A Modernist Insight into Character Formation: The Bildungsroman and Its Thematic Perspectives in *Jacob's Room*

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Abstract

The Bildungsroman constructed its fictional pattern in German literature in the eighteenth century, in English literature flourished as the Victorian Bildungsroman, and was adapted by Virginia Woolf, among other modernists, in the twentieth century. The Bildungsroman gained popularity among the Victorian realists for having offered the necessary extension in a fictional discourse to their primary concern with the based on the principle of determinism relationship between individual experience and the milieu, but the Bildungsroman maintained its vitality in the age of Modernism, as to mention just Jacob's Room, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, *and* Sons and Lovers. *Virginia Woolf's novel reveals that the modernists call attention to individual experience in the determent of the social concern to show the impossibility of the harmony between internal and external factors in the process of character formation. To present the ways in which* Jacob's Room *both continues and deviates from the tradition of the Bildungsroman, and expresses the protagonist's physical and spiritual development, while criticizing the social structure that restrains the achievement of the personal desires of the young generation and provokes their failure before completing their development, represent the main concern of this study.*

Key Words: *Bildungsroman, formation, modernism, modernist fiction, experimental novel, modernist character, modernist Bildungsroman, Virginia Woolf, Jacob's Room, Victorian fiction, Victorian Bildungsroman, realism.*

1. Introduction

The Bildungsroman is among those subcategories of the novelistic genre that display diachronic persistency and aesthetic vitality, passing through its own process of development as to establish as a literary tradition in the eighteenth century with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre,* flourish in English literature in the Victorian Age in the works of the realists, remain popular among the realists as well as modernists in the first half of the twentieth century, and display on the contemporary literary scene a complex typology as realist, postmodern, post-colonial, of magical realism, racial, lesbian, in the discourse of metafiction, and so on.

We regard the Bildungsroman as a type of biographical/autobiographical fiction that renders the process of growth and formation of a character in his/her both biological and intellectual development from childhood till early maturity. Our consideration of the term corresponds to the generally accepted, standard definitions of the Bildungsroman, such as the famous one by Buckley (vii-viii) or a more recent one provided by Sarah E. Maier:

> The German term *bildungsroman* has been used to designate a genre of novel (*roman*) which demonstrates the formation (*bildung*) of a character; indeed, the possibilities for such a novel proliferate. Ideas of literary characters' self-development have been variously categorized as novels of growth, education (*erziehungsroman*), development (*entwicklungsroman*),

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> socialization, formation, culture, or as novels of coming-of-age of the artist (*künstlerroman*). (Maier 317)

The standard definition is true for the Bildungsroman in general, but the various periods and movements that produce novels of formation change the pattern and provide the Bildungsroman with various new nuances of thematic and narrative construction. It is therefore more appropriate to define the Bildungsroman with regards to the cultural and literary context from within which it emerges, although its thematic essence remains unchanged and consists of certain thematic units or motives rendering a particular syntagmatic structure: (1) a child (sometimes orphaned or fatherless) lives in a village or provincial town; (2) the child is in conflict with his or her actual parents, especially father or step-father, or any parental figures (the trial by older generation); (3) the child leaves home to enter a larger society (usually London), where the departure is determined by (2) or various external and inner stimuli (for instance, the desire for experience that the incomplete, static atmosphere of home does not offer); (4) he or she passes through institutionalized education and/or self-education; (5) a young person now, the protagonist seeks for social interaction and inter-human relationship; (6) his or her experience of life is now a search for a vocation and social accomplishment, and above all a working philosophy of life; (7) he/she has to undergo the ordeal by society and embark on a professional career; (8) he/she has to resist the trial by love and embark on a sentimental career; (9) he/she passes through moments of spiritual suffering and pain; (10) now in his/her early manhood, he/she experiences epiphanies that lead to (or should determine) his/her final initiation and formation (complete or relativistic, or not existing at all – that is to say, the final stage of the formative process implies the dichotomy success/failure, or a third possibility of partial success/partial failure).

Calling attention to the Bildungsroman as a literary system of interrelated elements, as a fictional pattern encapsulating these thematic perspectives, the present study reveals the ways in which Virginia Woolf's novel *Jacob's Room* both adheres to and deviates from the established pattern on thematic level with regards to character representation strategies and the insight into individual psychology in its interconnectedness with the process of character formation.

2. Realistic Fiction versus Modernist Fiction with Regards to the Bildungsroman Literary Pattern

In the nineteenth century realism-saturated English literary background, the novel displayed an impressive typology in which the Bildungsroman was among the most popular forms. It is a mistake, however, to consider the Victorian Bildungsroman as an exponent solely of realism, although it mostly deals with the protagonist's physical, psychological, and spiritual formation and maturation by representing him or her within social and ethical practices. The concept of "apprenticeship" possesses a substantial meaning in terms of the hero's "becoming" a mature, developed, and self-achieved man within the social context of the Victorian era and even earlier, even in Goethe:

> Already in Meister's case, 'apprenticeship' is no longer the slow and predictable progress towards one's father's work, but rather an uncertain exploration of social space, which the nineteenth century – through travel and adventure, wandering and getting lost, 'Boheme' and 'parvenir' – will underline countless times. (Moretti 4)

In the nineteenth century realistic Bildungsromane, the expected final formation occurs as a result of the protagonist's apprenticeship which is carried on by acknowledging social and moral demands until he or she finds his or her place in society. But the last decades

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of the century and the first ones of the twentieth century challenge the concern with the ways in which society and its strong entailments dominate and shape every stage of individual life. Subjectivity and individuality as two main modes of thinking of modernism – as well as its search for new themes and new means of artistic expression – reshape tradition and provide innovative versions of the Bildungsroman which in this way becomes a part of the modernist literature. It would still be a mistake to classify the modernist Bildungsroman as a very distinct and different type, and in contrast to the traditional one, since the modernist Bildungsroman occurs as the continuation of the former, even if, rejecting the Victorian fiction and its social concern, the modernists reshape and distort the elements of Bildungsroman by diverging from the original structure to make a critique of the conventional patterns and of the nineteenth century Bildungsroman within a modernist context:

> In the modernist Bildungsroman, a critical perspective reconfigures the conventional structures of narrative, while retaining most of its main elements (plot trajectory, characterization, thematic emphases), and reinstates a revalued classical Bildung as the goal of the modernist Bildungsheld. (Castle 25)

While adopting the traditional type, the modernists maintain many of the thematic components, such as the formation of a character, education, leaving home for a larger society, travel, growing up, and others, but they alter the material of the components according to their modernist perspectives. The social concern is replaced by the individual concern and subject-matters, such as individual experience, abstract manifestations of the mind, epiphany, aestheticism, freedom, and ordinariness, are applied as themes of the modernist novel of formation besides other sustained thematic elements of the traditional Bildungsroman.

These thematic and ideological discrepancies between the two periods precipitate two different approaches to the formation process of the protagonist and its different outcomes. Castle makes a comparison between the traditional and the modernist Bildungsroman in terms of the hero's failure or success in completing his development and role in society. With regards to the realist Bildungsroman, "for the nineteenth century generally, the heroes of the Bildungsroman are always returning to the authorities they have spurned, not because they have seen 'the error of their ways,' but because they have, for all their efforts, found no other home" (Castle 23); on the contrary, the hero of the experimental, modernist fiction,

> marginalized by race, class, education, nationality, or gender, refuses socialization and assimilation into social institutions that do not advance his or her artistic designs. If Stephen Dedalus must flee his native land in order to try to achieve his goals, if Jude Fawley fails to achieve his goals of self-cultivation and slips into fatal illness, if Rachel Vinrace dies before she can even find out what her goal is, the failure is not that of Bildung, which remains an ideal for all of these young people, but that of the specific social conditions of their development. (Castle 24)

In the realist novel of formation, society and social codes, which have the roles of determiner and authority, are presented as superior entities that cannot be the reason for the failure of the hero; in the modernist Bildungsroman, the social demands and institutions are suggested as obstacles for the hero to achieve his goals in the direction of his development by causing his failure.

Regarding the social authority on the protagonist in his or her maturation and the critical approach of the modernist fiction towards the social concern, the character formation in the modernist Bildungsroman is generally presented as unsuccessful, but this failure does not show up as an unexpected result; on the contrary, it is an expected outcome. Unlike the

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protagonist of the Victorian Bildungsroman, whose goal is to adapt to the demands of society to be successful in his or her development, that of the twentieth century modernist Bildungsroman assimilates himself or herself to pursue his or her individual and aesthetic desires separate from the environmental expectations, and thus collides with social entailments of the period which lead him to failure. The modernist Bildungsroman receives its uniqueness and deviates from the classical pattern in terms of the character's isolation from social institutions:

> For this recuperative project seeks not to circumvent or 'opt out' of socialization processes, but rather to develop new conceptions of self-cultivation, which often take the form of a liberatory *depersonalization* and which respond more effectively and productively to the demands of modern social conditions. The modernist Bildungsroman may fail in terms of genre, but that failure only serves to articulate more effectively its singular triumph, the abstract affirmation of Bildung as a cherished ideal. The constitutive irony of the modernist Bildungsroman lies in this affirmation made from the perspective of the subject who, in the final analysis, can feel only its absence. (Castle 28)

The failure of the modern hero signifies the main motivation of the modernist Bildungsroman, which is the criticism of the social structure of the previous century. While growing up, the protagonist designates his or her own goal to find his or her identity free from the social conventions. The main character in development struggles to fulfil his or her personal desires instead of the demands of society and institutions. By not being able to do this, he or she becomes a failure for society, although he or she is successful in accomplishing his or her individual goal on personal, often spiritual level, and in this way reifying the intention of the modernist fiction to textualize the individual experience and the realm of the mind.

3. *Jacob's Room* as a Modernist Novel

Virginia Woolf's third novel *Jacob's Room,* published in 1922, is considered as the first step of the author towards fictional experimentation and innovation in its being "a hybrid of the essay, the short story, and the novel" (Froula 74). *Jacob's Room* is composed of fourteen chapters, in which the author through the voice of her narrator tells the story of the protagonist Jacob starting from his early childhood to his entering upon maturity which tragically ends up with death. Although the novel lacks a full-developed plot and story because of Woolf's disconnected and fragmented style, there is actually a blurred story and characterization. The reader meets widowed Betty Flanders in the first page of the novel with *Medias res*, then her sons Archer and Jacob, who live in the city of Scarborough. Woolf presents a part of their daily lives, while introducing some other characters from their environment. Throughout the novel, Woolf never explicitly indicates the changing of time and place as one of her distinctive narrative techniques.

Jacob goes to Cambridge in October, 1906, for his college education, and his journey begins as "Mr Flanders". His college years elapse within a social circle different from his childhood environment. He spends time with his college friends, especially Timothy Durrant with whom he sails to the coast of Cornwall. There he meets Timothy's family, and his friend's sister Clara is the first woman in the novel that Jacob has feelings for. But they cannot develop a steady relationship. A few chapters later we see Jacob in a celebration: "The hotel dining-room was brightly lit. A stag's head in plaster was at one end of the table; at the other some Roman bust blackened and reddened to represent Guy Fawkes, whose night it was" (Woolf 73). Another woman, Florinda, with whom Jacob has a short-time affair, is introduced to the reader. She is described as a beautiful woman, but at the same time stupid.

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This creates an unsatisfied feeling inside Jacob, when he realizes her stupidity. “In her face there seemed to him something horribly brainless – as she sat staring” (Woolf 79). Jacob later learns that she is actually a prostitute when he sees her with another man in the street.

As his education continues, Jacob develops his artistic and intellectual knowledge by joining artistic groups, reading literary texts from British to Greek literaturte, and going to museums. In chapter 9, we see him going to British Museum to read Marlowe. He also reads Plato and his *Phaedrus*, and Shakespeare.

Chapter 10 begins with a new character Fanny Elmer “who passes right beneath Jacob’s window” (Woolf 113) in her way to the painter Nick Bramham’s studio to be a model for one of his paintings. Later on Jacob encounters them on the street and he is introduced to Fanny. At that moment Jacob makes a strong impression on her by his awkwardness and voice. She is also influenced by his interest in literature, remembering his words about Fielding; she goes to a bookstore and buys *Tom Jones* in order to find a common interest with Jacob to establish a connection with him, although she is not educated in literature:

> At ten o’clock in the morning, in a room which she shared with a school teacher, Fanny Elmer read *Tom Jones* - that mystic book. For this dull stuff (Fanny thought) about people with odd names is what Jacob likes. Good people like it. Dowdy women who don’t mind how they cross their legs read *Tom Jones*- a mystic book; for there is something, Fanny thought, about books which if I had been educated I could have liked- much better than earrings and flowers, she sighed, thinking of the corridors at the Slade and the fancy-dress dance next week. She had nothing to wear. (Woolf 121)

When they are sitting together, Fanny tells Jacob that she liked *Tom Jones*; however, immediately Jacob realizes that she is lying. Here, Woolf enters Jacob’s mind and unfolds his past love for Clara:

> Alas, women lie! But not Clara Durrant. A flawless mind; a candid nature; a virgin chained to a rock (somewhere off Lowndes Square) eternally pouring out tea for old men in white waistcoats, blue-eyed, looking you straight in the face, playing Bach. Of all women, Jacob honoured her most. (Woolf 122)

While exhibiting Clara’s importance for Jacob, Woolf also touches upon the condition of women in a male dominated society by describing Clara’s current situation as doomed forever to serve men, like Sisyphus who is cursed to carry out the same task endlessly.

In the next chapter, Jacob is presented in Paris on his way to Greece. Meanwhile, he and his mother send letters to each other, but Jacob never tells any detail about his life, because it makes no sense for him. Here Woolf makes a sudden shift to Mrs Flanders and Mrs Jarvis’s trip to Dods Hill while talking about Jacob, death, and other things with a detailed description of nature around them.

Jacob finally arrives to Greece after he passes from Italy. There he meets a married couple, Sandra Wentworth Williams and Evan Williams, and falls in love with Sandra. Jacob and Sandra make short trips to Acropolis while trying to know each other better. Then, he joins the couple in their visit to Constantinople. In the meantime, he sends a letter to his friend Bonamy in which he talks about Greece and his admiration about this place.

Jacob’s trip is over and he turns back to London “very brown and lean, with his pockets full of Greek notes” (Woolf 165). When he is telling his experiences to Bonamy, Bonamy understands that Jacob is in love, and Bonamy’s rage upon this exposes his homosexuality in his jealousy and passion for Jacob. At the end of Chapter 13, the writer reveals that the World War I has started and Jacob has gone to fight: “Again far away, she

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(Mrs Flanders) heard the dull sound, as if nocturnal women were beating great carpets. There was Morty lost, and Seabrook dead; her sons fighting for their country" (Woolf 177).

In the last and the shortest Chapter 14, Bonamy and Mrs Flanders enter Jacob's empty room where everything has been left as it was. The empty room strikingly reflects the absence of Jacob. Bonamy sorrowfully shouts his name two times which reminds the reader of Archer's call for Jacob at the beginning of the novel. Lastly, Mrs Flanders' words upon finding Jacob's old shoes, "What am I to do with these, Mr Bonamy?" (Woolf 179), symbolize the death of Jacob and create an emotional end for the novel. Mrs Flanders finds her answer at the very beginning of the novel, when she writes in her letter that "So of course, there was nothing for it but to leave" (Woolf 1). Although the end of the novel seems inconclusive, and Mrs Flanders' question remains unanswered, Woolf connects the end to the beginning and provides an answer to the question by reversing time's order and linearity as one of her narrative strategies. The novel ends with a question and starts with an answer. Upon her answer, it can be said that Mrs Flanders finds the solution by letting go and keeping drifting in the ordinariness and simplicity of life.

Apart from its structural level, *Jacob's Room* contains certain thematic elements which strengthen its function as a modernist novel, among which ordinariness and Virginia Woolf values this thematic feature as the most noticeable source of her novels. In *Jacob's Room*, the ordinariness is so intense that a plot cannot find a place to occur. The insignificance of the ordinary is felt all throughout the novel in the experiences of Jacob and other characters. By using a descriptive language, Woolf usually portrays a situation or an event which does not end up with any result or conclusion, for she thinks that the daily and ordinary life is full of these insignificant and inconclusive moments. For instance, during Jacob's and Timmy Durrant's boat journey to the Scilly Isles in Chapter 4, the narrator suddenly begins to tell about Mrs Pascoe without any introduction of the character. The narrator depicts her as a regular character by assuming that the reader has all information about her, although she is narrated for the first time. However, the reader understands that she is an ordinary Cornish woman carrying out her daily routine:

> Although it would be possible to knock at the cottage door and ask for a glass of milk, it is only thirst that would compel the intrusion. Yet perhaps Mrs Pascoe would welcome it. The summer's day may be wearing heavy. Washing in her little scullery, she may hear the cheap clock on the mantelpiece tick, tick, tick . . . tick, tick, tick. She is alone in the house. Her husband is out helping Farmer Hosken; her daughter married and gone to America. Her elder son is married, too, but she does not agree with his wife. (…) For the millionth time, perhaps, she looked at the sea. A peacock butterfly now spread himself upon the teasle, fresh and newly emerged, as the blue and chocolate down on his wings testified. Mrs Pascoe went indoors, fetched a cream pan, came out, and stood scouring it. Her face was assuredly not soft, sensual, or lecherous, but hard, wise, wholesome rather, signifying in a room full of sophisticated people the flesh and blood of life. (Woolf 49-50)

Mrs Pascoe exists just for four pages in the novel and does not have any influence on other characters or the story. This four-page part about Mrs Pascoe does not seem to have any significance, but it actually serves Woolf's aim of displaying everyday life and giving the message that each of us encounters such moments, observes the environment around us, and develops irrelevant instant thoughts about it. The novel is full of such vague characters and moments appearing and disappearing within short periods.

The accelerating technological developments which began at the end of nineteenth century influenced every aspect of life, including literature. The modernist literature taking its roots from the theme of everyday and ordinary life, reflects the modernized life as its background. In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf describes the city and the streets of London within a

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modern outline, and indicates her main point about modern life as the reason for alienation, despair, frustration and unhappiness of man:

> The proximity of the omnibuses gave the outside passengers an opportunity to stare into each other's faces. Yet few took advantage of it. Each had his own business to think of. (…) The omnibuses jerked on, and every single person felt relief at being a little nearer to his journey's end, though some cajoled themselves past the immediate engagement by promise of indulgence beyond-steak and kidney pudding, drink or a game of dominoes in the smoky corner of a city restaurant. (…) Jacob, getting off his omnibus, loitered up the steps, consulted his watch, and finally made up his mind to go in…. (Woolf 62)

In another chapter, Woolf touches upon the condition of modern man and modern life with her own thoughts by using a first-person narration:

> And telephones ring. And everywhere we go wires and tubes surround us to carry the voices that try to penetrate before the last card is dealt and the days are over. 'Try to penetrate,' for as we lift the cup, shake the hand, express the hope, something whispers, Is this all? Can I never know, share, be certain? Am I doomed all my days to write letters, send voices, which fall upon the tea-table, fade upon the passage, making appointments, while life dwindles, to come and dine? (Woolf 91)

Modernization traps man in its eternal cycle, and makes him a victim of its system. Man feels lonely and desolated, since it brings unhappiness. Woolf creates her characters as victims of modernization, but does not end up with any solution, for she thinks that there is no way out. Woolf's common themes, such as isolation, hopelessness, absence, and unhappiness, are related to another main topic, which is modernization. Relatedly, absence can be felt in every part of the novel, and the novel "figures absence in more substantial terms than presence" (Marcus 93). If we look from outside the novel at the plot and events, they may seem as a unit. When we look from within it as a discourse, incompleteness, absence, and fragmentariness are everywhere. One of the tragic realizations of absence appears at the beginning of the novel when Jacob wanders on the shore and thinks that he saw his nanny, but later he realizes that she was actually a rock, and he is lost (Woolf 4). His nanny becomes absent, and Woolf displays this moment in a heart-breaking tone.

Admittedly, Jacob is the main victim of the modern life in the novel. Woolf tries to present his fate and condition in modern life by intentionally making his identity reveal incompleteness and mutability: the "novel emphasizes the image of Jacob *adrift,* moving rapidly but lightly from one social set to another, from one romantic attachment to another, without either the intention or the ability to 'settle'" (Zwerdling 898). As well as his presented identity, his deeds are never complete and stable, either. This is actually the general situation of man in modern life, which Woolf aims to reflect and criticise by using the protagonist Jacob as an agent.

War is another outcome of the modern era, which can be observed as one of the major themes in the novel. *Jacob's Room* covers the period prior to and during the World War I, and demonstrates its effects on society and characters indirectly. That is to say, Woolf's intention is not to deal with war directly, but to disclose the ways in which it affects the lives of young men who are victims of both society and the war as its outcome. Although the war constitutes the major reason of the protagonist's fate, Woolf never directly depicts or talks about war except for several parts. Nevertheless, she successfully creates and transfers the feeling of war period and its tragic results to the reader. Like social system in general, the notion of war also influences and entraps the young generation, and the young people become slaves and victims of both the idea and the concrete presence of war. Critics claim that the novel is an elegy for

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the loss of a generation in war, and Jacob Flanders represents the youth that is slaughtered, but Woolf's attitude is different from the style of the war poets and writers of the period in that,

> By contrast, Woolf's elegiac novel is persistently small-scaled, mischievous and ironic. She had an instinctive distrust for reverence of any kind, feeling it was a fundamentally dishonest mental habit that turned flesh-and-blood human beings into symbolic creatures. She was no more interested in a cult of war heroes than she had been in a religion of eminent Victorians. (…) Woolf's elegy for the young men who died in the war is revisionist: there is nothing grand about Jacob; the sacrifice of his life seems perfectly pointless, not even a cautionary tale. *Jacob's Room* is a covert critique of the romantic posturing so common in the anthems for doomed youth. (Zwerdling 903)

The theme of death, which also goes hand in hand with the theme of war, makes its presence felt from the beginning to the end of the novel. In the very first pages, Jacob's father Seabrook is revealed as dead. Betty Flanders sometimes thinks about her dead husband, and tries to imagine his condition if he had not been dead:

> Had he, then, been nothing? An unanswerable question, since even if it weren't the habit of the undertaker to close the eyes, the light so soon goes out of them. At first, part of herself; now one of a company, he had merged in the grass, the sloping hillside, the thousand white stones, some slanting, others upright, the decayed wreaths, the crosses of green tin, the narrow yellow paths, and the lilacs that drooped in April, with a scent like that of an invalid's bedroom, over the churchyard wall. Seabrook was now all that; and when, with her skirt hitched up, feeding the chickens, she heard the bell for service or funeral, that was Seabrook's voice - the voice of the dead. (Woolf 10)

The writer gives a detailed description of the graveyard and the tombstones on the ground by giving the feeling of the inevitability of death, and she creates a parallel between the funeral bell and the dead person by identifying the sound of the bell with the voice of her late husband. Towards the end of the novel, Woolf again apparently demonstrates her idea of the insignificance of life by putting forward her characters' conversation about death and dead people on "a calm night; when the moon seemed muffled and the apple trees stood perfectly still" (Woolf 130). The environment and the stillness of nature create an atmosphere that reminds death and eternity:

> 'I never pity the dead' said Mrs Jarvis, shifting the cushion at her back, and clasping her hands behind her head. Betty Flanders did not hear, for her scissors made so much noise on the table.
>
> 'They are at rest' said Mrs Jarvis. 'And we spend our days doing foolish unnecessary things without knowing why'. (Woolf 130)

When Mrs Jarvis reveals her opinion about being dead and "doing unnecessary things", Woolf immediately validates Mrs Jarvis' opinion by making Mrs Flanders not hear Mrs Jarvis' words, for she is lost in her work, which is one of the "unnecessary things" that we are lost in every day, every moment of our lives. Our everyday life is full of these insignificant, aimless, and mundane moments that we cannot escape. That is why Mrs Jarvis considers the dead people as lucky because of their salvation.

The presence of death can be felt directly when Jacob's last name "Flanders" appears in the first page. It is a strong and direct reference to a place named Flanders, related to the World War I, a place where millions of British soldiers died during the war. Here, Woolf's aim is to make a foreshadowing to Jacob's fate and death at the end: "Ironically, it is

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'Flanders' – a name, a place, and a way of dying – which renders Jacob absent, deceased, and voiceless; the name both grants identity and cancels it out" (Marcus 88).

Besides these major themes of the novel, Woolf uses supporting thematic elements and motifs throughout the novel. For instance, she embeds literature and literary components in every part of the novel. Jacob's interest in literature that starts from his childhood continues until he dies. His interest in literature is first revealed when Archer, Jacob, and John are supposed to choose one of Mr Floyd's belongings as a remembrance when he leaves the city, and Jacob chooses a volume of Byron's works, while others choose a paper-knife and a kitten (Woolf 16). In his young adulthood, his interest regularly appears in his college years, even in his love affairs, or his trips. He goes to British Museum to read Marlowe, or when he goes to Greece he visits Acropolis, sits there and reads his book. In his room,

> there were books enough; very few French books; but then anyone who's worth anything reads just what he likes, as the mood takes him, with extravagant enthusiasm. Lives of the Duke of Wellington, for example; Spinoza; the works of Dickens; the Faery Queen; a Greek dictionary with the petals of poppies pressed to silk between the pages; all the Elizabethans. (Woolf 34)

Related to the theme of literature, Woolf's emphasis on Greece and Greek antiquity carries a special meaning. She makes references to the literary works of Plato and Aristotle, and tries to highlight the importance and influence of the ancient Greek civilisation on the present. Jacob takes a journey and leaves his modern society to go to Greece, an "ancient" society, where he finds happiness: "Stretched on the top of the mountain, quite alone, Jacob enjoyed himself immensely. Probably he had never been so happy in the whole of his life" (Woolf 143). Woolf refers to Greece as a place where Jacob can be free of the difficulties of modern life, and even as a solution to all the problems of everyday life. Jacob's interest in antiquity and English philhellenes, especially Byron, may have caused his death by creating a tendency to join the war (de Gay 71). Byron is known to be a supporter of Greece against Ottomans in the World War I, and Jacob is probably influenced from such ideas. On the other hand, Greece as a recurrent theme in the novel supports other authorial purposes:

> Woolf uses the idea of Greece in *Jacob's Room* to explore the paradoxes and ironies of our concepts of civilization, particularly in relation to war; she anticipates Freud's title (*Civilization and its Discontents*) in her exploration of civilization and Jacob's discontents. She also takes a distance from the neo-classicism that marks so much modernist writing. (Marcus 90)

The novel follows Jacob's life from childhood to young adulthood, in relation to which his existence and status in the milieu are also important elements in the general thematic context of the novel. While exhibiting Jacob's life, Woolf deals with the patriarchal society and how this society gives some privileges to males in terms of education and gaining a profession. She also expresses the condition of women in this social system and tries to demonstrate how they are excluded from all areas that prevent them from having a voice. Although many woman characters exist in the novel, their presence is suppressed under the dominance of the male characters. They are the ones who go to college, gain a qualified education, and have a job. In chapters which deal with Jacob's college education, the reader never encounters with a woman student in Jacob's group of friends. The woman characters of the novel are mostly uneducated housewives, prostitutes, or girls whose social lives consist of only house and domestic works. Even in Bonamy's homosexuality, Woolf reflects the exclusion of women: "It was to Bonamy that Jacob wrote from Patras – to Bonamy who couldn't love a woman and never read a foolish book" (Woolf 139). It appears that Virginia

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Woolf aims to criticize the patriarchal system by expressing female characters as repressed by male dominance because she herself is a woman who is excluded from this society, but

> Woolf's feelings about her exclusion from this world are quite complex. She envies the men their guaranteed success (assuming they follow the rules) while pitying them their lack of freedom. The whole exploratory stage of life through which Jacob is passing is subtly undermined by the preordained, mechanical program he is acting out; and the machinery that would have assured him a place in *Who's Who* sends him off to war instead. In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf describes a 'dozen young men in the prime of life' whose battleship has been hit 'descend with composed faces into the depths of the sea; and there impassively (though with perfect mastery of machinery) suffocate uncomplainingly together'. (Zwerdling 905)

The social system provides opportunities and privileges to males while shaping them with a pre-determined order. What Woolf tries to show in her writing of an elegy for a generation is that these young men are educated for a purpose and victimized for the sake of the system and the country. The lives of youth are worthless, yet serve a purpose. That is why Woolf does not assign any significance and value to the short life of Jacob and to his death at the end. His often being absent, his insignificance and incomplete characterization throughout the novel represent the unessential presence of youth for the system and their annihilation and victimization.

The twentieth century modernist novel separates itself from the previous traditional, realistic novel on both thematic and narrative levels, and indeed the real experimental writer would attempt to achieve innovation of the text in its both thematic concern and structural organization. *Jacob's Room*, as a modernist novel, has a special place among its kind with its distinct form and structure apart from its thematic content. Concerning plot and the sequence of events, the novel lacks a complete and ordered plot and narrative structure in the traditional way. It starts with an abrupt beginning, with Mrs Flanders' words that she writes in her letter. The writer does not provide any information about what she is talking about. The abrupt beginning and the lack of information can also be observed clearly in the first paragraph of Chapter 3:

> 'This is not a smoking-carriage,' Mrs Norman protested, nervously but feebly, as the door swung open and a powerfully built young man jumped in. he seemed not to hear her. The train did not stop before it reached Cambridge, and here she was shut up alone, in a railway carriage, with a young man. (Woolf 25)

Who is Mrs Norman? Who is this young man? The questions arise in the reader's mind; however, without giving any answer, the writer describes the moment in detail and after one and a half pages later she prefers to reveal that the young man is Jacob Flanders, but she never tells who Mrs Norman is. Woolf creates a scene with intense descriptions to evoke the reader's imagination, but she suddenly destroys it and jumps into another moment of the story, which disturbs the reader's process of reception and makes it difficult to follow the narrator. Consequently, it becomes impossible for the writer to construct a unity of plot and action. The novel is full of sudden shifts and changes in time, place, and action, which Woolf does intentionally. Again in Chapter 3, Jacob's thoughts about the service in King's College Chapel and the women taking part in it are presented to the reader in a long paragraph, and the next paragraph suddenly begins with a moment of a Sunday lunch time with many people (Woolf 28). When and how many days later has he gone there? There are such gaps between the shifts of time and place throughout the novel, and this causes fragmentariness and incompleteness, and constructs a distinct narrative style which can be summarized as the following:

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> The style of *Jacob's Room* is that of the sketchbook artist rather than the academic painter. Scenes are swiftly and allusively outlined, not filled in, the essential relationships between characters intimated in brief but typical vignettes chosen seemingly at random from their daily lives: a don's luncheon party at Cambridge, a day spent reading in the British Museum, a walk with a friend. No incident is decisive or fully developed. Nothing is explained or given significance. The narrative unit is generally two or three pages long and not obviously connected to the one before or after. The effect is extremely economical and suggestive but at the same time frustrating for an audience trained to read in larger units and look for meaning and coherence. All of this was innovative, as Woolf's first readers saw. (Zwerdling 895)

Woolf uses this particular technique in order to create a more effective atmosphere to transfer her modernist point of view and themes to the reader. The significance of the ordinariness of our lives and moments pushes her to focus on some most realistic sides of life. She wants to show that in real life we cannot obtain information about everything around us, and there is no one to explain the things that remain unknown, like a narrator would do. This might be the reason why the writer does not provide all the information about the characters and events, and has a fragmented style which works together with the thematic structure of the novel. After all, she wants to write a novel that serves life itself to the reader.

Apart from plot and narration, Virginia Woolf constructs her novel by reorganizing the role of the narrator. Along with tone, mode, point of view, chronotope, narration, and other elements, the narrator is one of the most important components of a novel's structure, and it has the potential of determining the novel's process and characteristics. In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf appoints a peculiar task to the narrator which carries her idea of modernist fiction. She recurrently uses the notions of absence, lack of information, and fragmentariness in the novel to apply them to her building up the narrator as well. In most parts of the novel, she continues the tradition of the omniscient narrator, in which the narrator has the authority and knows and sees everything, can freely move in time and place, makes predictions about the future fate of the characters, and indicates his/her personal opinions on a situation. "Jacob, getting off his omnibus, loitered up the steps, consulted his watch, and finally made up his mind to go in…. Does it need an effort? Yes. These changes of mood wear us out" (Woolf 62). Here, the authority of the narrator is remarkable, emphasizing this authority by asking a question, providing an answer to it, and suggesting a point about the changing moods. It is also noteworthy that the word "us" adds a more personal inclination to narration. Although Woolf rarely consults her stream of consciousness technique in this novel, her narrator sometimes enters the characters' minds again by using its authority: "'So that's all? Well, a gloomy old place…. Where's Nelson's tomb? No time now-come again-a coin to leave in the box…. Rain or fine is it? Well, if it would only make up its mind!'" (Woolf 63). The quotation exhibits that the omniscient narrator reveals Jacob's mind and instant thoughts, because it has the control and freedom to access the minds of the characters.

The novel gains the characteristics of the modernist fiction at the point where Woolf alters the narrator's position considering its authority. In some parts of the novel, the narrator suddenly gives up its authoritative power and turns into another kind of narrator, a limited or detached one, an ordinary person who possesses a limited vision and knowledge. Clearness and complete knowledge are replaced by absence, ordinariness, ambiguity, and uncertainty. For instance, in Chapter 3, the narrator's mode changes by creating gaps of information and expresses the idea that its vision is limited:

> Was it to receive this gift from the past that the young man came to the window and stood there, looking out across the court? It was Jacob. He stood smoking his pipe while the last stroke of the clock purred softly round him. *Perhaps* there had been an argument. He looked

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> satisfied; indeed masterly; which expression changed slightly as he stood there, the sound of the clock conveying to him (*it may be)* a sense of old buildings and time; (…). (Woolf 40)

The writer intentionally chooses the words "perhaps" and "may be" to produce a sense of doubt, and to show that things are not always known and explained, or we cannot fully get to know a person, as we might do in real life. Woolf ruins the novel's unity and order by creating a contradiction with these two kinds of narrators. With the non-omniscient narrator, the reader's questions and expectations from the writer remain unanswered. By doing this, the writer puts the reader in an active position to find answers on their own, or does not care whether they find the answers or not, which can be related to Roland Barthes' idea of "writerly fiction" that he introduces in *S/Z*. Woolf's approach explains her concept of modernist fiction and her aim to change the novel tradition by building a new one. Kathleen Wall makes a detailed examination of Virginia Woolf's narrative style in *Jacob's Room*, and speculates on Woolf's using these two types of narrator, particularly the non-omniscient one. The critic calls it "character-focalizer" and explains its function as in the following:

> But the narrator's care in examining the various kinds of limitations that bedevil her full knowledge of characters' behaviour and motives suggests that Woolf's broader purpose is to explore and exemplify the epistemological crisis of authority that in part characterizes modernism. The character-focalizer is aware of all the perspectival limitations on our knowledge of our world – of the ways in which our feelings distort our vision; of the fact that, looking at others, we see ourselves and our own expectations; of the way our distance from a scene dictates what we see; of our need to rely upon the experience of others to fill in the gaps created by our inability to be in more than one place at a time. (Wall 310)

The limitations in our vision, knowledge, and knowing a person designate our nature, our existence in the world. The novel expresses this unknowable aspects and details of our lives by attributing a special purpose to the detached non-omniscient narrator. Its limitation in the novel is very obvious especially when Jacob and Florinda come to Jacob's room, enter the bedroom and shut the door behind them. The narrator stays out. It no longer can depict what is going on behind the door, for it is closed. It is crucial to state that the door here symbolizes the narrator's and our own limited access to knowledge. Again in another chapter towards the end, when Jacob and Sandra are walking around Acropolis, the narrator states that "[t]hey had vanished. There was the Acropolis; but had they reached it?" (Woolf 160-161). The narrator does not provide an answer. The mystery behind the question is just one of those infinite moments that remain unknown in real life, as Woolf tries to demonstrate in her novel of character formation.

4. *Jacob's Room* as a Modernist Bildungsroman

As an exponent of the twentieth century modernist and experimental fiction, *Jacob's Room* is above all a Bildungsroman in its thematic line following the protagonist Jacob's life from his early childhood to his young adulthood and consisting of certain perspectives, such as (1) childhood and education, (2) youth and university life (3) the experience of love and friendship, (4) the pursuit of the meaning of life and the theme of journey; and (5) failure or success in completing the formation.

4.1 Childhood and Education

In *Jacob's Room*, as in other Bildungsromane, the story of Jacob and his character formation process are presented from their beginnings in childhood. The childhood stage

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covers the first two chapters before he goes to Cambridge. In this part, Woolf follows the theme of childhood as a characteristic of the traditional Bildungsroman by making Jacob a fatherless protagonist. He is raised by his mother together with his two brothers living in countryside, Scarborough. Generally, in a Bildungsroman, the protagonist spends his childhood in a rural place, and the natural environment carries an important role in his first steps towards character development before he enters an urban and larger society which succeeds the experience of childhood. In the novel, we first meet Jacob when he is wandering around on the seaside alone, searching and collecting natural objects, such as shells, crab, and a skull while his mother and brother are searching for him. Here, the author actually gives the very first hint to his personality by showing him as a person who likes to be alone in nature, which provides happiness to him. It also immediately reminds the reader of the time when Jacob feels great happiness in his journey to Greece, walking alone through historical places and amid nature. Woolf gives another hint to his personality regarding his love for nature when Captain Barfoot asks for Jacob to give him a letter, and Mrs Flanders replies that "Jacob is after his butterflies as usual" (Woolf 23). To reveal his relationship with nature, Woolf prefers to use just one sentence uttered by his mother to give the idea without losing the intensity of meaning that the author tries to transfer to the reader.

Another aspect of the childhood experience of a protagonist in the Bildungsroman is that of gaining education. In the nineteenth century Bildungsromane, the character generally begins by having a formal education, sometimes in boarding schools, which is considered as the first stage of his spiritual formation and which is indispensable from a type of self-education based on personal interests. However, unlike in the literary pattern of the Victorian Bildungsroman, in *Jacob's Room* the protagonist is never introduced as embarking on an institutionalized education until he leaves home for his college education at the age of nineteen. The only moment when Virginia Woolf refers to Jacob's education in his childhood is the following:

> 'Oh, bother Mr Floyd!' said Jacob, switching off a thistle's head, for he knew already that Mr Floyd was going to teach them Latin, as indeed he did for three years in his spare time, out of kindness, for there was no other gentleman in the neighbourhood whom Mrs Flanders could have asked to do such a thing, and the elder boys were getting beyond her, and must be got ready for school (…), and Mr Floyd, like his father before him, visited cottages miles away on the moors, and, like old Mr Floyd, was a great scholar, which made it so unlikely – she had never dreamt of such a thing. (Woolf 14)

Even though the author does not indicate anything related to Jacob's formal education, it seems that she does not want to skip the education stage in the childhood process while creating her modernist Bildungsroman, and presents Jacob as having Latin courses from Mr Floyd, which can be classified as an informal education, unlike in most of the nineteenth century English Bildungsromane in which children have institutionalized education.

Already in childhood, society and its moral codes have a strong influence on protagonist's maturation and formation in the realistic Bildungsroman, but they do not have any presence in *Jacob's Room* as a modernist novel. The author never mentions about social order and does not develop a social chronotope in presenting Jacob's experience of childhood. Considering the fact that in the realistic Bildungsromane educational institutions are the first place where child protagonists are introduced to social and moral rules, the lack of the presentation of the formal education in Jacob's childhood strengthens the idea that modernist novels avoid the concern with those social structures that shape the maturation process of the character.

In the part of the novel dealing with Jacob's childhood, Virginia Woolf does not provide an explicit or detailed description of his childhood moments. Instead, she blends the

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bits and pieces of his childhood with natural descriptions and with some parts or fragments of lives of other characters including, Betty Flanders. By not following a specific order and not focusing only on Jacob while telling this phase of Jacob's life, Woolf deviates from the traditional pattern and applies her modernist technique of narration which promotes the notion of fragmentariness.

In *Jacob's Room* as a modernist Bildungsroman, in presenting the process of the childhood experience of the protagonist, the author both follows and diverges from the traditional literary pattern of the Bildungsroman. By creating an orphan character that grows up in a rural and natural environment, she exhibits a proper prototype of a Bildungsroman hero, but she distorts the concepts of education and disconsiders the influence of society on the protagonist, by which separating in theme and technique from the realist novel of formation.

4.2 Youth and University Life

The childhood period of the protagonist ends and he becomes a young man required to leave his local environment and home to continue his professional education or apprenticeship in a larger society where he takes his first steps towards real life which is full of ordeals. Jacob, like all other Bildungsroman heroes, completes his childhood and begins his university education at Cambridge, a larger urban city, as a nineteen year-old young man. In the realist Bildungsromane, generally the hero's departure from his home is triggered by some reasons such as the pain of losing someone dear, or being determined by an obstructing parental figure, or anger, or dissatisfaction, or the need for having a higher status in society. In *Jacob's Room* as a modernist Bildungsroman, no specific reason for Jacob's departure is provided except for his need to pursue college education.

The author makes a quick shift from childhood period to young adulthood by using just one sentence without any former implication on his departure: "Jacob Flanders, therefore, went up to Cambridge in October, 1906" (Woolf 24). Yet the reader can sense the change in Jacob's personality and the maturation he is passing through as he grows up. His childish and inexperienced habits leave their places to more serious issues, as in Chapter 3 he questions women's place in King's College Chapel:

> But this service in King's College Chapel – why allow women to take part in it? Surely, if the mind wanders (and Jacob looked extraordinarily vacant, his head thrown back, his hymn-book open at the wrong place), if the mind wanders it is because several hat shops and cupboards upon cupboards of coloured dresses are displayed upon rush-bottomed chairs. (…) So do these women – though separately devout, distinguished, and vouched for by the theology, mathematics, Latin, and Greek of their husbands. Heaven knows why it is. For one thing, thought Jacob, they're as ugly as sin. (Woolf 28)

Woolf presents Jacob, who is a young man now, in a different social environment consisting of elderly people and his classmates, interacting with them and arguing on various social, political, or daily matters and sharing. The author illustrates a scene form a Sunday lunch with the Durrant family and other guests, in which she clearly reveals Jacob's realization of the things he has lost upon his maturation from childhood to youth, his changing environment, and she presents the condition of youth in a world in which they have to find their own ways and build a life for themselves:

> Anyhow, whether undergraduate or shop boy, man or woman, it must come as a shock about the age of twenty – the world of the elderly – thrown up in such black outline upon what we are; upon the reality; the moors and Byron; the sea and the lighthouse; the sheep's jaw with the

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> yellow teeth in it; upon the obstinate irrepressible conviction which makes youth so intolerably disagreeable – 'I am what I am, and intend to be it,' for which there will be no form in the world unless Jacob makes one for himself. (…) Every time he lunches out on Sunday – at dinner parties and tea parties – there will be this same shock – horror – discomfort – then pleasure, for he draws into him at every step as he walks by the river such steady certainty, such reassurance from all sides, the trees bowing, the grey spires soft in the blue (…), whatever it is that gives the May air its potency, blurring the trees, gumming the buds, daubing the green. (Woolf 31)

It is also noteworthy that Virginia Woolf evidently discloses the difference between Jacob's childhood and youth in his formation process by reflecting his mind and thoughts within a disparate approach. While Woolf rarely opens Jacob's mind and thoughts to the reader in his childhood period, in his years of youth, she intentionally begins to give more attention to exposing his thoughts in order to demonstrate his intellectual and spiritual maturation.

University education plays a significant role in establishing a philosophy of life and an intellectual vision in the formative process of the protagonists of the nineteenth century Bildungsromane. In *Jacob's Room*, Virginia Woolf follows this pattern while creating her Bildungsroman hero, and Jacob is presented gradually as a more developed, educated, and intellectual young man in his university years. However, as in the first two chapters that cover Jacob's childhood, the author again seems to be distant from the theme of education, which is related to the social structure in the realist Bildungsroman. She does not even clearly states what field Jacob is studying on, except for indicating frequently his deep interest in literature throughout the novel. Woolf illustrates Jacob's university life, friendship, and his expanding social environment and inter-human relationships by adding new characters as the novel progresses, and his relationship with society reveals the persistency of an important aspect of the Bildungsroman tradition.

4.3 The Experience of Love and Friendship

The traditional, realistic Victorian Bildungsroman focuses on a specific individual and his or her process of formation which ends up with success or failure, where his or her interactions and relationships with other individuals have a special significance in establishing a philosophy of life and making sense of his or her existence in society. *Jacob's Room* is also a Bildungsroman which mirrors the main character's relationship with his friends and his emotional experiences as necessary steps of his maturation.

Beginning from Jacob's college years to other stages of his life until his death, Timothy Durrant has been presented as Jacob's closest friend with whom he shares most of his experiences. They sail together to Scilly Isles, while having conversations on different subjects. The author uses Timothy and his other friends as vehicles to expose Jacob's ideological perspectives and thoughts as he shares his opinions with his friends, instead of narrating them directly by using an omniscient narrator. Apart from Timothy, Jacob gains more friends as his environment changes and expands, such as Richard Bonamy, Edward Cruttendon, Mallinson and Jinny Carslake, whom he meets in France. The influence of friends on the protagonist in his maturation is strong in the nineteenth century Bildungsromane, since they are mostly social and moral types, but Woolf ignores this aspect in her modernist novel. She includes the element of friendship, but she does not devote any significance on it. It is obvious that Jacob's experiences of friendship do not contribute much to the shaping of his personality and do not have any significant effect on Jacob's decisions. He does not consult anyone while deciding on something, although he has friends around him. As Jacob is detached from the reader because of the fragmentariness of the novel, he is also

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detached from his friends and environment, although he seems to have a connection with them. He talks to them, he writes to them while he is travelling, but he is always alone.

In the realist Bildungsroman, falling in love is an important aspect of the protagonist's spiritual and emotional development. Generally, the hero experiences two love affairs, of which the first one ends in disappointment and pain, often this situation causing the hero's departure from his homeland to heal himself and to eventually form his identity. The second one provides him with epiphanic realizations and helps distinguish the good and the bad. In *Jacob's Room* as a modernist Bildungsroman, Virginia Woolf adopts the theme of love, however, by distorting the tradition again. Contrary to the realist Bildungsroman, here the emotional experience does not have any influential role on Jacob's formation. As she does in applying other thematic elements of the Bildungsroman literary system, Woolf retains the pattern but leaves it empty or altered. She presents Jacob as having love affairs with different women, such as Clara, Florinda, Fanny, and Sandra; however, neither of them is strong enough to influence Jacob in his process of development. Like everything else in the novel, they are incomplete and fragmented.

Nevertheless, Virginia Woolf exhibits different types of women having emotional relationship with Jacob. The first woman that Jacob falls in love, Clara, is illustrated as a domestic, house girl. Even if she seems like an appropriate woman to marry, they could not maintain their relationship. Unlike Clara, Florinda is depicted as a simple-minded and libertine girl, with whom Jacob has sexual intercourse, but does not continue to see her, either. Then he meets Fanny, who deals with painting and art. Fanny is deeply impressed by Jacob; however, Jacob could not develop an emotional response to her feelings. Lastly, in his trip to Greece, he meets a married woman named Sandra and falls in love with her. They do not establish a relationship except for short trips to historical places in Athens together, and Jacob turns back to England.

It is very obvious that although Jacob involves himself in a number of love affairs, the author never mentions his thoughts and plans on marriage. As a social institution, marriage does not have any presence in the novel, which is a supportive proof of the modernist novel's approach to the idea of social concern. In the Victorian Bildungsroman, the relationship with the opposite sex should lead the character to a suitable marriage that fits into social norms and values, which supports, besides professional aspect, the protagonist's successful formation; in *Jacob's Room*, Jacob's relationships do not lead him to anywhere, or have any significance in his formation process which actually ends up in failure.

4.4 The Pursuit of the Meaning of Life and the Theme of Journey

As a necessity of the contextual structure of the Bildungsroman literary tradition, in order to reach a successful formation the hero is supposed to find his own path in the milieu depending on his experiences, mistakes, and sufferings. This path, which is guided by social demands and rules, takes him to the success or failure of formation as the final stage of maturation. While moving along this path, the Bildungsroman hero tries to make his life meaningful and find his place in society.

The modernist Bildungsroman which alters the conventional pattern of the realist Bildungsroman does not allow society and social expectations to lead the protagonist to his formation. In this respect, Jacob's individual development should be examined within the frame of a modernist approach.

We hypothesize that as a Bildungsroman hero, Jacob's deviation from traditional society-centred Bildungsroman starts with his early interest in literature. In his every stage of life, he is always presented as connected to literature and books, namely in his conversations, in his room, and in his spare time. To Jacob, literature becomes a place of escapism from

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people, from society. He tries to find his identity and his existence in books, and assimilates himself from society. In this regard, he refuses the social guidance by designating himself as his own guide, and tries to achieve his self-cultivation by staying alone or travelling to distant places, which also emphasizes the idea of individuality in modernist literature. In Greece, he experiences an epiphany as a moment of intense happiness when he is alone and isolated: "And though Jacob remained gloomy he had never suspected how tremendously pleasant it is to be alone; out of England; on one's own, cut off from the whole thing" (Woolf 140). Although throughout the novel he participates in different social activities and interacts with different social groups and classes, his spiritual isolation and willingly assumed direction towards his intellectual and artistic development determine his self-sufficiency by rejecting social codes.

Apart from literature, the journey is thematically encapsulated as another influential factor on the protagonist's process towards his self-accomplishment, and it represents a both physical and spiritual journey. A journey is always full of new experiences and adventures, in this way offering a good opportunity to the author to create a congenial atmosphere of formation for the Bildungsroman hero. In the realist Bildungsroman, the hero is tested by social and moral values during his physical and spiritual journey prior to his completion of maturation, while in the modernist one the concept of journey acquires a more symbolic and essential meaning.

In *Jacob's Room,* although Jacob's journey commences the time when he leaves his homeland, his trip to Greece determines on the whole the crucial meaning and function of the theme of journey in the novel. Until he decides to go to Greece, Jacob's interest in ancient Greece and classics is hinted at beginning with his college years. In his room, there are "books enough, (…) a Greek dictionary with the petals of poppies pressed to silk between the pages (…). Then there were photographs from the Greeks, and a mezzotint from Sir Joshua – all very English" (Woolf 34). Considering Virginia Woolf's reflection on antiquity and Greek literature, it would not be surprising to come across this significant paragraph that reflects both Woolf's and Jacob's sympathy for antique literature, which is expressed through a conversation between Jacob and Timmy:

> The Greeks – yes, that was what they talked about – how when all's said and done, when one's rinsed one's mouth with every literature in the world, including Chinese and Russian (but these Slavs aren't civilized), it is the flavour of Greek that remains. (…) Civilizations stood round them like flowers ready for picking. Ages lapped at their feet like waves fit for sailing. Ad surveying all this, looming through the fog, the lamplight, the shades of London, the two young men decided in favour of Greece.
>
> 'Probably,' said Jacob, 'we are the only people in the world who know what the Greeks meant'. (Woolf 74)

Jacob's travel to Greece uncovers a major perspective in the novel, namely the perception of modern life and its effects on human in modernist fiction, and also the idea of self-achievement as a thematic component of the Bildungsroman tradition. By going to Greece, Jacob symbolically escapes from modern and metropolitan city life to an ancient place where the first civilization of humanity flourished. The author delivers an obvious message by contrasting modernity and antiquity, where antiquity is glorified: "Though the opinion is unpopular it seems likely enough that bare places, fields too thick with stones to be ploughed, tossing sea-meadows half-way between England and America, suit us better than cities" (Woolf 144). She integrates the idea of the superiority of antiquity with Jacob's admiration for Greece by making it the most meaningful part of his life. He reflects his enthusiasm and adoration of the place in his letter to Bonamy during his journey: "I intend to

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come to Greece every year so long as I live. It is the only chance I can see of protecting oneself from civilization" (Woolf 145-146).

We believe that this is a crucial moment in the novel considering the notion of formation that is presumed to be completed in the Bildungsroman. Woolf clarifies the value that Jacob grants for his life by exhibiting his happiness in Greece as if he finds there the right place to live and achieve his purpose. Regarding the idea of individuality as the main thematic component of the modernist novel, Greece appears to be the place where Jacob can complete his individual achievement. However, as a prerequisite of the modernist Bildungsroman, the failure of the hero and the distortion of the tradition, Woolf does not let her character complete his formation and self-achievement and bestows him an early death by intentionally reflecting his ironic words upon his intention of visiting there every year as long as he is alive (Woolf 145).

4.5 Failure or Success in Completing the Formation

To remember the main concern of the modernist Bildungsroman while determining the fate of the protagonist at the end of the formation process is revelatory for the analysis of Jacob's condition with regards to his development. The modernist rejection of the traditional type of fiction, which deals with social concern and moral issues and the idea that the social and moral didacticism should be included in the works of literature, is reflected as a kind of criticism on realistic fiction. Modernists make use of the Bildungsroman literary tradition, which originally belongs to the Victorian period, and regard it as an appropriate platform to make the critique of the realistic perspective according to which the Bildungsroman pictures an individual's exposure to social influences in every stage of his life.

The notion of social power in the modernist fiction operates as a handicap for the protagonist of the Bildungsroman to achieve a successful formation, instead of being a substructure that provides him with a social status. The condition of man in society gains a totally different perspective in the twentieth century, which is presented as individuality and individual experience, including frustration, alienation, and assimilation of the human from social structure. The desires and goals of the individual that are needed for his self-cultivation contradict with the demands of society, and this causes his failure in completing the anticipated formation.

At the end of the novel, the consequence of Jacob's maturation in terms of success or failure should be examined in two different perspectives considering the social and personal accomplishment. These two opposite perspectives exhibit how Jacob responds to the demands of society and to his personal goals within a critical approach to the realistic fiction.

Considering the social aspect, Jacob's interaction with society and social institutions is deliberately excluded and ignored throughout the novel. Woolf dismisses certain elements of the Bildungsroman that are related to social power, and focuses on Jacob's personal desires and inner world. Jacob is not able to maintain a stable connection in his relationship with his environment, love affairs, experience of job and so on. As a prototype of a modern man, he is presented as obscure, insignificant, and assimilated from society, who goes after his own objectives. He becomes so unimportant and meaningless for the society that his death in war does not signify anything. It is also noteworthy that by not establishing a permanent relation to anything in his life, Jacob seems to be aware of his temporary existence in this modern, chaotic, and disordered civilization.

Woolf makes another social criticism, this time on World War I and the country's attitude towards the war by sending young lives to death. Her vision that society and its rules are obstructions for the individual freedom makes sense when Jacob's early death at war is contemplated as an end for his future complete formation. Unlike other war poets and writers

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of the period that glorify war and refer to it as "heroic", Virginia Woolf treats the issue in her novels as tragic, as indeed a modernist writer would do in that the "First World War inspired the modernists not to heroic mythmaking but to a critical unmaking" (Froula 66). By focusing on Jacob's death at war, the critic also asserts that

> Woolf does not tell Jacob's story but unwrites it to expose the social forces that initiate him into masculinity and leave him dead on the battlefield. What facilitates this deconstructed bildungsroman is the fact that the war story evoked by Jacob Flanders' very name did not have to be told in 1922, for (as Lucrezia Warren Smith says) 'Every one has friends who were killed in the War' (*MD* 66). Leaving 'character-mongering' to the 'gossips,' the essayist-narrator frames Jacob's life and death not as a unique and personal story but as that of a generation. (Froula 70)

Jacob eventually becomes a victim of the social order, and his death in war can be interpreted as his failure that prevents him from visiting Greece every year, which is an ideal place for his escape from the modern civilization. He finds his purpose, but the war and his refusal of integration into social entities provide the basis for his failure as a Bildungsroman hero:

> As for Jacob Flanders, he is at once an elusive being no net of words can capture and – delivered by his education to a modern war that overwhelms individual will – a puppet moved hither and thither by fate, one of the war dead, a ghost. As Rachel Vinrace dies in a battle to bring to light civilization's hidden 'truth,' Jacob dies in the gap between founding ideal of European civilization – summed up as the 'Greek myth' or 'illusion' – and modern barbarity (*JR* 137, 138). Through the deaths of their young protagonists, these companion pieces of the modernist bildungsroman suggest that to learn to read the modern novel is to become aware of the hidden forces that drive modern lives; that to witness the life and death of the puppet or ghost its pages pursue may be in some sense to save one's own. (Froula 64)

By considering the individualist approach of modernism which highlights the individual freedom over abiding the social restrictions, Jacob's situation can be interpreted within a different outlook.

Although his death symbolizes the failure of his maturation process, by being able to discover his goal and the meaning of his short life, Jacob gains a victory over society that tries to devour him into its powerful mechanism, and thus achieves his first stage and fulfils some basic requirements for a successful formation.

Throughout the novel, Jacob is always in search for a better society instead of the modern one that he lives in. Starting from his early readings and interest in Greek and antique civilization and literature, antiquity becomes for him superior to the modern civilization:

> 'You ought to have been in Athens,' he would say to Bonamy when he got back. 'Standing on the Parthenon,' he would say, or 'The ruins of the Coliseum suggest some fairly sublime reflections,' which he would write out at length in letters. It might turn to an essay upon civilization. A comparison between the ancients and moderns, with some pretty sharp hits at Mr Asquith – something in the style of Gibbon.
>
> A stout gentleman laboriously hauled himself in, dusty, baggy, slung with gold chains, and Jacob, regretting that he did not come of the Latin race, looked out of the window. (Woolf 135)

He turns back from his journey with a sense of happiness of fulfilment, but either way, his death in war as a victim of the modern civilization renders his formation a failure.

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In many ways, *Jacob's Room* is a significant novel which represents Virginia Woolf's and all other modernist novelists' attitude towards modern life and modern civilization's enforcement upon individuals. However, *Jacob's Room* diverges from other modernist novels by adopting the Bildungsroman tradition which originates from a nineteenth century dominated by the realist movement while reversing the tradition and criticising the conventions of that period. Jacob becomes the key element by being a Bildungsroman protagonist whose process of formation and development is investigated beginning from his childhood, but ends up with a tragic failure.

Conclusion

Not society, not institutionalized education, not professional advancement, not love or marriage, not family or inter-human demands, but literature and journey shape Jacob as a solitary, lonely figure whose maturation is a private experience, the realm of an individual mind, his own universe, his room, a room of one's own.

Virginia Woolf's novel focuses on its protagonist rendering his process of development and formation with a strong psychological insight into character. Contrary to the idea of absence and ambiguity that Woolf widely uses throughout the novel, the title carries a very simple and clear meaning that explains the novel's content to some extent. However, although the title apparently propounds the main character, the writer's idiosyncratic style changes the situation when the reader witnesses the gaps within the characterization of Jacob. She intentionally never fully describes Jacob's appearance and personality; instead, she assigns this duty to other characters – mostly women. That is to say, the writer deliberately reveals Jacob's character by revealing other minor characters' impressions and descriptions of him.

An attempt to encompass a description of Jacob by combining all minor characters' remarks on Jacob upon meeting him from the beginning to the end of the novel would start not until Chapter 3, since prior to that the reader has no idea of Jacob's appearance and personality, how he looks like and what are his features of character. For the first time the writer provides a description of Jacob, who is nineteen, through the eyes of Mrs Norman, in a train carriage: "powerfully built young man" (Woolf 25). She continues her impression of him:

> Taking note of socks (loose), of tie (shabby), she once more reached his face. She dwelt upon his mouth. The lips were shut. The eyes bent down, since he was reading. All was firm, yet youthful, indifferent, unconscious – as for knocking one down! (…) then he fixed his eyes – which were blue – on the landscape. (Woolf 26)

Then comes Mrs Durrant's opinion about him as "extraordinarily awkward (…) [y]et so distinguished looking" (Woolf 58). The remarks are intensified especially in Chapter 5, in which Mrs Durrant again: "distinction", "distinguished-looking", "extremely awkward", "[t]here was something in the shape of his hands which indicated taste", "[t]hen his mouth – but surely, of all futile occupations this of cataloguing features is the worst" (Woolf 68). Clara Durrant writes in her diary: "[h]e is so unworldly", "frightening" (Woolf 68). Another female character, Julia Eliot: "the silent young man", "[i]f he is going to get on in the world, he will have to find his tongue" (Woolf 69). Betty Flanders: "clumsy in the house" (Woolf 69). Two dancers in the celebration party: "the most beautiful man we have ever seen" (Woolf 73). Florinda: "like one of those statues in the British Museum", "such a good man" (Woolf 78). Fanny Elmer: "awkward", "beautiful voice", "little and firm he speaks" (ibid., 116). Sandra Wentworth Williams: "very distinguished looking" (Woolf 145).

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These characters' impressions about Jacob throughout the novel expose and summarize Jacob's personality, which the author avoids to reveal directly. The reader concludes about Jacob that he is a silent, attractive, extraordinary, awkward, well-built, and blue-eyed man, who is fond of literature and Greek antiquity. Woolf could describe Jacob in one sentence like this; however, her modernist characterization technique produces instead a fragmented and incomplete characterization. Her aim in doing this is to show that in real life, our impressions on someone determine the way we know and recognize that person and they are both not enough and deceptive to know his/her real character. It is impossible to know a personality with its whole aspects. That is why Woolf deliberately creates and exhibits Jacob's personality as deficient and a mystery. In the following paragraph taken from the novel, Woolf clearly states her idea of the elusiveness of the reflected or expressed personalities:

> But how far was he a mere bumpkin? How far was Jacob Flanders at the age of twenty-six a stupid fellow? It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done. Some, it is true, take ineffaceable impressions of character at once. Others dally, loiter, and get blown this way and that. Kind old ladies assure us that cats are often the best judges of character. A cat will always go to a good man, they say; but then, Mrs Whitehorn, Jacob's landlady, loathed cats. (Woolf 154)

In its character representation strategies, as well as in its plot, narrative organization and in some of its thematic elements that also build up the literary system of the Bildungsroman, *Jacob's Room* departs from the conventions of novel writing, in general, and of the novel of formation, in particular, especially in terms of structure and the lack of complete and definite meaning and message, and constitutes thematically and structurally a sample of modernist fiction, the first novel in which Virginia Woolf applies experimental, modernist devices and techniques.

Concerning the success or failure of formation, the main thematic principle in a Bildungsroman, the message and the meaning are again indefinite and subject to the freedom of reader's interpretation. Our own final concluding reflection would follow a twofold perspective as to encapsulate as true and valid both perspectives of success and failure: the modern civilization and social restrictions victimize Jacob by sending him to death, which results in his failure and the incompleteness of formation; however, by discovering his ideal place and achieving – however short-lived – escapism from the modern life, Jacob is able to fulfil his individual desire and seemingly accomplish successfully his formation in spite of the impossibility to maintain it because of his death at a young age.

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