shares with the reader: sometimes these sound like religious annunciations and at other times like off-hand remarks.²¹ But one is also left in doubt about a cardinal point in the narrative when the narrator chooses to hold back information concerning the traitor's motivation. On the other hand, both the narrator and some of the characters heavily rely on proverbs—definitive statements which operate by creating an illusion of being sure and certain about something. But the reader is left in doubt concerning the reliability and the omniscience of the narrator when the narrator misquotes the school's motto from Proverbs, a text meant to be of chief religious and moral authority in a school for girls. Proverbs also appear in the form of proverbial wisdom when the narrator cites characters citing proverbs. Miss Brodie especially often cites proverbs and other locutions, she reflects on them, and now and then misapplies them.²² Although proverbs seem to contain pearls of practical wisdom which can be utilized in everyday situations and are thought to be guiding principles in life, in reality their uses are limited: partly because the assertion contained in a proverb is “a dead weight behind the edge” in Collingwood's above terms; and partly because it “teaches a lesson that is of no use to the concerned party, since it always comes too late to serve as a response to the situation” (Jauss 1989, 73). However, the ironic nature of the proverb (that it is “of no use as a rule of action” due to its “retrospective awareness”) makes it “the simplest literary form to shatter the certainty of a dying worldview” (Jauss 1989, 73). In the present context, this simple literary form which is supposed to solidify authority (as a school motto and as golden wisdom

²¹ Lodge identifies these as “calculated irrelevance” (1986, 123).

²² The reader will notice Miss Brodie's mistakes, which will subtract from her prestige as a supposedly reliable authority figure, and will also notice that the girls are offered no alternative road to knowledge (at least not in the junior school), and that what Miss Brodie calls her “leading out” of knowledge is in fact a *misleading* that none of the girls in her set (with Sandy's exception) notice or care about.

from the lips of an authoritative teacher figure) also serves, in roundabout ways, to dismantle the reader's belief in the omniscience and the authority of the narrator as well as of Miss Brodie.

Hermeneutics can easily bring Miss Brodie's moral and professional errors to light. In this school story, which is partly but crucially set in Miss Brodie's classroom, her teaching method of questioning receives an enormous weight, especially, of course, in dialogues. The following dialogue is particularly illuminating:

"Who is the greatest Italian painter?"

"Leonardo da Vinci, Miss Brodie."

"That is incorrect. The answer is Giotto, he is my favourite."

(Spark 1965, 11)

The question appears to generate a comic effect but in fact it calls attention to two problems which are not at all amusing: Miss Brodie's professional incompetence as a teacher whose special skill should lie in asking the right questions; and her moral error as an authoritarian female role model and mother substitute who misleads the girls who have been entrusted to her care. On the one hand, her question is right and legitimate, and her answer, "Giotto," is also right and legitimate. The trouble is that it is not an answer to the question she asked. It is a correct answer to another correct question ("Who's my favourite Italian painter?"), which is not asked. Miss Brodie, therefore, is wrong on two counts: the answer she received from the girls and she thought was incorrect was correct; and the question she asked and she thought was correct was incorrect. On the other hand, it can be argued that the discrepancy in her questioning method is not a mistake but it is intended. In other words, she might hide an implicit meaning behind the explicit meaning on purpose, and if she does so, it is supposed to convey the same message as God's question to Adam ("Adam, where art thou?") conveys. Since God is omniscient, He knows just where Adam is, and Adam knows that He knows. Adam, therefore, "does not answer the 'where,' but responds to the unspoken 'why?'" (Jauss 1989, 52). By doing so, Adam covertly signals that he submits himself to God's unconditional authority. But the Brodie girls answer the explicit question, failing to notice the intended or implied meaning—given that there is one. Therefore, they fail to signal their surrender to the unconditional authority of Miss Brodie, who likes to display her power for reasons that are beyond the grasp of most girls in her set.²³ Moreover,

²³ Though critical essays (including this one) focus on Sandy only as a rebel figure, there seems to exist an unconscious and collective, though lightweight, rebellion