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The Degeneration and Crisis of the Late Victorian *Bildungsroman*

The Protagonist's Circular Development and the Failure of Formation

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Introduction

From the second half of the nineteenth century the concept of modernity underwent a process of gradual transformation from a bewitching idea of progress, despite its risks, to a pessimistic and regressive one. And consequently, also the literary genre that represented modernity underwent a gradual degeneration until it reached its crisis at the turn of the century. Indeed, the *Bildungsroman* had been for more than a century the literary genre that aimed to be "the 'symbolic form' of 'modernity'".[1] Deeply imbued with the concept of historicism which connects the idea of *Bildung* both "with an understanding of history as a universal and transformative current",[2] and with a collective idea of nation in which people "who share a culture, language, or even just geographic location will frequently undergo the same formative process";[3] this genre rose in Germany with the publication of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-96) and from that moment on 'youth' will be "'a specific image of modernity'":

> Only by curbing its intrinsically boundless dynamism, only by agreeing to betray to a certain extent its very essence, only thus, it seems, can modernity be *represented*.[4]

The profound impact of the *Bildungsroman* on the Western literary scenario was proven by the massive proliferation of this genre throughout Europe in the nineteenth century. Yet, in Britain this genre had a different evolution. Differently from the continental *Bildungsroman*, the British novel of formation demonstrated a more solid stability, which was represented by the ultimate happy ending of these novels. Whilst Balzac's and Stendhal's French novels already around the

[1] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, London, Verso, 2000, p. 5.
[2] Boes, T., *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the "Bildungsroman"*, Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 2012, p. 51.
[3] *Ivi*, p. 158.
[4] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 6.

first half of the century showed the first tragic endings due to their characters' excessive ambition excited by the Napoleonic turmoil; in Britain we need to wait until 1847 with the publication of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* to witness the initial crumbling of the ultimate happy ending. And the same novel stood also as the prototype of a gradual degeneration of the form of the coming-of-age novel whose new features would be developed and integrated with a tragic end and a negative didactic function by George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil* (1859) and finally by Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890-1).

Indeed, at the turn of the nineteenth century with the crisis of modernity the youth started losing its symbolic function by culminating into a 'frozen youth', due to many cultural, scientific, political, and economic issues which originated around the mid of the century influencing the form of the *Bildungsroman*; a symbolic degeneration that is at the centre of this thesis. I will argue that from the middle of the nineteenth century in Britain the form of the 'classical *Bildungsroman*' started undergoing both a thematic and aesthetic degeneration culminating with the failure of the protagonist's formation and its tragic end. These degenerated features are the intrusion of Gothic, the circular development of the protagonist's formation, the predominance of the negative alterity/double, and the negative didactic function through the negative empathy. This degenerated form of the novel of formation might be called 'negative *Bildungsroman*', as it willingly displays negative aspects to warn the reader against an emulation of the protagonist's wrongdoing.

Wuthering Heights, *The Lifted Veil* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* have these peculiar features in common. Yet, with *The Lifted Veil* the negative didactic function and the tragic end become explicit. Then with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, besides these aforesaid features, the youth exhausted its symbolic function, which is represented by the artificial arrested growth of the 'frozen youth'. This latter cooperates with the new aesthetics of the 'novel-essay' to symbolize the ultimate crisis of the *Bildungsroman*, and consequently of modernity itself.

The first chapter of this dissertation, *Coming of Age in the Victorian Bildungsroman: Formation and Deformation of Characters*, will deal with the origin and the peculiar evolution of the British *Bildungsroman* and its initial deformation. More specifically I will firstly describe the redefinition of the "bourgeois morality" according to which from the middle of the century the fulfillment of the protagonist's formation is reached out of a confrontation with a negative alterity, rather than with a similar positive character. And this negative alterity is momentarily accepted to allow the protagonist's formation to be then expelled once the formation is completed. Yet, I will discuss some peculiar novels in which this negative alterity rather than being expelled, it prevails and, being the protagonist, and causes the degeneration of the journey of formation and the ultimate tragic end. And it is from these exceptional novels that the 'negative *Bildungsroman*' springs.

The second chapter will delve into the first experiment of a 'negative *Bildungsroman*', *Wuthering Heights*. We will argue how this novel created the prototypical features of this degeneration deriving from the Romantic tradition since it is still in a period of transition from a romantic period to modernity. Indeed, it merged the Gothic genre with the *Bildungsroman* and its protagonist, Mr. Heathcliff, stands as the example of the predominance of the negative alterity which causes his and others' circular development. Yet, in this novel the tragic end and the negative didactic function are still not explicit.

The third chapter entitled *The Lifted Veil and the End of the Classic Phase of the Bildungsroman* will deal with the creation of arguably the first proper 'negative *Bildungsroman*', since in this novel Eliot made the tragic end and the negative didactic function explicit with the advent of a tragic connotation of modernity, since the protagonist's tragic end dramatizes the imminent risks of a modernity that lured the modern man into a dismal loneliness. And by employing her unique first-person narrative and the structure of the confession, Eliot exploited the negative empathy by making the reader vicariously experiencing

the negative outcomes of Latimer's egoism to warn about an emulation of his actions. Therefore, the reader becomes aware of the importance of sympathy and love in our society.

The last chapter entitled *The Picture of Dorian Gray and the "Frozen Youth"* will finally delve into the pessimistic redefinition of the idea of modernity with the spreading of the 'degeneration' theory which highlights a hereditary diseased humanity that was heading towards its extinction, and this theory is present in the novel as the inner Gothic double. Such negative redefinition of the idea of human progress shows its consequences in the ultimate degeneration of the *Bildungsroman* at the turn of the century. Firstly, the failure of the protagonist's formation is represented by the artificial arrested growth of the 'frozen youth'. And secondly, the new decadent aesthetic of the 'novel-essay' disrupts the normal temporal flow of the *Bildungsroman* by inserting static chapters and monologues that postpone the protagonist's agency. Both aspects thematically and aesthetically cooperate to symbolize the crisis of the *Bildungsroman* and of modernity itself. Nevertheless, Wilde's novel is also one of the last examples of a 'negative *Bildungsroman*', since he presents tragic outcomes of an excessive aestheticism through the employment of the omniscient narrator, that is again functional to make the reader vicariously experience the negative consequences of Dorian's wrongdoings as a warning about an excessive aestheticism.

After this degenerative phase of the *Bildungsroman*, during the first half of the twentieth century this genre definitive collapses as a sign of the downfall of the Western civilization which will be apparent in the imminent outbreaks of the two World Wars, and especially in the madness and folly of Nazism and Fascism during World War II.

Chapter I. Coming of Age in the Victorian *Bildungsroman*: Formation and Deformation of Characters

The use of the German word *Bildungsroman* was preferred to describe a narrative genre dealing with the coming of age of young characters towards adulthood. As Redfield suggests, the reason for the preference of the original word can be found in the German suffix itself "*Build* (representation) and *Bildung* (formation)" that summarizes simultaneously both the self-reflexive individual aspect of a character and its integration into the universalizing structure of the novel.[5] However, this definition is far too simplistic to describe all the cultural and historical changes that covered the whole nineteenth-century Europe and influenced the genre itself and consequently the formation of its characters. As a matter of fact, there are two different approaches in the critical debate on the *Bildungsroman*. Boes skillfully divides the "universalist" from the "essentialist". The former "detects themes of universal human significance in the novel of formation";[6] the latter "believes that *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, as well as the other novels of formation that were more or less directly inspired by it, reveals something specific about the character of the German nation".[7] Nevertheless, both approaches agree on defining "the *Bildungsroman* via the question of form rather than content, and thus also via its ultimate telos".[8] It is this very aspect of the form that encapsulates the important feature of this genre that Esty calls the "soul-nation allegory", according to which the individual "soul and nation grow together".[9] On the other hand, Moretti defines the form as the "'symbolic form' of modernity", according to which the youth "is, so to speak,

[5] Cf. Redfield, M., *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and "Bildungsroman",* Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press. 1996, p. 38.
[6] Boes, T., *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the "Bildungsroman"*, cit., p. 21.
[7] *Ivi*, p. 19.
[8] *Ivi*, p. 21.
[9] Esty, J., *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, Oxford University Press, London, 2012, p. 17.

the modernity's 'essence', the sign of a world that seeks its meaning in the future rather than in the past";[10] a new future which now offers boundless opportunities: "As with the money, the fascination of social mobility is in its boundlessness: it is not the question of reaching 'a' position, no matter how high (Napoleon), but of the possibility to become 'anything'".[11]

I. 1 *The Origin and Evolution of the Bildungsroman*

Initially the original, or as Moretti defines it "the classical *Bildungsroman*", was "explicitly anti-heroic and prosaic".[12] The representative novel of this phase was Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-96).[13] The protagonist is a normal youngster who accustomed the reader to a "phenomenology that makes normality interesting and meaningful *as* normality".[14] However, according to Boes, this important novel not only highlights the "origins of the German *Bildungsroman* in the picaresque genre",[15] but also the rise of historicism that changed inevitably the way of conceiving history:

> By the early nineteenth century, however, the conventions of both historiography and novelistic writing had changed considerably, due in no small part to the resounding victory of historicism. "History" was now regarded as a dynamic, forward-moving and "emplotted" process, the laws of which thinkers such as Hegel and Marx set out to codify. Similarly, novels now had to contend with what Georg Lukàcs termed the "transcendental homelessness" of the

[10] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: the Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., pp. 5-6.
[11] *Ivi*, p. 131.
[12] *Ivi*, p. 11.
[13] The original German title was *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and this novel is considered the first *Bildungsroman* in the proper sense, since during the previous decades the picaresque genre forerun the self-formation feature of the protagonist through 'adventures'.
[14] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: the Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 11.
[15] Boes, T., *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the "Bildungsroman"*, cit., p. 89.

> modern individual: the ways, in other words, in which human beings try to claim a place for themselves amid the tumultuous flow of history.[16]

In this new perspective, historicism influenced the development of the *Bildungsroman* that "differs from established schemata based in the legacy of German idealism" that tended to "privilege finality, and focused on the perfected form revealed at the end of the protagonist's development".[17] And although *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* embedded both the German idealism, characterized by the perfect form of the happy ending, and the new theory of historicism that privileged the process rather than finality; this novel might be considered a watershed since Europe was about to face several historical and cultural changes that influenced the idealism of the 'classical *Bildungsroman*' by making the formation problematic. Moretti identifies in Napoleon the historical turmoil of the nineteenth century, whose deeds inspired a generation of middle-class youngsters:

> Without Napoleon literary history too would have been totally different, for we would not have had that dynamic, ambitious, and ambiguous hero who dominates an entire century. His restless ambiguity makes him the natural representative of an age in which existence truly becomes […] 'problematic'.[18]

Napoleon himself was the first bourgeois embodying the values of the French Revolution which replaced those of the old aristocracy, and he seemed for a long while to change the course of history until the Congress of Vienna (1814-15) in which the political status of Europe was restored to the pre-Napoleonic period. In other words, Napoleon embodied the romantic revolutionary individuality embodied in many protagonists of the continental *Bildungsroman*, who

[16] Boes, T., *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the "Bildungsroman"*, cit., p. 57.
[17] *Ivi*, p. 59.
[18] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: the Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 76.

momentarily fulfil their limitless ambitions colliding with the rules of society, to then face the tragic end. As a result, the continental *Bildungsroman* had a different evolution compared to the British novel of progress. Indeed, countries such as France or Germany had been very sensitive to all these historical changes: the French Revolution, the Napoleonic period that inevitably influenced the narrative conventions and the logic of the continental *Bildungsroman*, whose protagonists were characterized by stark ambition and self-illusions that led them to a tragic romantic failure of their formations. To name some of them: Balzac's *Lost Illusions* (1837-43), Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* (1830).[19]

Yet, Britain was a unique exception. The British *Bildungsroman* featured a prolonged stability in its narrative conventions, from Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) to Dicken's *David Copperfield* (1849-50), that were based on the final happy ending signalled by the marriage of the protagonist, or as Moretti defines it, the "judicial-fairy-tale model".[20] This unique aspect was due to the circumstance that "the bourgeois revolution had taken place between 1640 and 1688 and England, which had never been touched by Napoleon's forces, was perhaps the only European nation for which 1789 did not seem like year one of modernity".[21] However, the Napoleonic heroic germ, even though not in a tragic form, started insinuating into the early Victorian *Bildungsroman* by making also the British youth problematic.

I. 2 *The Romantic Victorian Bildungsroman and the "Bourgeois Morality"*

Youth and problematic are the two keywords of this romantic era which will also be the main features of the rising Victorian *Bildungsroman*, whose first traces can

[19] The original French titles were *Illusions Perdues* and *Le Rouge et le Noir*.
[20] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: the Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 214.
[21] *Ivi*, p. 181.

be found within pre-existing consolidated genres published during the second half of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century in Britain, such as the picaresque novel of Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones* (1749); the historical novel of Sir. Walter Scott, *Waverly, or 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814); and especially the declining sentimental novel during the second half of the eighteenth century. As Harkin suggests, the exhaustion of the sentimental novel at the turn of the eighteenth century was caused rightly by the excessive resistance of its protagonists towards the inevitable commercial expansion and the rise of the middle class;[22] men and women of feeling were depicted, in the last twenty years of the eighteenth century, as excessively sensitive and incapable of dealing with the way of the world, and therefore new protagonists and a new narrative form were needed to represent the social mobility and integration of the expanding middle class:

> *The Man of Feeling* in particular, and sentimental fiction more broadly, in the determined preference for time past, define the sentimental novel itself as a kind of anti-*Bildungsroman*. The *Bildungsroman*, or novel of formation, developed in the later years of the eighteenth century to become, alongside the courtship novel, the dominant form of fictional prose narrative in the nineteenth century.[23]

Characters of the developing *Bildungsroman* express what Armstrong calls the "bourgeois morality", something that "appears to be the assertion of pure individuality".[24] Yet, the peculiarity of this morality revolves around a paradox, since the protagonists at the beginning of their journey of formation yearn to prove their self-expression dictated by romantic passions of love or ambition against the social order, but finally on the threshold of maturity, the same morality

[22] Cf. Harkin, M., *Introduction* to Mackenzie, H., *The Man of Feeling* [1771], ed. Harkin, M., Peterborough, Broadview Press, 2005, Introduction, p. 16.
[23] *Ibidem*.
[24] Armstrong, N., "The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism", in Moretti, F. ed., *The Novel, Volume 2: Forms and Themes*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 349-89, p. 349.

also makes them join the social contract that demands of individuals to willingly restrain their individuality by harnessing the very passions that triggered their journey.[25] Considering novels written in England between the romantic era and the early Victorian era, Armstrong highlights recurring patterns that will be fully developed in the second half of nineteenth-century Britain. These patterns reflect conditions characters have to meet to find their place in the world:

> […] to enter into the contractual relationship that gained them membership in a modern social order, individuals had to renounce what was most essential to their individuality. This is no less true of Anne Elliot's quiet refusal of Captain Wentworth in Austen's *Persuasion* and Waverley's involuntary renunciation of Flora Mac-Ivor in Sir Walter Scott's Waverley, than it is of Jane Eyre's empassioned rejection of a bigamous marriage to Rochester. In all three cases, moreover, the rules of kinship that nineteenth-century protagonists must obey at the peril of their very existence always collides with an alternative morality based on fidelity to one's own desire. By no coincidence, this turn against individualism on the part of bourgeois morality during the thirty-year period between Austen and Brontë coincides with the rise to hegemony of the novel and of the class whose interests that genre consistently served.[26]

Additionally, Armstrong identifies among English romantic novelists, such as Scott and Mary Shelley, the first ones who experimented a new narrative approach consisting in opening the boundaries of society to new forms of individuality or alterity characters must confront. This new approach changed the course of the future English fiction and inevitably influenced the future Victorian *Bildungsroman*, whose protagonists cannot reach the formation without a confrontation with an alterity:

[25] Cf. Armstrong, N., "The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism", pp. 356-57.
[26] *Ivi*, p. 366.

> Scott and Shelley set a future course for British fiction that turned the novel itself against the very expressions of individualism likely to bring about a more inclusive social order. Both authors focused on the revolutionary energy that had infused morality into the community capable of opening to include new forms of individualism. Both, however, focused on such larger-than-life figures as Fergus and the monster with something like affection, only to denounce these figures for seeking self fulfillment at the expense of the entire community […] Both authors initially seem to push the individual beyond the limits of collective identity in order to expand the social contract beyond the limits of a nation, class, or race and include members of an outside group selected to challenge those boundaries. Waverley and Frankenstein open the floodgates of inclusion, however, only to establish irreducible differences between cultural material that can be contained within the collective identity and that which would nullify any such identity.[27]

It seems that the basis from which the Victorian *Bildungsroman* was to develop is based on a structure that is "*intrinsically contradictory*",[28] and that the journey of formation is based on the youth's temporal determination, something that, as we have seen, Moretti calls "the 'symbolic form' of modernity"; a contradictory form that he considers being the cause of a similar contradictory historical feature of a century in which "Europe plunges into modernity, but without possessing a culture of modernity", so that the symbolic centrality of youth in the future flourishing of the Victorian *Bildungsroman* is exploited "because Europe has to attach a meaning, not so much to youth, as to modernity".[29] He continues: "This is not surprising, since the nineteenth century, under the pressure of modernity, had first of all to reorganize its conception of change – which too often, from the time of the French Revolution, had appeared as a meaningless and thus threatening reality".[30] As suggested, it is essential that characters of the early

[27] Armstrong, N., "The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism", cit., pp. 367-68.
[28] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: the Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 6.
[29] *Ivi*, p. 5.
[30] *Ivi*, p. 6.

Victorian *Bildungsroman* in order to reach adulthood must go through a development that according to Golban "is rendered linearly, and the process [of development] is essentially a straight line into the indefinite and infinite space and especially time".[31] This linear formation of the protagonists of the *Bildungsroman* can be gradually achieved only through negotiation, failures and pain, by facing the actual reality and dissolving what they imagined reality was.

Adulthood means also learning to distinguish what is good from what is evil by reasoning and controlling desires. Nevertheless, this awareness cannot be achieved without a direct experience of the world with all its threats and pleasures. Armstrong and Tennenhouse discuss this point, by appealing to Locke's empiricism, in *A Mind for Passion: Locke and Hutcheson on Desire*:[32]

> […] from our sensations of pleasure and pain arise our notions of good and evil, and reason prompts us to prefer the good. But Lockean reason […] does not explain why men subordinate their immediate desires to the greater good. To behave in this way, he argues, humans must have an internal moral sense.[33]

I. 3 *Binary Oppositions in the Bildungsroman and the Gothic*

The real question is: how can the moral sense distinguish the good from the bad? An answer might be found in *Structural Anthropology* (1949). There, in comparing myths of different cultures, Lévis-Strauss found similar structural patterns of evaluation.[34] This study exploits the contrasting binarism of plot elements and similar-but-opposed characters to illustrate the importance of the

[31] Golban, P., *Victorian Fiction as a Bildungsroman: its Flourishing and Complexity,* Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars, 2019, p. 164.
[32] Cf. Armstrong, N. and Tennenhouse, L., "A Mind for Passion: Locke and Hutcheson on Desire", in *Politics and the Passions, 1500–1850*, ed. Coli, D., Kahn, V. and Saccamano, N., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 131-50, p. 133.
[33] Armstrong, N., *The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism*, cit., p. 349.
[34] Cf. Lévi-Strauss, C., *Structural Anthropology,* trans., C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf, NY, Basic Books, 1963 [1949], p. 214.

negative element without which the positive one doesn't have much meaning or vice versa. The same structural pattern can be found both in the so-far-discussed romantic novels written in the first half of the nineteenth century in Britain, and also in some examples of the early Victorian *Bildungsroman*. For instance, if *Jane Eyre* (1847) is taken in consideration, the linear formation of the young protagonist is in line with the bourgeois morality, since Jane rebels against the society that restricts her individuality according to conventions, to find then a compromise in the end. The happy ending and her maturity though are achievable only by a negotiation of values and by confronting herself with her binary opposites, Bertha (the excess of violent passions) and Helen (the excess of moral restrictions), so that Jane can find a compromise in the middle between the two excesses, in the end. The same can be said about a more mature Victorian *Bildungsroman*, *Great Expectations* (1860-61):

> Bertha's purpose in relation to Jane is much the same as Orlick's relation to Pip in Great Expectations, Jo's relation to Esther in Bleak House, or Bradley Headstone's relation to Eugene Wrayburn in Our Mutual Friend, as well as the many ingenious examples of the so-called divided self that mark the literature of this epoch.[35]

These alterities the protagonist must face are what Armstrong describes as "[…] indigestible lumps of cultural traits", in the sense that "Victorian fiction could simultaneously embrace and exclude precisely what that fiction designated as most hostile to middle-class culture".[36] In other words, it seems that Victorian fiction, in line with the paradox of bourgeois morality, exploits this binarism for the formation's sake, by initially enlarging the boundaries by accepting the immoral alterity in the journey of formation. But once the protagonists have confronted themselves with the alterity and eventually are approaching their

[35] Armstrong, N., *The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism,* cit., p. 375.
[36] *Ibidem*.

coming of age, then the alterity itself can be excluded and sanctioned. It could be argued that this inclusive/exclusive stratagem is to make protagonists acknowledge their own passions and that "the forms of desire that had to be resisted could take any number of forms—adultery, business fraud, false identity—as long as the protagonist's act of resistance placed him or her momentarily and wrongfully in someone else's shoes".[37] This exploration of the world and of the self, on the one hand contributes to the ultimate maturity, but on the other hand, as Moretti suggests, the journey might give "rise to unexpected hopes, thereby generating an interiority not only fuller than before, but also perennially dissatisfied and restless".[38] This will be the case of some Victorian *Bildungsroman* discussed in the next paragraph, in which negative protagonists experience a deformation that leads them to death, being incapable of harnessing their violent passions and control their inner moral sense. I will argue that these kinds of novels of formation, published between the high and the late Victorian age, represent a degenerative phase of the British coming of age novel between the middle of the nineteenth century and the modernism of the early twentieth century. In this phase it is witnessed a shift from the happy ending feature of the 'classical *Bildungsroman'* to the failure of the formation is to be seen. These novels might be considered as 'negative *Bildungsroman'*, since their protagonists' failed formations aim at being negatively didactic on purpose by warning the reader about the possible outcomes of a boundless expression of their individuality without the ultimate negotiation of the bourgeois morality.

I. 4 *The Negative prevails*

So far, the structural patterns of some romantic and Victorian novels have been discussed together with the importance of the binary oppositions to give meaning

[37] Armstrong, N., "The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism", p. 371.
[38] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 6.

to the formation by setting in opposition similar-but-opposite plot elements and characters. A similar binary opposition has been pointed out in Nancy Armstrong's argument of the paradox of bourgeois morality, implying both the assertion and the restraint of the individuality, and the inclusion of the alterity followed by the eventual exclusion. In both perspectives the implied argument is that if a negative example is set in opposition to a positive one, this latter gains more value as such. Nonetheless, the general outcome is what can be defined as a symbolic linear formation achievable only by gradual improvements by experiencing the real world. In the same period of the novels previously discussed, there were some particular exceptions, such as *Wuthering Heights* (1847), that started to shift their attention towards negative characters as protagonists of the *Bildungsroman*, nullifying the happy ending that symbolically signals the fulfilment of the formation.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Victorian *Bildungsroman* became the dominant genre in England, yet it had to deal with the influence of the Gothic genre, still rooted in romantic values, and its inevitable intrusion within the *Bildungsroman*. Consequently, these novels are characterized by a major attention to negative characters and their impossibility to control their violent passions resulting in their death, meant as a symbolic sign of the failed formation, or deformation. If Mr. Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw, for instance, of *Wuthering Heights* (1847) are compared with Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester of *Jane Eyre* (1847), both couples share an initial rebellious behavior at the beginning of their youth, then, as explained before, Jane fully embodies the paradox of bourgeois morality harnessing the same rebellious passions and negotiating a new identity within the boundaries of the same society she challenged. On the other hand, Catherine seems incapable of harnessing her violent passion of immoral love and indeed she dies in the end, as well as Heathcliff, who additionally willingly perpetuates also vengeful and aggressive passions. Besides *Wuthering Heights*, other Victorian examples of a mixture of

Gothic and *Bildungsroman* will be analyzed in depth in the following chapters. So, the novels in question will be: Wuthering Heights (1847) by Emily Brontë, *The Lifted Veil* (1859) by George Eliot, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) by Oscar Wilde. A particular attention will be given to the effects of major Gothic tropes in the (de)formation of protagonists.

One of these Gothic tropes overlapping with the *Bildungsroman* is the doppelgänger. The term again is a German word meaning the double and that "literary means 'double-goer'".[39] There is no need to say that according to the structuralist approach of Lévis-Strauss the conflict between the negative and the positive in the binary opposition is even more stressed within the Gothic double. Potter suggests different functions of the double as a literary means. This trope "can function on a broad scale […] separating and inserting differences between character portraits", otherwise the double can work also on a smaller scale "by exploring ways in which fragments or heterogeneous facets of a *single* character […] are held simultaneously apart and together".[40] However, a question arises: what is the aim of choosing a negative protagonist who reaches deformation in the end for a *Bildungsroman*? A possible answer could be found within the Gothic genre itself. As Vanon Alliata suggests, the Gothic is "a non-mimetic mode of expression, a type of romance intended to arouse terror in the reader, and a voice to ventriloquise the unspeakable" and "This focus on excess and passionate extremes […] provided readers with vicarious but controlled satisfaction, offering them the possibility of directing outward their unconscious anxieties and repressed desires and thus experiencing a sort of cathartic release".[41] Therefore, it could be argued that the deformation of protagonists is intended to be negatively

[39] Hughes, W., Punter, D., and Smith, A., *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, Vol. 1, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, p. 191.
[40] Potter, C., "Reading Blanchot's Obscure Double: Le soi comme (dés) aster en orbite avec soi", in Hock Soon Ng, A. ed., *The Poetics of Shadows: The Double in Literature and Philosophy* Stuttgart, Ibidem-Verlag, 2008, pp. 35-58, pp. 40-41.

[41] Vanon Alliata, M., *Haunted Minds: Studies in the Gothic and Fantastic Imagination*, Verona, Ombre corte, 2017, pp. 11-12.

didactic on purpose as a warning to the reader itself by having him experience, at a 'safe distance', those terrible outcomes destructive passions provoke, to which everyone, though, is naturally attracted but which are normally restrained. In other words, the positive in the binary opposition in these 'negative *Bildungsroman*' is arguably just a minor diversion, since not only has it a little room in the plot, but it does not even have the same symbolic and didactic functions as in the 'linear *Bildungsroman*', in which the formation is gradually achieved. It can be argued that the reader is the real positive element in the binary opposition, whose inner moral sense is stimulated by confronting, while reading, with a fictional negative double. And most importantly, the didactic function of the 'negative *Bildungsroman*' is generated by a conflicting empathic response called 'negative empathy'.[42] According to this theory we will see how readers can feel attraction and repulsion for negative characters not by being attracted to their negative actions, yet by perceiving their absent positive dimension conveyed through their errors, their sufferings, their regrets; in other words:

> the artistic representation of the negative would ultimately affirm the positive. Even in the depiction of what is miserable or disturbing, works of art allow us to feel the human. Art cannot turn the negative into the positive, but it can allow us to perceive negativity as beautiful by bringing its human dimension to the fore.[43]

Everyone can recognize something familiar within the vengeful feelings of Mr. Heathcliff or the narcissistic egotism of Dorian. This unsettling familiarity is what the Gothic uncanny provokes,[44] and the fact that readers feel this unease in recognizing themselves in negative characters while condemning that recognition

[42] This aspect of empathizing with a negative character will be discussed at length in the following chapter as the dynamics of what is called 'negative empathy'. Cf. Ercolino, S., "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism" in *ORBIS LITTERARUM*, vol. 73, 2017, pp. 243-262.
[43] Ercolino, S., "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism", cit., pp. 245-6. Italics mine.
[44] Stemming from psychoanalytical discourse, "The uncanny is a mild form of anxiety and alienation that arises when something familiar suddenly appears strange". Cf. Hughes, W., Punter, D., and Smith, A., *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic,* cit., p. 699.

at the same time, makes the binary opposition and connection between the reader and the negative character even stronger.

The examples of *Wuthering Heights*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Lifted Veil*, besides the negative empathy, have arguably in common the circular development of the protagonist's formation. This pattern metaphorically represents the failure of the maturity, since at the end of its journey of formation, the protagonist witnesses no improvement and no integration, but a return to the identical, or very similar, initial situation. As mentioned before, the intent of the classical *Bildungsroman* is to achieve a new identity through a compromise within the society, harnessing the passions to benefit oneself and the entire community. Therefore, all the struggles and pains characters experience are not ineffectual, creating this symbolic linear formation that is gradually achieved. On the other hand, the circular decrease of the journey of the formation in these novels of de-formation is represented in the plot development as the identic repetition of the starting situations in the ending outcomes. And this ineffectual journey can be associated with the same ineffectuality of violent passions, such as vengeance. Despite the fulfilment, these passions turn out being worthless and self-destructive. After the death of Catherine, Mr. Heathcliff's only aim is to fulfill his revenge upon his foster brother Hindley, who denied Heathcliff an education and consequently separated him from Catherine. Nonetheless, Heathcliff experiences a development that upgrades him in the social ladder by economically dispossessing Hindley.[45] Yet, at the end of the novel, an uncanny situation reappears, in which Heathcliff denies Hareton an education and forces Cathy to marry his son Linton. The future couple Hareton and Cathy, who also uncannily resembles her mother Catherine, exactly mirrors the identical initial situation the young Heathcliff and Catherine experienced, as if the journey had

[45] This is another example of how during Victorian era class distinctions are changeable. Novels of this period tent to highlight the upwards mobility of the 'new money', whose members acquired the wealth and the high status within their generation rather than inheriting them.

never started. This novel demonstrates the dangerous outcome of being totally possessed by violent passions, in this case vengeance, without any restraining influence of a recourse to the exertions of reason. As a matter of fact, these kinds of passions are characterized by being worthless, however successful they are, and generate this circular decrease of the formation leaving a sense of emptiness within the person. Cathy herself realizes this aspect and tells Heathcliff: "however miserable you make us, we shall still have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty arises from your greater misery".[46] *Wuthering Heights* could be considered a prototypical negative *Bildungsroman,* from which novels of the late nineteenth century will re-elaborate on its new conventions and create the negative didactic function, still absent in this novel. We will see also how novels such as *The Lifted Veil* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* will accentuate the prevailing of the negative doppelgänger and the adoption of new aesthetics structures, such as the novel-essay or the confession, to highlight the failure of the coming of age.

In the evolution of the *Bildungsroman,* we have observed how important was the idea of modernity symbolically attached to the youth through the formation of the young protagonists and through the reliability of the omniscient narrator. However, as Golban explains, many third person narrators of the Victorian fiction can be not so reliable and he believes that "the Victorian author is less objective in his narrative point of view, and often speaks in his own person, intruding into the narrative and not being merely an impersonal and non-evaluation agent through whom the story is told"[47]. It seems that a redefinition of the idea of modernity is offered within this shift towards the negative protagonists, who do not achieve the maturity in the end, supported by an unreliable narration. Something that could be considered as a sign of general distrust in the future and in modernity itself. Armstrong, as well, offers a social explanation for this shift

[46] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights* [1847], ed. Nestor, P., Penguin, London, 1995, Volume II, Chapter XV, p. 288.
[47] Golban, P., *Victorian Fiction as a Bildungsroman: its Flourishing and Complexity*, cit., p. 106.

towards the negative elements in the oppositions. Firstly, we need to "read these figures symptomatically" focusing on:

> The appearance of the outsider who must be kept out in order for the protagonist to assume a place within the social order marks a major historical shift from a culture where individual identity is based on similarity (that is, "I am me, because I am like you in some essential way") to one in which identity is based on difference (that is, "I am like you to the extent that neither of us is that other thing"). This shift amounts to a shift from positive to negative identity.[48]

As a matter of fact, if during the first half of the nineteenth century the protagonists of the *Bildungsroman* achieve their respectable position in the society by resisting their impulses; on the other hand:

> in these high Victorian dramas […] from Fagin to Dracula and Dorian, Victorian fiction is known for its criminals, madmen, prostitutes, profligate spenders, predacious children, and sexual perverts–and for good reason. These figures are as central to the later nineteenth century […] because it is in relation to them that all other behavioral options in the novel earn their respective degrees of moral value. Not only of similar magnitude to Darcy but also in polar opposition to him, these figures personify what an individual cannot become and still belong to the community of readers. On the emergence, consolidation, and excorporation of traits composing the negative category of being, or symptom, in Victorian fiction depends a decisively negative redefinition of bourgeois morality as well.[49]

In the second chapter we will analyze the prototypical 'negative *Bildungsroman*', whose unconventional features, such as the circular development of characters, the intrusion of Gothic and the negative empathy will

[48] Armstrong, N., *The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism,* cit., p. 376.
[49] *Ibidem*.

inspire successive novels. Indeed, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë cannot be considered a proper 'negative *Bildungsroman*', but a prototype. It lacks the explicit negative didactic function, the explicit tragic end and the presence of the Gothic double finally prevailing. Mr. Heathcliff is only a negative alterity, discussed in the bourgeois morality, that in the end it cannot be excluded provoking chaos. I will argue that the Romantic influences such as the Byronic hero and the untamed Gothic passions provoked this origin of the failed *Bildungsroman*. Mr. Heathcliff is the outsider, the embodiment of the excess, and his vengeful, ruthless, misanthropic, and amoral feature leads him to his self-destruction, provoking not only his own circular deformation but also the others'.

Chapter II. *Wuthering Heights* as the Prototype of the Developing 'Negative *Bildungsroman*'

II. 1 *Between the Legacy of Romanticism and the Bildungsroman*

Since the first publication in 1847, *Wuthering Heights* stood out for its avant-garde originality by introducing new narrative elements that anticipated the development of the 'negative *Bildungsroman*' during the second half of the nineteenth century in Britain. What Emily Brontë created was a complex novel, both structurally and thematically, that "straddles literary traditions and genres".[50] It combines Romantic and Gothic features which are "filtered through a novelistic sensibility with a surprisingly Austenian grasp of social details",[51] and still today it is difficult to be classified. To put it in Nancy Armstrong's words: "In attempting to pin down the genre of *Wuthering Heights*, however, the problem has not been resolved".[52] Despite the innovations, the novel had a moderate success due to accuses of immorality. Unfortunately, Emily died the year after the first publication and Charlotte, whose novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) had become a best-seller, wanted to re-publish in 1850 her sisters' novels adding a preface to both of them in order to "'wipe the dust' from their reputations and 'leave their dear names free from soil'".[53] We will see how this daring work exploited and re-elaborated Romantic features, such as the Byronic hero and Gothic tropes, by merging them with what Goodman calls a 'Male-female double *Bildungsroman*'. The outcome is the prevailing of the negative alterity and the

[50] Pykett, L., *Emily Brontë*, London, Macmillian, 1989, p. 73.
[51] Gilbert, S., et Gubar, S., *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979, p. 43.
[52] Armstrong, N., "Emily Brontë In and Out of Her Time", in *Genre*, vol. 15: 243-64, 1982, p. 243.
[53] Miller, L., *The Brontë's Myth*, London, Jonathan Cape, 2001, p. 63. "She argued that her sisters were innocent girls, inhabitants of a 'remote district where education had made little progress': if they had committed errors, she pleaded, it was not through willfulness [...] Charlotte presented her sisters as naive artists responding only to the dictates of nature, rather than as knowing and ambitious writers who had produced consciously constructed novels", p. 65.

two protagonists' circular development. In other words, *Wuthering Heights* is a prototype of the developing 'negative *Bildungsroman*'.

The male-female double *Bildungsroman* is a particular literary achievement that rose around the mid of the century, and it is an exclusive female re-elaboration of the classical *Bildungsroman* that "differs significantly from the prototypical *Bildungsroman* not only with regard to its principal characters but also with regard to structure".[54] As Goodman continues:

> Normally linear in design, the typical male *Bildungsroman* begins in childhood and progresses toward the moment when the mature adult, having cast off the restraints of his/her earlier life, faces the future. However, the design of the male-female double *Bildungsroman* is circular; tripartite in structure, it describes the shared childhood experience of a male and a female protagonist who inhabit a place somewhat reminiscent of a prelapsarian mythic garden world where the male and female once existed as equals; then such novels dramatize the separation of the male and the female character in adolescence and young adulthood as the male, like the hero of the typical male *Bildungsroman*, journeys forth to seek his fortune, while the female is left behind; and finally, the novels conclude with a reunion of the male and the female protagonist. I believe the reunion of the male and the female protagonist […] signifies a turning away from mature adult experience and a reaffirmation of the childhood world in which the male and the female protagonist were undivided.[55]

Wuthering Heights is one of the first novels that strictly follows this circular structure, yet the ultimate "reaffirmation of the childhood" has not a positive connotation. As a matter of fact, Goodman considers it a "turning away from mature adult experience", a kind of regression in which the ultimate maturity is not achieved. One of the symptoms of this failed maturity in the novel is the

[54] Goodman, C., "The Lost Brother, the Twin: Women Novelist and the Male-Female Double Bildungsroman", in *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 17: 28-43, 1983, p. 30.
[55] *Ibidem*.

intrusion of the Gothic genre, especially in the first three chapters. Deeply rooted in the Romantic tradition, the function of Gothic tropes in *Wuthering Heights* is different from a mere threatening amusement, it rather alludes to a past tragedy connected with the protagonists' failed coming of age.

II. 2 *The Intrusion of Gothic*

As we have argued in the first chapter, the intrusion of Gothic is one of the peculiar aspects of the developing 'negative *Bildungsroman*'. And in this paragraph, I will highlight how the Gothic elements at the beginning of the story are exploited to hint at the tragic outcome of the protagonists' coming of age, whose details would be later disclosed by Nelly. Indeed, Heathcliff and Catherine's tragic formation has a complex narration like a Russian doll. The beginning of the novel is told through a first-person narration by Mr. Lockwood with elements of the Gothic tradition, to then there is the shifting to another first-person narration: Nelly's own account of Heathcliff and Catherine's double coming of age. Let us analyze how Lockwood's Gothic account at Wuthering Heights is functional to hint at a past tragic coming of age.

The story starts with the narration of Mr. Lockwood, a metropolitan man who rents Thrushcross Grange from Heathcliff. Lockwood is the narrator of the present part of the story set between 1801-2; whilst Ellen Dean, the housekeeper of the Grange, is the second narrator of the novel and she is the one who recounts the thirty-year-old past story of the protagonists' double coming of age. As narrators Lockwood and Ellen "reemerge regularly to remind us of their agency and the requirements of the telling scenes. In accepting the substances of the past, each narrator measures, revises, and preserves what he or she sees fit".[56] Therefore, none of the two narrations is the reliable one, which creates an aura of

[56] Matthews, J., "Framing in Wuthering Heights", in *Nineteenth-Century English Literature*, vol. 27: 25-61, 1985, p. 28.

mystery in many events by inserting many gaps, and especially about the character of Mr. Heathcliff. This fragmented narrative expedient is in line with the Gothic genre which "is marked by a proliferation of narrative frames and voices, and represents the forces of violence, wildness and savagery, as opposed to the domestic, which is marked by an assumption of omniscient, totalizing narratorial awareness and associated with civilization".[57] This violent Gothic atmosphere is immediately perceived as soon as Lockwood walks in Wuthering Heights:

> Wuthering Heights is the name of Mr. Heathcliff's dwelling, 'Wuthering' being significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather.[58]

Moreover, the threatening aspects of Gothic are also conveyed through the rude inhospitality of Mr. Heathcliff and his servants:

> I detected the date '1500,' and the name 'Hareton Earnshaw.' I would have made a few comments, and requested a short history of the place from the surely owner, but his attitude at the door appeared to demand my speedy entrance, or complete departure […].[59]

This spooky beginning suggests a Gothic story with Mr. Heathcliff as the Gothic villain for his "dark-skinned gypsy in aspect" and his "aversion to showy displays of feeling".[60] Indeed, to foster the expectation of a Gothic story there is the night Lockwood spends in the 'forbidden room'. The housekeeper Zillah leads him to this bedroom ignoring the past events surrounding that place. The climax of mystery and threatening Gothic conventions are reached in the very chapter III,

[57] Rena-Dozier, E., "Gothic Criticism:'Wuthering Heights' and Nineteenth-Century Literary History", in *ELH*, vol. 77: 757-75, 2010, p. 758.
[58] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights* cit., Volume I, Chapter I, p. 4.
[59] *Ibidem*.
[60] *Ivi*, Volume I, Chapter I, p. 5.

where Lockwood has a nightmare in Catherine's bedroom. After having read a twenty-five-year-old diary belonging to Catherine Earnshaw, he dreams about a child ghost who declares herself to be the very Catherine Earnshaw and begs him to open the window to let her enter. Lockwood screams out of terror and wakes up Heathcliff and tells him about the incident. The servants then lead him into another room. Yet just before this, Lockwood sees Heathcliff imploring at the window: "'Come in! Come in!' he sobbed. 'Cathy, do come. Oh do – *once* more! Oh! My heart's darling, hear me *this* time – Catherine at last!'".[61] This scene clearly refers to a mysterious past trauma of an important person for Heathcliff that arises many questions in the reader.

Nevertheless, I would focus on the moment before the nightmare, when Lockwood finds the different variations of the names of Catherine scratched on the window's ledge:

> This writing, however, was nothing but a name repeated in all kinds of characters, large and small – *Catherine Earnshaw*, here and there varied to *Catherine Heathcliff*, and then again to *Catherine Linton*.[62]

This apparently insignificant detail hides a deeper meaning, and it is related to the failure of Catherine's formation. As Nestor suggests, these variations of her name make the reader contend "with a disconcerting duplication of names which frequently makes individual identity difficult to specify".[63] At the end of the classical *Bildungsroman* the protagonist must find its true place in the world with a defined identity, and it happens frequently after a marriage. The marriage, indeed, is what Moretti defines a literary "'pact' between the individual and the world"[64]. A kind of rhetoric of happiness that affirms the ultimate maturity and the restrain of one's own individuality. However, in the case of Catherine her

[61] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights* cit., Volume I, Chapter III, p. 28.
[62] *Ivi*, Volume I, Chapter III, p. 19.
[63] Nestor, P., *Introduction* to, *Ivi*, Introduction, p. xxii.
[64] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 22.

marriage was a failure, and the many variants of her name suggest a confusion of her identity and consequently a failed formation. Indeed, it is the very Gothic trope of the ghost that supports the tragic aspect of this unrestrained individuality that led Catherine to her death, and therefore with no ultimate happy ending. Moreover, it is a "child's face" what Lockwood sees through the window. By using the trope of the child ghost, it is as if the author wanted to represent on the one hand Catherine's boundless freedom, but on the other its tragic connotation: "'It's twenty years,' mourned the voice, 'twenty years, I've been a waif for twenty years!'".[65] It recalls the tragic destiny of a restless soul who has found no peace even after her death, doomed to roam between the two worlds. On the other hand, Catherine's features of a child might symbolize her failed coming of age as if the journey of formation had never started.

Likewise, Heathcliff lives the similar condition of a restless soul, but as a living person, doomed to be consumed by his love for her. As he stated in his wish to be always with her after her death:

> Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living! You said I killed you – haunt me, then! The murdered *do* haunt their murderers […] Be with me always – take any form – drive me mad! Only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I *cannot* find you! Oh, God! It is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul![66]

Both protagonists have experienced a failed marriage due to their obsessive and destructive love. Yet, as far as Catherine is concerned, her love for Heathcliff literally kills her; Heathcliff's reaction is more catastrophic and involves the vengeance against the others to fill the void of her death. Lockwood meets him right after the fulfillment of his vengeance witnessing these tragic outcomes; and how the vengeance rather than satisfying him, it has made Heathcliff even more

[65] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights*, cit., Volume I, Chapter III, p. 25.
[66] *Ivi*, Volume II, Chapter II, p. 169.

miserable. It is only when Lockwood finally returns to Thrushcross Grange and tells Nelly the events of that night that the housekeeper unfolds what has happened in the double *Bildungsroman* part of the novel.

So far, we have seen how the Gothic tropes are functional to hint at a mysterious tragic past event related to the failure of Heathcliff and Catherine's final happy ending. In the next paragraph we will analyze their initial formation in the double *Bildungsroman* part of the novel, and we will focus on Heathcliff's and Catherine's childhood and adolescence. During this period, we will analyze the second characteristic of the developing 'negative *Bildungsroman*': the rise and predominance of the negative alterity as a re-elaboration of the Byronic hero as the bourgeois entrepreneur whose actions trigger the final circular development.

II. 3 *Heathcliff and the Prevailing Negative Alterity*

As we have mentioned in the first chapter, besides the intrusion of Gothic, it is also the prevailing of the negative alterity another feature of the developing 'negative *Bildungsroman*'. According to the bourgeois morality, the negative alterity is momentarily accepted to allow the protagonist's formation by confronting with it, and then once the formation is completed the alterity is rejected. However, in *Wuthering Heights* the negative alterity is one of the two protagonists of the male-female double *Bildungsroman* that ultimately prevails, embodied by Heathcliff as a mysterious gypsy with an unknown past:

> Who knows, but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week's income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together? And you were kidnapped by wicked sailors, and brought to England.[67]

[67] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights*, cit., Volume I, Chapter VII, p. 58.

This passage not only highlights the mystery of Heathcliff's background, but it is also a kind of prediction of Heathcliff's future actions. Indeed, he becomes the owner of both places in the end. Yet, how can an orphan replace a very old aristocracy in such a little period? The answer is both in his ethnicity and in the economic discourse of the time. As Armstrong suggests: "In the social discourse of the age, the gypsy was naturally viewed with all the disdain and apprehension attending his utter lack of social position".[68] This undefined position, thus, gives him a freer agency in the social ladder promoted by the combination of an intense Byronic rebellious force and with the money he has earned. "Heathcliff's rise into power dramatizes the apotheosis of the Romantic hero" and makes the Byronic conventions "manifest in an energetic new form",[69] namely the power of money. Although he gains his high position, at the end of his formation he remains between a "dark-skinned gypsy in aspect" and "in dress and manners a gentleman".[70] Heathcliff is what Armstrong defines an "impossible third term"[71] destined to succumb having brought about only chaos. And this in-between position of Heathcliff represents an in-progress historical shift from a Romantic feudal past towards the rising and expansion of a modern middle-class in the remote countryside:

> Much like Scott's settings, this remote landscape endows a contemporary crisis with all the trappings of an archaic one and summons up a context in which Heathcliff's insurgency seems to justify the emergence of middle-class power.[72]

Nevertheless, Brontë's re-elaboration of the Byronic hero has an important negative connotation in the discourse of the *Bildungsroman*. Heathcliff's

[68] Armstrong, N., "Emily Brontë In and Out of Her Time", cit., pp. 245-6.
[69] *Ibidem*.
[70] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights*, cit., Volume I, Chapter I, p. 5.
[71] Armstrong, N., "Emily Brontë In and Out of Her Time", cit., p. 244.
[72] *Ivi*, p. 248.

rebellious actions are not founded in a sense of justice, but in his mere egotistical and destructive interests: "the principal impulse behind his actions is not that he feels himself to be on the fringe of a society which condemns him […] He is conscious of his own frustration and, like Milton's Satan, wishes to become destructive".[73] In other words, "Emily Bronte's Heathcliff is not only Byronic, but a great literary achievement".[74] This demonic quality, though, is expressed in the second part of the male-female double *Bildungsroman*, when the couple is separated due to class differences. We have mentioned how this variant of the classical *Bildungsroman* is "tripartite in structure": it firstly describes the couple experiencing an equal childhood together, then it dramatizes their separation, and then it describes again their reunion at the end of the novel. Let us analyze the first two parts of their coming of age and how Heathcliff in the first part momentarily adheres to the bourgeois morality, to then, in the second part, infringe it and prevail.

It is Mr. Earnshaw who brings home this "alterity", an orphan boy, after his journey to Liverpool and he becomes an adopted son. During his childhood Heathcliff is very different from the demonic owner Lockwood has met. Yet, due to his ethnic diversity, with the only exception of Mr. Earnshaw, everybody hates and mistreats him, but Nelly is the first one who changes her idea of him by knowing his fragile features when he gets dangerously sick. And during his recovery, Nelly highlights in her account a first odd feature of the future demon: "he was the quietest child that ever nurse watched over".[75] As long as Mr. Earnshaw lives, Heathcliff is treated as an equal to his other two children. It is in this period, soon after Hindley is sent to college that Catherine as well changes her idea of him and becomes "too fond of Heathcliff. The greatest punishment we

[73] Blondel, J., "Literary Influences on Wuthering Heights", in Allott, M., ed., *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, London, Macmillan, 1970, pp. 157-66, p. 160.
[74] Thorslev, P., *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes*, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1965, p. 192.
[75] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights*, cit., Volume I, Chapter IV, p. 38.

could invent for her was to keep her separate from him".[76] In this part of the male-female double *Bildungsroman* the two protagonists grow as equals regardless of their social status. Catherine has an innate wild and natural propensity that makes her very similar to Heathcliff. They love running free in the moor and evade the domestic walls. Unfortunately, Mr. Earnshaw's health rapidly deteriorates and dies. This is a turning point in Catherine's and Heathcliff's equal coming of age, because Hindley succeeds to Mr. Earnshaw as head of the family. He comes back from the college with his ineffectual wife Frances and inflicts his cruelty on Heathcliff by denying him his education and sending him off working in the fields. From this moment on the class distinctions between Heathcliff and Catherine become more and evident and their equality starts fading away. And the first occasion that marks their difference occurs when they escape from Wuthering Heights and go to Thrushcross Grange where the civilised Lintons live. Once there, both spy into the house and laugh at the Linton siblings for their civilized manners; a funny moment that soon ends since Linton's dog catches them and injuries Catherine's foot. The Lintons realize Catherine belongs to the Earnshaw and decide to take care of her. She stays in Thrushcross Grange for five weeks, during which they try to transform her into a civilized girl. In this event Catherine learns the pleasures of belonging to the high class, and Heathcliff's lower status makes him more and distant from her. After this event, Hindley even blames him for turning Catherine wild, and as a punishment "Heathcliff received no flogging. But he was told that the first word he spoke to Miss Catherine should ensure a dismissal".[77]

Their coming of age has just entered into the second phase of the male-female double *Bildungsroman*: the dramatization of their separation due to class differences; a separation signalled by the imminent marriage between Catherine and Edgar Linton. When Catherine comes back around Christmas to Wuthering

[76] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights* cit., Volume I, Chapter V, p. 42.
[77] *Ivi*, Volume I, Chapter VI, p. 51.

Heights, she is turned into a proper girl of her class wearing a beautiful dress. Differently, Hindley allows Heathcliff to greet her but "like the other servants".[78] Also Catherine unintentionally highlights his class inferiority when she kisses him: "how very black and cross you look! and how – how funny and grim! But that's because I'm used to Edgar and Isabella Linton".[79] Nevertheless, Catherine is the only one of the high class that treats him well. Her exceptional behaviour stands out when the Lintons visit the Earnshaws at Wuthering Heights: Hindley and Edgar assert their superiority by discriminating Heathcliff and Hindley locks him in the attic. It is during that night that Nelly pities and offers him some food in the kitchen where Heathcliff declares for the first time his intention of revenge:

> 'I'm trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back. I don't care how long I wait, if I can only do it, at last. I hope he will not die before I do!'
>
> 'For shame, Heathcliff!' said I. 'It is for God to punish wicked people; we should learn to forgive.'
>
> 'No, God won't have the satisfaction that I shall,' he returned. 'I only wish I knew the best way! Let me alone, and I'll plan it out: while I'm thinking of that, I don't feel pain'.[80]

From that moment on Heathcliff would never be the same. His wish for vengeance is the first sign of his transformation into a negative alterity. When he turns sixteen, Nelly describes a perceivable negativity his body emanates due to the degradation inflicted by Hindley:

> He had reached the age of sixteen then, I think, and without having bad features or being deficient in intellect, he contrived to convey an impression of inward and outward repulsiveness that his present aspect retains no traces of […] he acquired a slouching gait, and ignoble look; his naturally reserved disposition was exaggerated into an almost idiotic excess of unsociable moroseness; and he

[78] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights*, cit., Volume I, Chapter VII, p. 54.
[79] *Ibidem*.
[80] *Ivi*, Volume I, Chapter VII, p. 61.

> took a grim pleasure, apparently, in exciting the aversion rather than the esteem of his few acquaintance.[81]

Heathcliff has reached a stark difference compared with Edgar, indeed Catherine herself chooses to marry the latter, although the time would fade her love away "as winter changes the trees"[82], and confesses to Nelly that she cannot marry Heathcliff because his degradation would consequently degrade her as well. Heathcliff that night hears only her intention of accepting Edgar's proposal, and runs away whilst a thunder is raging.

After that night, it seems that the negative alterity has been rejected and Catherine can complete her formation by marrying the civilized Edgar fulfilling the ultimate happy ending. Yet, Heathcliff has been away just for three years during which he has earned a consistent sum of wealth. Then the negative alterity returns, and he is visibly different: he seems a real gentleman in aspect but a "half-civilized ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows, and eyes full of black fire".[83] After his departure the Heights have experienced a peaceful period. As soon as he has come back, Heathcliff starts manifesting his negative influences and having the upper hand over all of them. Firstly, Catherine's health deteriorates due to her devastating passion for him, and secondly, he starts realizing his revenge against Hindley and Edgar. As far as his vengeful plan is concerned, Heathcliff gradually takes possession of Wuthering Heights due to Hindley's debts towards him and of Thrushcross Grange through a cunning marriage with Isabella Linton. His full demonic quality is described by Isabella herself after their marriage in a letter to Nelly: "Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? And if not, is he a devil?".[84] As Van Ghent suggests, Heathcliff "is an archetypal figure, untraceably ancient in mythological thought – an imaged recognition of that part of nature

[81] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights*, cit., Volume I, Chapter VIII, p. 68.
[82] *Ivi*, Volume I, Chapter IX, p. 82.
[83] *Ivi,* Volume I, Chapter X, p. 96.
[84] *Ivi*, Volume I, Chapter XIII, p. 136.

which is 'other' than the human soul";[85] this "other" is the alterity that according to the bourgeois morality should have been rejected after Catherine accepted Edgar's proposal. Yet, Heathcliff's return signals the challenge of the bourgeois morality, since he is one of the two protagonists of the male-female double *Bildungsroman,* and his agency cannot be cancelled, however negative or positive it is.

Apart from his vengeful actions, as mentioned, he also causes Catherine's health decline since, after giving birth to a girl, she dies due to her destructive love for Heathcliff. Since the beginning of the novel their love has never been a sane one. As Charlotte Brontë highlights in the *Preface* of the second edition, his love for Catherine "is a sentiment fierce and inhuman: a passion such as might boil and glow in the bad essence of some evil genius".[86] This sentiment rather than advocating a harmonious happy ending, rather triggers their death. The very insane aspect of this love is described by Catherine herself to Nelly: "Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff – he's always, always in my mind – not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself – but as my own being".[87] Catherine describes a dangerously obsessive and possessive love that "appropriates the other to itself by consuming it, introjecting it into the self until the self disappears";[88] a condition that forecasts a failed maturity, since true love is that "movement of becoming that allows the one and the other to grow. For such love to exist, each one must keep its body autonomous".[89] As also Joudrey suggests: "Heathcliff and Catherine do not merely bond but struggle towards total assimilation into a unitary self […] Their disastrous example cautions against succumbing to the

[85] Van Ghent, D., "Dark 'otherness' in Wuthering Heights**",** in Allott, M. ed., *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, cit., pp. 152-7, p. 155.
[86] Brontë, C., *Preface* to, *Wuthering Heights*, cit., Preface, pp. xlvi-xlx, p. xlix.
[87] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights*, cit., Volume I, Chapter IX, p. 82.
[88] Irigaray, L., *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1989, p. 170.
[89] *Ibidem*.

illusion that human separateness either can or should be eradicated in a totalizing fusion of selves"[90].

We have seen how Heathcliff has become the negative alterity from his adolescence to his early adulthood, and how, once returned, his predominance has brought about the chaos both at the Heights and at the Grange. In the next paragraph, we will analyze the effects of his vengeance on the second generation by provoking the third feature of the developing 'negative *Bildungsroman*', that is, a circular repetition of the initial condition but projected on Hareton and Cathy. Moreover, we will also analyze this circularity in the last part of Heathcliff and Catherine's male-female double *Bildungsroman* in which the couple finally reunites but, in the afterlife, as a symbol of a "turning away from mature adult experience and a reaffirmation of the childhood world in which the male and the female protagonist were undivided".[91] In other words, a symbol of their failed coming of age.

II. 4 *Devastating Passions and the Circular Development*

Heathcliff's negative influences cause the third feature of the developing 'negative *Bildungsroman*', that is, the circular development of the protagonists' coming of age. At the end of their formation a similar initial situation occurs as if the journey of maturity had never started. In *Wuthering Heights*, this circular aspect is reached, on the one hand by Heathcliff's devastating love for Catherine that provokes the death of both protagonists and a reaffirmation of their childhood. On the other hand, also his vengeance triggers a circular repetition of his past suffered injustices in the second generation at Wuthering Heights. By inflicting his revenge on Hindley, Heathcliff also degrades his son, Hareton, by

[90] Joudrey, T., "'Well, we must be for ourselves in the long run': Selfishness and Sociability in Wuthering Heights", in *Nineteen-Century Literature*, vol. 70: 165-93, 2015, p. 178.
[91] Goodman, C., "The Lost Brother, the Twin: Women Novelist and the Male-Female Double Bildungsroman", cit., p. 30.

denying his education, as Hindley had previously done with him. In this way, Hareton's love for Cathy, Catherine's daughter, is impeded due to class differences mirroring Heathcliff and Catherine's past situation.

Firstly, let us analyze how the destructive love provokes the failure of Heathcliff and Catherine's maturity. As mentioned in the first paragraph, the trope of marriage is the essential aim in the classical *Bildungsroman* since it signals the ultimate maturity and the protagonists' final happiness reached through a willing restraint of their individuality:

> It has been observed that from the late eighteenth century on, marriage becomes the model for a new type of *social contract*: one no longer sealed by forces located outside of the individual (such as status), but founded on a sense of 'individual obligation'. A very plausible thesis, and one that helps us understand why the classical *Bildungsroman* 'must' always conclude with marriages. It is not only the foundation of the family that is at stake, but that 'pact' between the individual and world, that reciprocal 'consent' which finds in the double 'I do' of the wedding ritual an unsurpassed symbolic condensation.[92]

Curiously, it is after Heathcliff's and Catherine's respective marriages that their decline starts due to their exploding passions for each other. Their marriages rather than bringing about peace and stability foster instability and a reaffirmation of their exploding wild individuality. Catherine's marriage is the first to occur in the novel with Edgar Linton, the civilized owner of Thrushcross Grange. When they get married Heathcliff is far away earning his future wealth, and her wildness seems to have been tamed. However, six months after her marriage, as soon as Heathcliff returns from his voyage, his return triggers the explosion of Catherine's repressed wild individuality symbolized by her health decline, and Edgar cannot deal with this instability. As Heathcliff himself tells Nelly:

[92] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 22.

> You say she is often restless, and anxious looking […] You talk of her mind being unsettled – How the devil could it be otherwise, in her frightful isolation. And that insipid, paltry creature attending her from *duty* and *humanity*! From *pity* and *charity*! He might as well plant an oak in a flower-pot, and expect it to thrive, as imagine he can restore her to vigour in the soil of his shallow cares![93]

Edgar is a civilized man who throughout the novel has a quite passive personality, opposite to Catherine's who is compatible with Heathcliff's strong disposition. Already in chapter IX Nelly perceives a shallowness in Catherine's choice of marrying Edgar just for his high status, and it unavoidably results in a violent contention between the two men. This situation makes Catherine's health more and more precarious, until it would finally kill her. Nevertheless, in the meantime Heathcliff roams around Thrushcross Grange not only to see Catherine but also to woo Isabella. Although Catherine hopes he truly loves her, Heathcliff only needs her to inflict his revenge on Edgar. Once Nelly informs Edgar of this intention, he tries to send him away, but his weakness cannot move Heathcliff. Only with the help of other servants Edgar succeeds. The fact that Edgar cannot equate Heathcliff's overwhelming power puts Catherine more in confusion, since she wished her husband would be as strong as Heathcliff. Yet, the conflict persists to the point that Edgar asks her: "Will you give up Heathcliff hereafter, or will you give up me? It is impossible for you to be *my* friend, and *his* at the same time; and I absolutely *require* to know which you choose".[94] This statement aggravates her already precarious health. Catherine does not answer to that question and locks herself up in her room for three days without eating. When she unlocks her out of the room and thinks she is near her death, Heathcliff and Isabella run away together and get married.

As far as Heathcliff's marriage is concerned, its outcome is even more catastrophic, since it rapidly deteriorates by involving only cunning interests

[93] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights*, cit., Volume I, Chapter XIV, p. 152.
[94] *Ivi*, Volume I, Chapter XI, p. 117.

rather than true feelings. As Isabella herself writes in a letter to Nelly their union has become a living nightmare:

> The adjective *our* gave mortal offence […] he is ingenious and unresting in seeking to gain my abhorrence! […] I assure you, a tiger, or a venomous serpent could not rouse terror in me equal to that which he wakens […] I do hate him – I am wretched – I have been a fool![95]

In this case, the adjective "our", proper of a marriage union, has already vanished into the enormous egoism of Heathcliff who has revealed his true intentions regarding their marriage, namely a means to take possession of the Grange and complete his vengeance on Edgar. From that moment on a series of tragic events unfold: Catherine dies after giving to birth to a girl, and Isabella moves to London where she gives birth to a sickly boy named Linton, and she dies when her son turns twelve. The death of Catherine is the first of the two protagonists to occur in the novel, and a long time would pass between Catherine and Heathcliff's death; during which Heathcliff fulfils his vengeance against those who interfered between him and Catherine. His desire of vengeance causes only many damages without receiving the hoped for satisfaction. Only in the end Heathcliff realizes the worthlessness of vengeance, since whatever he performs, he cannot have her back. The result is an enormous void that, day after day, torments and consumes him until his desire to feel her again close to him makes him even open her grave to momentarily ease his pain:

> Disturbed her? No! she has disturbed me, night and day, through eighteen years – incessantly – remorselessly […] I was wild after she died, and eternally, from dawn to dawn, praying her to return to me.[96]

[95] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights*, cit., Volume I, Chapter XIII, p. 144.
[96] *Ivi*, Volume II, Chapter XV, p. 289.

Although it takes place later than Catherine's, his following decline is similar: he stops eating and locks himself up in his room until he dies.

Heathcliff's death signals the beginning of the third part of the male-female double *Bildungsroman,* in which the divided couple is finally reunited, but after their death. And as spirits they circularly repeat their childhood by roaming around the moors, as if they regressed back to the beginning of their journey:

> I was going to the Grange one evening – a dark evening threatening thunder – and, just at the turn of the Heights, I encountered a little boy with a sheep and two lambs before him, he was crying terribly […]
>
> 'What is the matter, my little man?' I asked.
>
> 'They's Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t' Nab,' he blubbered […].[97]

Lockwood narrates this event when he returns to visit Wuthering Heights, and he discovers that it is rumoured their ghosts roam on the moors together. This is the ending scene of the novel and represents the failure of their their coming of age by repeating their childish "chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day".[98]

However, as mentioned, Heathcliff has caused not only his and Catherine's circular development, but also Hareton and Cathy's through the vengeance. This feeling affects also the second generation at Wuthering Heights and of Thrushcross Grange, despite their innocence. After the death of their parents, Heathcliff firstly disinherits Hareton and makes him his servant, as his father has previously done with Heathcliff: "'Now, my bonny lad, you are mine! And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it!'".[99] Then he plots how to take possession of the Grange, and the occasion is offered by his sick son Linton, who is forced to marry Cathy as the only heiress

[97] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights*, cit., Volume II, Chapter XX, p. 336.
[98] *Ivi*, Volume I, Chapter VI, p. 46.
[99] *Ivi*, Volume II, Chapter III, p. 187.

of the place. This latter resembles uncannily the late Catherine as "a second edition of her mother!",[100] as Nelly reports, and she soon gets close to Hareton during their adolescence, as Heathcliff and Catherine before. It is as if the story repeated itself: they both have the same natural attraction for each other, but their union is impeded by the same class differences. Hareton is illiterate, but constantly shows his intentions of improving. Cathy, on the other hand, is forced to marry Linton under Heathcliff's blackmail to complete his plan to take possession of the Grange. Linton is treated as a tool by his father who does not show any sign of love towards him. His son is both weak in health and in disposition, and this aspect strangely attracts Cathy who is naturally inclined to nurse people. During their imprisonment at the Heights, Edgar dies and with his death Heathcliff's vengeance is successfully completed: both his enemies, Hindley and Edgar, have been defeated and he is now the owner of both places, yet his vengeance affects more the innocent children than their fathers. The vengeance, like a wheel, has just re-created the injustice Heathcliff has experienced in his past. However, the new generation is more forgiving than their fathers, and contrary to Heathcliff's expectations, this match does not make Cathy and Linton miserable: Cathy loves Linton and when she becomes aware of his father's evil plans clarifies to Heathcliff that: "'Linton is all I have to love in the world, and, though you have done what you could to make him hateful to me, and me to him, you cannot make us hate each other!".[101] And she continues: "however miserable you make us, we shall still have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty rises from your greater misery!".[102] The peculiarity of the second generation is that they break the chain of vengeance by avoiding imitating the wrongs of their fathers. Although the disastrous effects of vengeance have shaped the same circular repetition of injustices, the novel leaves room for a possible

[100] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights* cit., Volume I, Chapter XIV, p. 153.
[101] *Ivi*, Volume II, Chapter XV, p. 287.
[102] *Ivi*, Volume II, Chapter XV, p. 288.

future happy regeneration through the marriage of Cathy and Hareton after Heathcliff's death. Yet, at the same time the design of the happy ending of the 'classical *Bildungsroman'*, since "The happy ending, in its highest form, is not a dubious 'success', but this triumph of meaning over time".[103] Therefore, it could be argued that the end of the novel is not entirely tragic, in fact, it is in between of a happy ending and a tragic one. On the one hand, Heathcliff and Catherine are happily reunited, despite the failure of their maturity and their death; on the other hand, Hareton and Cathy are free to get married without class restrictions, even though the vengeance has brought them permanent injustices.

In the next paragraph, we will describe how Heathcliff's tragic end triggers in the reader a last feature of the developing 'negative *Bildungsroman*', namely the negative empathy. Yet, in *Wuthering Heights* this conflicting empathic mechanism still lacks the didactic function of warning the reader against the outcomes of his wrongdoings.

II. 5 *First Traces of Negative Empathy*

The interesting aspect of *Wuthering Heights* is that, differently from the contemporary industrial novels of Dickens, Gaskell, Disraeli, and Kingsley that aimed to denounce social issues in their works, it "shows no engagement with wider social issues; its environment is enormously detached".[104] It lacks the explicit didactic function of presenting injustices or immoral aspects to be condemned by the reader. The novel "criticises neither woman's lot in society nor Catherine's resistance to gender norms: it criticises nothing. It brings everything into dispute, tearing open consensus norms to reveal their subterfuges and casuistry".[105]

[103] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 55.
[104] Nestor, P., *Introduction* to, Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights*, cit., Introduction, p. xv.
[105] Glen, H., *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 94.

At the same time also Heathcliff's negative actions are described without the apt mode of narration and perspective as to be interpreted as a warning by the reader, since the external unreliable narration creates an excessive empathic distance between the reader and the character. As Keen points out, in order to trigger the narrative empathy, the two factors are the situation and the character identification. As far as the "situation" is concerned, it involves the point of view and the perspective that should be functional to display the character's consciousness:

> The nature of the mediation between author and reader, including the person of the narration, the implicit location of the narrator, the relation of the narrator to the characters, and the internal or external perspective on characters, including in some cases the style of representation of characters' consciousness may be assumed to contribute to the potential for characters' identification and thus for empathy.[106]

Throughout the novel Nelly's prevailing fragmented and mysterious narration of Heathcliff hinders the emergence of his human dimension and creates a barrier against the reader to fully empathize with him. Yet, despite the limits of this narration, there is a particular event in which Nelly succeeds in bringing to the fore his human side and triggering the second factor that provokes the narrative empathy, that is to say the "character identification". But with Heathcliff the quality of this identification has a negative connotation, since it creates in the reader a conflicting empathic response with him, which we might call negative empathy. This occurs when we tend to sympathize with his suffering but at the same time are repulsed by his negative actions, provoking in the reader's reaction what Ercolino defines an "empathic distress".[107] The negative empathy is perceivable in the end when he renounces to perpetrate his vengeance having

[106] Keen, S., *Empathy and the Novel*, New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 93.
[107] Ercolino, S., "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism", cit., p. 254.

become aware of its worthlessness. In this moment we feel his misery and it slightly changes the readers' consideration of him as a total monster:

> 'It is a poor conclusion, is it not,' he observed […] 'An absurd termination to my violent exertion? I get levers and mattocks to demolish the two houses, and train myself to be capable of working like Hercules, and when everything is ready, and in my power, I find the will to lift a slate off either roof has vanished! My old enemies have not beaten me – now would be the precise time to revenge myself on their representatives – I could do it; and none could hinder me – But where is the use? I don't care for striking, I can't take the trouble to raise my hand! That sounds as if I had been labouring the whole time, only to exhibit a fine trait of magnanimity. It is far from being the case – I have lost the faculty of enjoying their destruction, and I am too idle to destroy for nothing.'[108]

Yet, this passage does not convey a didactic message for the reader, because Heathcliff's speech is neither a repentance of his past terrible actions, nor the narration is functional to highlight or denounce his errors that have caused his and others' misery. Differently from an omniscient narrator or a first-person narration by Heathcliff himself, Nelly's unreliable narration has been fragmented and detached, and she does not even comment on his actions. Nelly reports only what she has outwardly witnessed with no other explanations, and the reader ignores whether he repents in the deepest part of him or not. In other words, the partial display of Heathcliff's consciousness, Nelly's lack of comments on his actions and his lack of repentance have prevented his negative actions from being a moral warning. Yet, *Wuthering Heights* was one of the first novels to present the first traces of the negative empathy within a formative discourse, that will be didactically exploited in later examples of 'negative *Bildungsroman*'.

Moreover, as we have seen, *Wuthering Heights* was also one of the first British novels in which the happy ending, or as Moretti defines it, the 'judicial-fairy-tale

[108] Brontë, E., *Wuthering Heights*, cit., Volume II, Chapter XIX, p. 323.

model', was in danger of dissolution. As a matter of fact, in the previous chapter we have seen how this novel might be considered a prototype of the developing 'negative *Bildungsroman*' and how later writers will use the same circular development, the intrusion of Gothic, the predominance of the negative alterity that becomes the Gothic double, and the negative empathy to warn the reader about emulating negative actions. Indeed, we need to wait another decade to witness a definitive end of the classical phase of the *Bildungsroman* and its happy ending. We will see in the next chapter how George Eliot in *The Lifted Veil* (1859) exploited all the aforesaid prototypical elements to create a proper 'negative *Bildungsroman*'. And especially how she exploited the negative empathy didactically by highlighting the important connotations of love and sympathy by presenting only their negative sides. The whole experiment is supported by the structure of the confession through which the narrator comments on his actions, who is the first of Eliot's protagonists facing a tragic end. George Eliot, indeed, was the first novelist to dismantle the 'judicial-fairy-tale model', and the agency of the chaos, this time, will not be the Romantic legacy of the Byronic hero as in *Wuthering Heights*, but the tragic germ of modernity.

Chapter III. *The Lifted Veil* and the End of the Classic Phase of the *Bildungsroman*

The prolonged stability of narrative conventions that characterized the classical British *Bildungsroman*, from Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) to Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1849-50), had come to an end. Moving forward to the 1860s "the classic Stendhal-Balzac plot of the provincial youth's migration toward the capital receives something of a twist: a tragicomic reversal (Dickens) or a tragic undoing (Eliot)".[109] As also Spacks points out: "Eliot and Dickens […] both demonstrated clear awareness of society's corruptions without accepting the corollary that adolescence should triumph". Their protagonists' "adolescent state does not enable them to lead viable lives; neither does it enable them to avoid […] the responsibilities of adulthood. Eliot and Dickens, consequently, […] had trouble with their endings".[110] Yet, Moretti considers primarily important the legacy of Eliot as "the only novelist to dismiss the judicial-fairy-tale model and deal with the issues characteristic of the continental *Bildungsroman*: going so far, in fact, as to bring this genre to its natural conclusion".[111] Eliot explained the reason for her dissatisfaction with the canonical, ultimate happy ending in the essay "The Morality of Wilhelm Meister" in 1855:

> Just as far from being really moral is the so-called moral *dénouement*, in which rewards and punishments are distributed according to those notions of justice on which the novel-writer would have recommended that the world should be governed if he had been consulted at the creation.[112]

[109] Esty, J., *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, cit., p. 51.
[110] Spacks, P., M., *The Adolescent Idea: Myths of Youth and the Adult Imagination*, New York, Basic Books, 1981, p. 204.
[111] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 214.
[112] Eliot, G., "The Morality of Wilhelm Meister", *Leader*, 21st July 1855, in *George Eliot. Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. A.S. Byatt and N. Warren, London, Penguin, 1990, pp. 516-21, p. 518.

Eliot realized that this excessive, perfectly meaningful conclusion, as the symbol of maturity in the 'classical *Bildungsroman*', is "fully possible *only in the precapitalistic world*", since "'maturity' is hardly compatible with 'modernity'".[113] And, thus, George Eliot "is often taken to mark the end of the *bildungsroman*'s 'classic' phase",[114] which is demonstrated with the publication of *The Lifted Veil* (1859) by creating arguably the first proper 'negative *Bildungsroman*'. Yet, the agency of the protagonist's decline is not a Byronic hero. From this novel on Eliot introduces in the late Victorian fiction the germ of modernity which provokes in her characters such an ambitious aspiration that it "will make it hard to come to terms with reality".[115] As Villari suggests, although Eliot's other modern characters, such as Dorothea Brook in *Middlemarch* (1871-2), would ultimately remedy their failed vocation by realizing the impossibility of fulfilling an epic life in a modern world; in *The Lifted Veil*, the protagonist, Latimer, is the unique character in her canon to experience a drastic and desperate end;[116] a character who encapsulates and dramatizes the imminent risks of modernity that lured the modern man into a "dismal loneliness".[117]

III. 1 *The Tragedy of the Modern Man*

In 1873 the publisher John Blackwood wrote to George Eliot asking her for a possible republication of *The Lifted Veil* in the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*; the very magazine, fourteen years before, had also witnessed the massive success of her first novel, *Adam Bede* (1859). To his offer Eliot surprisingly replied:

[113] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 27.
[114] Esty, J., *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, cit., p. 26.
[115] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 214.
[116] Cf. Villari, E., *Introduction* to G. Eliot, *Il Velo Sollevato*, ed. Villari, E., Venezia, Marsilio, 2010, pp. 9-33, p. 12.
[117] Quoted in Raines, M., "Knowing too much: The Burden of Omniscience in 'The Lifted Veil'", *The George Eliot Review*, vol. 43: 39-46, 2012, p. 39.

> I think it will not be judicious to reprint it at present. I care for the idea which it embodies and which justifies its painfulness […] But it will be well to put the story in harness with some other products of mine, and not send it forth in its dismal loneliness. There are many things in it which I would willingly say over again, and I shall never put them in any other form.[118]

This "idea which […] justifies its painfulness", as Siford suggests: "lies in its exposure of the catastrophe which accompanies the egotistical rejection of humanity".[119] The protagonist is, indeed, a misanthropic and egotistical man who decides to tell the story of his whole gloomy life a month before his approaching death completely alone. He is a very different character if compared with those humble people portraited in the "Dutch paintings, which lofty-minded people despise", and which the narrator of *Adam Bede* praises because they belong to the same destiny of our "fellow-mortal than a life of pomp or of absolute indigence, of tragic suffering or of world-stirring actions".[120] Despite their imperfections, this "generous humanity – mixed and erring" is "saved from utter corruption by the salt of some noble impulse",[121] that prevented them from falling into a total corruption by embracing altruism. It is the Comtean lesson that we "'all are involved in the same miseries, and therefore stand alike in need of mutual help'"; unfortunately, this is the lesson that "Latimer learns too late".[122]

Latimer, indeed, belongs to a "fatal solitude of soul in the society of one's fellow-man";[123] an ambitious modern man who over esteems himself as a talented

[118] Quoted in *Ibidem*. Viera suggests the reason why there might have been a newfound interest in the story: "'The Lifted Veil' occupies a prominent position in the George Eliot canon; closely linked with the author's biography and other fiction, as scholars […] have demonstrated, it is also integrally related to early expressions of her critical theory. Certainly, 'The Lifted Veil' explores, or at least sets the stage, for Eliot's interests in science, physiology, desire, unfulfillment, alienation, knowledge, human consciousness, and various forms of sympathy" (Viera, C., "'The Lifted Veil' and George Eliot's Early Aesthetic", *SEL, 1500-1900,* vol. 24: 749-767, 1984, p.749).
[119] Siford, J., "'Dismal Loneliness': George Eliot, Auguste Comte and 'The Lifted Veil'", in *The George Eliot Review*, vol. 26: 46-52, 1995, p. 46.
[120] Eliot, G., *Adam Bede* [1859], ed. Martin, C., London, Oxford World's Classics, 2008, Book Second, Chapter XVII, p. 161.
[121] Eliot, G., "The Morality of Wilhelm Meister", *Leader*, cit., p. 520.
[122] Siford, J., "'Dismal Loneliness': George Eliot, Auguste Comte and 'The Lifted Veil'", cit., p. 50.
[123] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil and Brother Jacob* [1859-64], ed. Small, H., London, Oxford World's Classics, 1999, Chapter I, p. 124.

poet, and one of those people whom Eliot called "the intolerable just ones, who from the height of their golden seats, look dismissively down on the miseries and sufferings of mankind".[124] Latimer embodies the first of many characters of Eliot's novels in which the germ of modernity takes place, aspiring for a life of greatness; the condition of the modern man whom Moretti defines: "perennially dissatisfied and restless".[125] However, Latimer stands out as the only character, in Eliot's canon, facing a tragic end without any redemption and characterized by a sharp self-illusion. As also Small suggest, he is "the only artist protagonist in her fiction" who "fails to produce a single work of art, becoming instead the vehicle for an extraodinary pathologization of the ideals one finds elsewhere in Eliot's work".[126] And one of these ideals consists in negotiating a new existence by learning from the changeable force of sorrow, described in *Adam Bede* "as an indestructible force, only changing its forms, as forces do, and passing from pain into sympathy—the one poor word which includes all our best insight and our best love";[127] a sympathetic force Eliot majestically exemplifies as "a muscle that we are obliged to lean on and exert".[128] In fact, Latimer has a particular propensity for this extension towards others: he is troubled by a state of double consciousness, the paranormal powers of clairvoyance and mind reading, that paradoxically would literally facilitate the extension of his sympathy, but he fails to use them properly. Therefore, the negativity of what is Latimer's "[…] 'hard indifference' to the sensations and emotions of the people around him", seems to suggest that "*The Lifted Veil* dramatizes a crisis for Eliot's ethics of sympathy".[129] An ethics that was predominant in *Adam Bede* and that constituted her belief, "that the natural tragedies of human experience are the site of a kind of natural

[124] Eliot, G., "The Morality of Wilhelm Meister", *Leader*, cit., p. 520. The original quotation was in French: "insupportables justes, qui du haut de leurs chaises d'or narguent les misères et les souffrances de l'humanité".
[125] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 4.
[126] Small, H., *Introduction* to, Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil and Brother Jacob*, cit., Introduction, p. 20.
[127] Eliot, G., *Adam Bede,* cit., Book Sixth, Chapter L, pp. 435-6.
[128] *Ivi*, Book Sixth, Chapter L, p. 436.
[129] Albrecht, T., "Sympathy and Telepathy: The Problem of Ethics in George Eliot's 'The Lifted Veil'", *ELH,* vol. 73: 437-463, 2006, p. 440.

redemption".[130] *The Lifted Veil* conveys a pessimistic view of Eliot's theory "that art can and should enlarge our sympathy simply by granting us access to the thoughts and feelings of those around us. Latimer in fact makes explicit reference to this theory, but only to dismiss it as a wishful illusion":[131]

> But this is one of the vain thoughts with which we men flatter ourselves. We try to believe that the egoism within us would have easily been melted, and that it was only the narrowness of our knowledge which hemmed in our generosity, our awe, our human piety, and hindered them from submerging our hard indifference to the sensations and emotions of our fellow.[132]

So far, we have underlined the uniqueness of *The Lifted Veil* in the canon of Eliot which displays tragic traits of modernity, exacerbated by Latimer's hopeless self-illusion and loneliness. In the next paragraph we will argue how Gothic conventions throughout the novel aim to highlight Latimer's tragic lonely end, resulting from a crisis of Eliot's ethics of sympathy. And again, at the beginning of the novel the Gothic convention of an imminent death hints at a past tragedy connected to Latimer's failed formation.

III. 2 *The Intrusion of Gothic*

Eliot was not a Gothic writer, and this anomalous divergence towards the Gothic genre also surprised her publisher. Indeed, the first time John Blackwood read *The Lifted Veil* in 1859, he informed Eliot:

> I wish the theme had been a happier one, and I think you must have been worrying and disturbing yourself about something when you wrote […] I very

[130] Orr, M., "Incarnation, Inwardness, and Imagination: George Eliot's Early Fiction", *Christianity and Literature,* vol. 58: 451-81, 2009, p. 464.
[131] Albrecht, T., "Sympathy and Telepathy: The Problem of Ethics in George Eliot's 'The Lifted Veil'", cit., p. 439.
[132] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter I, p. 36.

> much dislike the revivifying experiment at the end and would strongly advise its deletion.[133]

Eliot rejected these requests of revision and the story was anonymously published in July of the same year in the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. As Small reports: "When the first responses from readers came in they were, predictably, mixed. 'Lovers of the painful are thrilled and delighted', Blackwood reported; 'others like me are thrilled but wish the author in a happier frame of mind'".[134] These latter comments were brought about by this unexpected divergence of Eliot to the Gothic genre with a story apparently removed from the themes discussed in *Adam Bede*. Readers, indeed, were eager to read another novel with a truthful depiction of the country life that had characterized her previous success. Probably all her readers, as Blackwood did, might have asked what happened to her. What did prompt her to write this story?

Firstly, a possible answer could be found in her biography. After the success of her first novel, Eliot's anxiety increased: she was afraid of disappointing her readers' expectations caused by a self-distrust that never abandoned her. Moreover, to complicate the situation was the recent death of her sister Chrissey and the painful relationship between Eliot and her brother, Isaac. "And what if Lewes, her great support, should die? This horrible prospect was increasingly part of her anxiety".[135] Lewes was an essential supporter of her works as well as her "dear husband",[136] and also an eclectic intellectual with whom Eliot shared her philosophical, literary and scientific interests clearly present in *The Lifted Veil*

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[133] *Quoted* in Helms, W., "Aesthetics, Artistry, and Gothicism: George Eliot and 'The Lifted Veil'", *George Eliot – George Henry Lewes Studies,* vol. 3: 49-65, 2012, p. 49.
[134] Quoted in Small, H., *Introduction* to Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil and Brother Jacob*, cit., Introduction, p. 17.
[135] Ashton, R., *George Eliot: A Life* [Kindle version], London, Hamish Hamilton, 1996, DOI: 6251/14206. The painful relationship with her brother was already planned in the plot of *The Mill on the Floss*, even before the outline of *The Lifted Veil*, as Ashton points out: "She had already planned the plot of *The Mill on the Floss*, the story of love and misunderstandings between brother and sister. Isaac and her relations with him were painfully present to her early in 1859, blending with her social isolation and anxiety about authorship and revelation, and her disappointment in old friends, to make her indeed, as Blackwood saw, worried and disturbed". *Ibidem*.
[136] "After completing any of her great books, the manuscript concludes with a dedication of the work to her 'dear husband'". Whipple, E., P., "George Eliot's Life", *The North American Review*, vol. 141: 320-330, 1885, p. 326.

through a precise scientific nomenclature.[137] Thus, the prospect of a lonely future without him started hovering in her mind, to the point that she suspended the writing of *The Mill on the Floss* and gave the priority to *The Lifted Veil,* in which she projected her anxieties, as she considered it: "not a *jeu d'esprit*, but a *jeu de melancolie*".[138]

And secondly, the literary explanation is that the Gothic genre is, again, functional, as the first feature of the 'negative *Bildungsroman*', to support Latimer's tragic lonely end. Differently from *Wuthering Heights*, the intense use of Gothic conventions in this novel remains constant throughout the story. Yet, as in *Wuthering Heights*, at the beginning of the story the Gothic conventions hint at Latimer's tragic end whose details would be successively disclosed. As Helms points out: "the artistic choices Eliot makes in crafting the novella prepare us to read it by Gothic norms".[139] Indeed, the narration starts with a gloomy atmosphere in which the first-person narrator immediately signals a possible Gothic tale by telling the reader: "THE time of my end approaches".[140] To make the prospect more bewildering is also the fact that Latimer even knows the precise date of his death and the illness that would cause it: *angina pectoris*. After describing the horrible symptoms, he confesses: "I long for life, and there is no help. I thirsted for the unknown: the thirst is gone. O God, let me stay with the known, and be weary of it".[141] The desperate laments of Latimer and the horror prospects of his death allude to the fact that his "thirst for the unknown" has caused this current lonely end. It is the lament of a modern man who has realized too late the mistakes he has committed during his formation, which are dramatized by the hopelessness and the Gothic convention of an imminent death. Indeed, Latimer immediately

[137] "Lewes discusses transfusion experiments and reanimation, including a scene eerily similar to that in the story. He uses language like Eliot's in discussing how a heart may be made to beat after death by the introduction of fresh blood". Kennedy, M., "'A True Prophet?' Speculation in Victorian Sensory Physiology and George Eliot's 'The Lifted Veil'", *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 71: 369-403, 2016, p. 372.
[138] Quoted in Rubinstein, E., L., "A Forgotten Tale by George Eliot", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction,* vol. 17: 175-183, 1962, p. 175.
[139] Helms, W., "Aesthetics, Artistry, and Gothicism: George Eliot and 'The Lifted Veil'", *cit.,* p. 55.
[140] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter I, p. 114.
[141] *Ivi*, Chapter I, p. 115.

seizes the opportunity to inform the reader about the details that has led him to this tragic situation to obtain her or his sympathy by disclosing his whole formation:

> Before the time comes, I wish to use my last hours of ease and strength in telling the strange story of my experience […] It is only the story of my life that will perhaps win a little more sympathy from strangers when I am dead, than I ever believed it would obtain from my friends while I was living.[142]

From that moment on Latimer narrates his failed coming of age, starting from his childhood to adulthood.

So far, we have argued how the Gothic atmosphere at the beginning of the story is again functional to hint at a failed past formation by showing its tragic outcomes. Yet, this time the intense use of Gothic conventions remains constant to support Latimer's tragedy also for the rest of the story. This intensified use of Gothic tropes is evident, for instance, with the re-elaboration of the negative alterity into the Gothic double.

In the next paragraph, we will analyze the second feature of the 'negative *Bildungsroman*', namely the predominance of the negative alterity as the agency provoking Latimer's tragic end. And surprisingly it is himself as a re-elaboration of the negative alterity into the double, which is set in opposition to only one character, his elder brother, Alfred: the successful version Latimer has failed to become. Eliot in *The Lifted Veil* exploits the Gothic double not to interpret Latimer as an evil character who brings about chaos, but to highlight his misanthropic and feckless personality in contrast with the successful Alfred. This opposition is aimed to stress Latimer's sense of frustration and jealousy towards Alfred, so that it makes the protagonist willingly choose the woman who plots to kill him, rather than saving him from his loneliness. To put it in Moretti's words:

[142] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter I, pp. 116-8.

"No more hidden antagonists, no more hellish conspiracies: Eliot's heroes always choose freely those characters who will most harm them".[143]

III. 3 *Latimer as the Prevailing Double*

The double is a trope that reinterprets and intensifies the metaphoric Christian conflict between good and evil; virtue and vice, in which the good part has to prevail out of a confrontation with a similar but opposite character representing its negative side.[144] As in the paradox of the bourgeois morality the negative alterity is momentarily accepted to allow the protagonist to confront with it, to then be expelled and defeated once the formation is achieved.[145] As we have seen in *Wuthering Heights*, once the negative alterity prevails, it brings about his and others' tragic end. Yet, in *The Lifted Veil* the alterity provokes only his own tragic end, and becomes the double of one particular character, Latimer's elder brother, Alfred.

Since his childhood Latimer immediately highlights the polar difference between him and Alfred, who is described as the successful brother and his father's "representative and successor; he must go to Eton and Oxford […]".[146] On the other hand, Latimer reports with a painful statement his sorrow of having been a misunderstood child: "my father thought me as an odd child, and had little fondness for me".[147] Although Latimer is a sensitive, shy boy with an inclination for literature, his father chooses for him the scientific education and sends him off to Geneva. Five years passes, during which Latimer in Switzerland spends the happiest time of his life. Yet, this happiness is destined to come to an end soon, since in Geneva he is also affected by a severe illness through which he also

[143] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 215.
[144] Cf. Hughes, W., Punter, D., and Smith, A., *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, cit., p. 189.
[145] Cf. Armstrong, N., *The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism,* cit., p. 375.
[146] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter I, p. 120.
[147] *Ibidem*.

acquires his paranormal powers. After all these years Latimer comes back home to his father and then he meets again his brother in Basle, where Latimer marks their contrasting physical features by describing himself with a "half-ghostly beauty", a kind of Gothic darkness opposed to Alfred's handsome features:

> At Basle we were joined by my brother Alfred, now a handsome self-confident man of six-and-twenty – a thorough contrast to my fragile, nervous, ineffectual self. I believe I was held to have a sort of half-womanish, half-ghostly beauty; for the portrait-painters, who are thick as weeds at Geneva, had often asked me to sit to them, and I had been the model of a dying minstrel in a fancy picture.[148]

The polar opposition is highlighted also regarding their personalities, in which the superiority of Alfred's handsome aspect is also confirmed by his confident personality provoking a rising jealousy in Latimer:

> Alfred, from whom I had been almost constantly separated, and who, in his present stage of character and appearance, came before me as a perfect stranger […] He had the superficial kindness of a good-humoured, self-satisfied nature. That fears no rivalry, and has encountered no contrarieties. I am not sure that my disposition was good enough for me to have been quite free from envy towards him.[149]

Apart from the stark difference, which is represented both in their appearances and in their personalities, Latimer marks also the typical point of convergence of the trope of the double that creates the similar-but-opposite characteristic between the two parts. This point of convergence, besides the bond of brotherhood, lies in their shared selfishness, but Latimer highlights that his selfishness is "only a suffering selfishness instead of" Alfred's "enjoining one".[150] All these superior

[148] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter I, p. 138.
[149] *Ivi*, Chapter I, p. 139.
[150] *Ivi*, Chapter II, p. 164.

aspects of Alfred provoke in Latimer an intense suppressed rivalry that is destined to explode soon.

There is an event that triggers the explosion of Latimer's suppressed rivalry, as he confesses: "There must always have been an antipathy between our natures. As it was, he became in a few weeks an object of intense hatred to me".[151] The cause of this hatred is the meeting with Bertha Grant, the *femme fatale* of the story. Latimer immediately falls in love with her, but during their sojourn Latimer notices an attraction between his brother and Bertha that triggers his jealousy. Latimer is intensely attracted by Bertha for being an exception to his mindreading power, that makes her a mystery to him. It is this contention that enacts the suppressed rivalry between the two brothers, even though it seems that Alfred has never been aware of it.

Nevertheless, the contention is momentarily resolved with the triumph of the positive part, Alfred, provoking an increasing jealousy and frustration in Latimer. And this is the moment in which the negative alterity, according to the bourgeois morality, is rejected allowing the positive part to reach the happy ending with the marriage. Yet, as in *Wuthering Heights*, Latimer is the protagonist, and he cannot be rejected. On the other hand, Bertha maliciously encourages Latimer's illusions, since she has noticed that "the brother of the man she meant to marry was dying with love and jealousy for her sake".[152] The outcome is an intense frustration leading Latimer to desire even more this evil woman out of a sense of rivalry, and this choice turns out being his self-destruction when it would ultimately prevail. Let us analyze how this frustration leads Latimer to his ruinous choice.

It was on the steps of the Belvedere palace that Latimer has the first and only insight into her mind. The vision discloses his very desperate dream of prevailing over his brother foreseeing himself married with Bertha in the future. Yet, the

[151] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter I, p. 139.
[152] *Ivi*, Chapter I, p. 140.

vision makes him feel "a wild hell-braving joy",[153] since the delight of his future conquest is connected with his only terrible insight into her mind: "Madman, idiot! why don't you kill yourself, then?".[154] Despite this bewildering awareness, Latimer is completely overwhelmed by his passion for her and his jealously for his brother with no regards of its consequences, as he confesses to the reader:

> The fear of poison is feeble against the sense of thirst […] The future, even when brought within the compass of feeling by a vision that made me shudder, had still no more than the force of an idea, compared with the force of present emotion – of my love for Bertha, of my dislike and jealousy towards my brother.[155]

Despite his terrible vision, Latimer pursues the woman who would ruin his life and trigger his circular development. However, he immediately starts wondering how he would ultimately succeed. He is so blinded by his resentments towards his brother that Latimer does not even consider the possible death of Alfred. The only thought that comes to his mind is "if he was not to marry Bertha, it would be because he had found a lot pleasanter to himself".[156] And it is again the trope of marriage that signals the start of the decline, rather than the ultimate happy ending, both for Alfred, who dies some months before the ceremony, and especially for Latimer who regresses in his loneliness.

So far, we have highlighted the confrontation between Latimer and Alfred, and how the predominance of Latimer, as the unsuccessful double of his brother, signals his personal ruin by obtaining the contended Bertha. In the next paragraph we will retrace his adolescence and early adulthood by focusing on how the marriage represents a false turning point of Latimer's maturity, since his union with Bertha rather than signalling the ultimate happy ending, it provokes the third

[153] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter I, p. 152.
[154] *Ivi*, Chapter I, p. 153.
[155] *Ivi*, Chapter I, p. 155.
[156] *Ivi*, Chapter II, p. 164.

feature of the 'negative *Bildungsroman*', namely the protagonist's circular regression to his initial juvenile loneliness and his need for the intense experience of the sublime.

III. 4 *Latimer's Circular Development*

Differently from the protagonists of the 'classical *Bildungsroman*', Latimer demonstrates, since his adolescence, an unsocial attitude enhanced by a gradual inclination towards the sublime; an aesthetic category that promotes the isolation by contemplating the remote rather than cherishing the visible. Nevertheless, his early misanthropy does not impede him from enjoying the smooth sensation of the beautiful of the Nature in Geneva.[157] But it is in this same period that Latimer contracts the illness that causes his inevitable predilection for the sublime. Let us analyze how the predominance of the sublime occurs in his adolescence.

When he turns sixteen Latimer spends the happiest moments of his life during his scientific education. In Geneva he demonstrates his romantic temperament by enjoying the aesthetic pleasures of Nature, in which his contemplation of both the sublime and the beautiful is still balanced. As Villari suggests, in *The Lifted Veil* Eliot calls forth the definition of the beautiful and the sublime of Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), in which he describes the beautiful possessing "a social *quality*",[158] since those who contemplate it "cherishes things in proportion to their nearness […]".[159] And this quality is opposed to the unsocial one of the sublime.[160] Yet, the social inclination has always been weak in Latimer since his childhood, as Latimer himself states: "I have never fully unbosomed myself to

[157] Cf. Villari, E., *Introduction* to G. Eliot, *Il Velo Sollevato*, cit., p. 22.
[158] Burke, E., *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* [1757], ed. Phillips, A., New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, Part I, Sec. X, p. 39.
[159] Eliot, G., "Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: The Poet Young", *The Westminster Review*, January 1857, in *George Eliot. Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, cit., pp. 307-84, p. 384.
[160] Cf. Villari, E., *Introduction* to G. Eliot, *Il Velo Sollevato*, cit., pp. 21-22.

any human being".[161] As a matter of fact, the characterization of Latimer recalls that type of human being exalted by Edward Young in his *Night Thoughts* (1742-45) and criticized by Eliot in her review published in *The Westminster Review* (1857):[162]

> In Young we have the type of that deficient human sympathy, that impiety towards the present and the visible. Which flies for its motives, its sanctities, and its religion, to the remote, the vague, and the unknown.[163]

However, as Villari suggest, this flaw of sociability does not impede Latimer from experiencing the smooth feeling of the beautiful in the Nature surrounding the lake of Geneva, and this romantic theme is evident in his love for his:[164]

> […] solitary moments […] in which I pushed off my boat, at evening towards the centre of the lake; it seemed to me that the sky, and the glowing mountain-tops, and the wide blue water, surrounded me with a cherishing love such as no human face had shed on me since my mother's love had vanished out of my life.[165]

On the other hand, Latimer also proves his "perpetual sense of exaltation" provoked by the delight he perceives from the sublime threatening features of the same Nature:

> […] the first sight of the Alps, with the setting sun on them, as we descended the Jura, seemed to me like an entrance into heaven; and the three years of my life there were spent in a perpetual sense of exaltation, as if from a draught of delicious wine, at the presence on Nature in all her *awful* loveliness.[166]

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[161] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter I, p. 116.
[162] Cf. Villari, E., *Introduction* to G. Eliot, *Il Velo Sollevato*, cit., p. 23.
[163] Eliot, G., "Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: The Poet Young", *The Westminster Review*, cit., p. 384.
[164] Cf. Villari, E., *Introduction* to G. Eliot, *Il Velo Sollevato*, cit., p. 13.
[165] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter I, p. 124.
[166] *Ivi*, Chapter I, p. 125. Italics mine.

In Geneva Latimer confirms his early egoism by starting a friendship with Charles Meunier, an English science student who shares Latimer's same unpopularity and self-centeredness. In fact, their friendship cannot be defined as such since it lacks the mutual listening and communication. Indeed, their "singularly enough" relationship, as Latimer defines it, is convergent in the assertion of self-centeredness:

> And in Charles rare holidays we went up the Salève together, or took the boat to Vevay, while I listened dreamily to the *monologues* in which he unfolded his bold conceptions of future experiment and discovery. I mingled them *confusedly* in my thought with glimpses of blue water and delicate floating cloud […].[167]

In other words, it could be argued that their relationship is fostered by a mutual egoism rather than mutual friendship. Even though Latimer seems to enter into a gradual process of sociability, it is only a false trail, because their egotistical dispositions do not resolve themselves into a negotiation of values or sentiments. Such egoism degenerates soon after, since this period of Latimer's life was also the end of his only 'friendship' and the beginning of a starker inclination towards the sublime.

The paranormal powers deriving from an unexpected illness that provoke his ultimate inclination towards the sublime, since Latimer interprets his power of clairvoyance as a proof of "the poet nature" in him;[168] the same innate genius of those immortal poets he compares himself with:

> Surely it was in this way that Homer saw the plain of Troy, that Dante saw the abodes of the departed, that Milton saw the earthward flight of the Tempter […] in genuine biographies I had read of the subtilising or exalting influence of some

[167] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter I, p. 127. Italics mine.
[168] Cf. Villari, E., *Introduction* to G. Eliot, *Il Velo Sollevato*, cit., p. 22.

> diseases on the mental powers. Did not Novalis feel his inspiration intensified under the progress of consumption?[169]

Additionally, the illness generates in him also a "wearing and annoying"[170] power of mind reading, which Latimer describes, in line with his misanthropy, as an "ill-played musical instrument, or the loud activity of an imprisoned insect".[171] And it is this power of mind reading that definitely ostracizes him from society since he considers himself too important to indulge in others' frivolous thoughts and emotions he is able to read. This isolation of Latimer's already signals an important difference if compared with the protagonists of the 'classical *Bildungsroman'*. As far as the formation is concerned, the "Self-development and integration are complementary and convergent trajectories, and at their point of encounter and equilibrium lies that full and double epiphany of meaning that is 'maturity'"[172], and symbolically completed with the marriage. Indeed, Latimer lacks an essential feature for maturity, namely the sense of belonging. As Moretti suggests by taking the example of the first *Bildungsroman*, Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-6): in order to reach the ultimate maturity, it is not sufficient that the protagonist achieves only its expectations, but "One must learn first and foremost, like Wilhelm, to direct 'the plot of [his own] life' so that each moment strengthens one's *sense of belonging* to a wider community";[173] an essential part of the formation that Moretti defines "*Zusammenhang*" to convey the narrative logic of the 'classical *Bildungsroman*':

> It tells us that a life is meaningful if the *internal* interconnections of individual temporality […] imply at the same time an opening up to the *outside*, an even wider and thicker network of external relationships with 'human things'.[174]

[169] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter I, p. 131.
[170] *Ivi*, Chapter I, p. 137.
[171] *Ivi*, Chapter I, p. 139.
[172] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 19.
[173] *Ibidem*.
[174] *Ivi*, p. 18.

This sense of belonging, as we have seen, is impeded by the sublime which promotes the loneliness and the contemplation of the remote by exalting the self-centeredness. And to establish Latimer's total absorption in the loneliness of the sublime there is his obsession with Bertha. As we have seen, this fatal attraction has not only been triggered by the rivalry with his brother, but also from her sharp features, "the pale grey eyes at once acute, restless, and sarcastic" that provoke in him the threatening delight the sublime produces: "I felt a painful sensation as if a sharp wind were cutting me".[175] And especially this fatal attraction "was chiefly determined by the fact that she made the only exception, among all the human beings about me, to my unhappy gift of insight".[176] The delightful sensation stemming from the fear of the unknown that Bertha emanates is too tempting for Latimer's sensitive disposition to resist.

Nevertheless, something seems to change after Alfred's death. Latimer appears to be moved away from his egoism by the first and only deep compassion for his father's sorrow he has ever felt; a change that seems to signal Latimer's entrance into sociability through the transformation of sorrow into sympathy. And this supposed redemption from an egotistical life needs to be formalized with the trope of marriage, as the symbolic sign of his maturity. As we have seen with *Wuthering Heights*, the trope of marriage, as Moretti explains, is a literary "'pact' between the individual and the world".[177] A kind of rhetoric of happiness that would affirm the ultimate maturity by restraining Latimer's self-centeredness. But *The Lifted Veil* momentarily follows this patter, since Latimer feels "a new deference to his wishes […] My softened feeling towards my father made this the happiest time I had known since childhood".[178] Then, this trope, as we have seen in *Wuthering Heights*, does not signal the ultimate happy ending, but the

[175] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter I, p. 139.
[176] *Ivi*, Chapter I, p. 140.
[177] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 22.
[178] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter II, p. 172.

beginning of the circular development. Eighteen months after Alfred's death, Latimer remains the only heir and his father hopes that the marriage of Latimer and Bertha "would complete the desirable modification" of Latimer's character, so that to make him finally "practical and worldly enough" to integrate him in the "society among sane men".[179] Yet, the so hoped entrance into sociability does not happen. Latimer's formation degenerates back to his juvenile loneliness, because of his failed marriage with a woman whose hatred has been even disclosed in Latimer's vision, and which he has ignored due to his desperate desire of prevailing over his brother. The worthlessness of this vainglorious triumph over his brother has, though, its dark results after their first year of marriage:

> I was only twenty-one, and madly in love with her. Poor father! He kept that hope a little while after our first year of marriage, and it was not quite extinct when paralysis came and saved him from utter disappointment.[180]

Bertha and Latimer's marriage has become a nightmare in which she hopes for her husband's suicide. And he, on the other hand, has no more ardent desire for her:

> I had become entirely passive; for my one ardent desire had spent itself, and impulse no longer predominated over knowledge. For this reason I never thought of taking any steps towards a complete separation, which would have made our alienation evident to the world.[181]

The failed marriage causes the reaffirmation of Latimer's loneliness and consequently provokes in him a new need for something "hidden and uncertain for the maintenance of that doubt and hope […]";[182] a strong source to 'resurrect' himself from the living death of his life. And there is not a more intense sublime

[179] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter II, p. 173.
[180] *Ivi*, Chapter II, p. 173.
[181] *Ivi*, Chapter II, p. 182.
[182] *Ivi*, Chapter II, p. 170.

experience than the resurrection itself. Nevertheless, Latimer's new pursuit of sublime just shifts its focus from the poetic aspiration to the scientific experiment of his old friend, Charles Meunier, who, as a *Deus ex machina* in the novel, reappears and proposes a revivification of the recently dead maid Mrs. Archer. This maid suddenly dies of appendicitis and is also the only one who keeps Bertha's secret plot of poisoning Latimer. The experiment turns out being scientifically worthless because the revivification lasts only momentarily without important consequences, with the exception of Mrs. Archer's revelation of Bertha's murdering plot and the consequently separation of the couple. The eerie disclosure of the dead body does not bewilder Latimer since he has always been aware of Bertha's evil nature, even before their marriage. Thus, for him "this new revelation was only like an old pain recurring with new circumstances";[183] a realization of the past warning that Latimer has willingly ignored, so that Bertha's unveiled hatred represents only a formalization of his lonely and unloved status.

Besides the circular reaffirmation of his loneliness and his pursuit of sublime, the circular development is also represented by the structure of the narration. Latimer circularly ends his story as he has started it: describing his lonely and approaching death, since the last page of the novel returns circularly at the beginning of the story about the date of his death. So, at the end of his story Latimer reaches the very discouraging result that the narrator in *Adam Bede* criticizes with a pitiful tone:

> Do any of us? God forbid. It would be a poor result of all our anguish and our wrestling, if we won nothing but our old selves at the end of it—if we could return to the same blind loves, the same self-confident blame, the same light thoughts of human suffering, the same frivolous gossip over blighted human lives, the same feeble sense of that Unknown towards which we have sent forth irrepressible cries in our loneliness.[184]

[183] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter II, p. 199.
[184] Eliot, G., *Adam Bede,* cit., Book Sixth, Chapter L, pp. 435-6.

Nevertheless, as we have argued in the first paragraph, this tragic and lonely end has been functionally supported by Gothic conventions throughout the novel to stress Latimer's lonely tragic end deriving from his failed coming of age. As Helms suggests, it is Latimer's solitary death that Eliot arguably wanted to highlight, at the expense of the good Gothic climactic moment of the revivification.[185] Or as also McGlynn underlines, the secret revealed by the dead maid about the plot of Bertha of poisoning Latimer in the scene of the blood transfusion appears peripheral compared to the centrality of Latimer's lonely death which stands out since the beginning.[186] A particular tragic centrality that provokes the last feature of the 'negative *Bildungsroman*', that is to say, the negative empathy.

In the next paragraph, we will analyze how, differently from *Wuthering Heights*, Eliot enhanced the probabilities of negatively empathizing with Latimer by exploiting more functionally both the structure of the narration and the characterization of Latimer to make the reader vicariously experience the tragic outcomes of his past mistakes. Thus, the reader can interpret his negative actions as a warning. As a result, Eliot created arguably the first proper 'negative *Bildungsroman*'.

III. 5 *The Confession Structure and the Negative Empathy*

As we have seen in the first paragraph, the supposed strangeness of *The Lifted Veil* triggered off discordant receptions from all of Eliot's readers, and consequently in the following years the novel was obscured by her major masterpieces, such as *Middlemarch* (1871-2) or *Daniel Deronda* (1876). As

[185] Cf. Helms, W., "Aesthetics, Artistry, and Gothicism: George Eliot and 'The Lifted Veil'", cit., pp. 54-55.
[186] Cf. McGlynn, D., "Transfusing the Secret in George Eliot's 'The Lifted Veil'", *George Eliot – George Henry Lewes Studies*, vol. 1: 60-75, 2007, p. 64.

Villari highlights, only from the 1970s some critics saved the novel from the oblivion by stressing its uniqueness rather than its strangeness.[187] Indeed, Rosemary Ashton has been one of these who, in her biography *George Eliot: A Life* (1983), highlights the originality of this story since it deals with the same themes of love and sympathy but approached only from their negative aspects and consequences:

> it has some of the elements familiar in her other writing, particularly her concern with the importance of love and sympathy between human beings and the inevitability of unhappiness resulting from *wrongdoing*, but in 'The Lifted Veil' these elements are present only in their *negative aspects*. Without humour, wit, or complete characterization, the work represents a strangely dark voyage into the interior of one consciousness, that of the narrator, the miserable Latimer. *The Lifted Veil* is the only example of a first-person narrative in George Eliot's fiction and the only one of her stories to deal with a subject related to the occult or pseudo-science.[188]

As Ashton correctly points out, this novel "is the only example of a first-person narrative in George Eliot's fiction". This aspect is, indeed, highly functional to display the protagonist's consciousness, which is essential to fully empathize with him. Thus, by presenting this "dark voyage" into the mind of the controversial Latimer, Eliot makes the reader vicariously experience the negative outcomes of Latimer's egoism through the negative empathy, so that his tragic outcome becomes a warning about a possible emulation. And consequently, the reader becomes aware of the importance of sympathy and love in our life, since "the artistic representation of the negative would ultimately affirm the *positive*".[189] Indeed, the negative empathy in *The Lifted Veil* is more effective to highlight Latimer's errors because of Eliot's employment of the melancholic first-person

[187] Cf. G. Eliot, *Il Velo Sollevato*, cit., Bibliografia, p. 172.
[188] Ashton, R., *George Eliot: A Life*, cit., DOI: 6208/14206. Italics mine.
[189] Ercolino, S., "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism", cit., p. 246. Italics mine.

narration of the protagonist himself who comments on his past errors, because of the employment of the confession structure that allows the narrator to directly address to the reader. Let us analyze how both the 'situation' and the 'character identification' maximize the probabilities of a negative empathic response in *The Lifted Veil*.

As we have seen in the last chapter, Keen points out that to trigger the narrative empathy, the 'character identification' is one of the two essential factors.[190] As Ercolino points out, the first-person narrator is one of the most common narrative means "to produce stronger character identification",[191] and especially, "specific aspects of characterization", among which: "quality of attributed speech, and mode of representation of consciousness may be assumed to contribute to the potential for character identification and thus for empathy".[192] Despite the unreliability, the reader has access to the protagonist's full consciousness through a particular characterization of the suffocating first-person narrator of Latimer as a melancholic protagonist, that Rubinstein considers "the epitome of the acutely sensitive man trapped in his own suffering".[193] Thus, the first two differences from the Heathcliff of *Wuthering Heights* are both the full display of Latimer's mind, despite its unreliability, and the melancholic tone of his speech which enhance the probabilities of a conflicting identification by the reader.

Moreover, a second and most important difference from *Wuthering Heights* is the narrative structure that enhances a negative empathic response since Latimer sometimes directly addresses to the reader. As we have seen in the second chapter, the second aspect that enhances the probability of narrative empathy is the 'situation', that is, the point of view and the perspective by involving the "nature of mediation between author and reader", and sometimes including also

[190] Keen, S., *Empathy and the Novel*, cit., p. 93.
[191] Ercolino, S., "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism", cit., p. 253.
[192] Keen, S., *Empathy and the Novel*, cit., p. 93.
[193] Rubinstein, E., L., "A Forgotten Tale by George Eliot", cit., p. 183.

"the style of representation of characters' consciousness".[194] The "style" of the narration in *The Lifted Veil* is a first-person confession entrusted to the protagonist himself "as a narrative medium by his frequent references and even direct addresses to the reader: these moments give the story an emphatic third dimension or axis along which it reaches out to us".[195] Indeed, Eliot intensified the factor of the 'situation' by adopting the structure of the confession, which derives from Eliot's eleven-year studies of French and of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782-89).[196] To put it in Hertz's words, in *The Lifted Veil* the theme of confession shapes the narrative structure, since Eliot "was quite deliberately experimenting with the narrative voice […]", indeed "sometimes Latimer also sounds like the man he claims as his hero, Jean-Jacques Rousseau".[197]

In crafting a structure based on a personal confession, Eliot was aware that she was using a particular first-person narrator that enhances the probability of (negative) empathy. Indeed, she enhanced this empathic mechanism by employing some intruding comments by Latimer that momentarily suspend the narration of the past and stress his own mistakes. For instance, in the imminence of his brother's death:

> In after-days I thought with bitter regret that if I had foreseen something more or something different—if instead of that hideous vision which poisoned the passion it could not destroy, or if even along with it I could have had a foreshadowing of that moment when I looked on my brother's face for the last time, some softening influence would have been shed over my feeling towards

[194] Keen, S., *Empathy and the Novel*, cit., p. 93.
[195] Galvan, J., "The Narrator as Medium in George Eliot's 'The Lifted Veil'", *Victorian Studies*, vol. 48: 240-48, 2006, p. 242.
[196] As Witemeyer reports: "The mixed judgments of Rousseau current in George Eliot's London circle during the 1850s tempered and enriched her youthful enthusiasm for the fiery Swiss genius". Witemeyer, H., "George Eliot and Jean-Jacques Rousseau", *Comparative Literature Studies,* vol. 16: 121-130, 1979, p. 123.
[197] Hertz, N., *George Eliot's Pulse*, Stanford, Stanford UP, 2003, p. 43. Moreover, *The Lifted Veil* was influenced, according to Small, by Balzac's novel Eliot admired, *La Peau de Chagrin* (1831) in line with the occult and macabre Gothic tropes (Cf. Small, H., "George Eliot and the Cosmopolitan Cynic", *Victorian Studies*, vol. 55: 85-105, 2012, p. 86).

> him: pride and hatred would surely have been subdued into pity, and the record of those hidden sins would have been shortened.[198]

By intruding into the narration of the past, Latimer's comments highlight and bring to the fore the positive outcome that has not occurred: "pride and hatred would surely have been subdued into pity"; "the record of those hidden sins would have been shortened". However, Latimer immediately demolishes this positive scenario by addressing directly the reader and confesses that this "softening influence" has not taken place in him due to his strong egoism:

> But this is one of the vain thoughts with which we men flatter ourselves […] Our tenderness and self-renunciation seem strong when our egoism has had its day—when, after our mean striving for a triumph that is to be another's loss, the triumph comes suddenly, and we shudder at it, because it is held out by the chill hand of death.[199]

This last part meant to highlight the worthless outcome of his egoism and the readers in this moment might feel a warning about the emulation of Latimer's worthless "mean striving for a triumph that is to be another's loss" through the "Empathic distress".[200] This empathic mechanism makes the warning more incisive since readers empathize with Latimer's acknowledgment of his worthless triumph represented by his brother's death. In other words, the confession structure has been exploited to make the reader negatively empathize with Latimer's melancholic comments, on the one hand to highlight the positive scenario that has not occurred, and on the other hand, to make the reader vicariously experience the worthless outcomes of a possible emulation of Latimer's egoism.

[198] Eliot, G., *The Lifted Veil*, cit., Chapter I, p. 36.
[199] *Ivi*, Chapter I, p. 37.
[200] Ercolino, S., "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism", cit., p. 254.

Finally, Eliot herself clarifies the negative didactic function of this 'negative *Bildungsroman*', where the tragic end of Latimer in his total loneliness is an example to highlight the important function of love and sympathy in our society. In the new edition of the story in 1873, Eliot added a "motto" which appeared as an epigraph that encapsulates the catastrophe that accompanies the rejection of humanity:[201]

> A motto which I wrote on it yesterday perhaps is sufficient indication of that idea:
>
> Give me no light, great heaven, but such as turns
> To energy of human fellowship,
> No powers save the growing heritage
> That makes completer manhood.[202]

We have seen how with this novel, differently from *Wuthering Heights*, the tragic end and the didactic function are explicit. And how this latter aspect has been possible only through an optimization of the negative empathy integrated with the confession structure. So that readers vicariously experience the protagonist's sufferings deriving from his failed formation and caused by the predominance of his agency as the negative double. Moreover, we have seen how, as in *Wuthering Heights*, the use of the Gothic genre has been functional to support this tragic outcome of Latimer's formation, and especially at the beginning to hint at his tragedy by making the reader expect a Gothic story.

However, the tragic end of Latimer is the watershed that clearly signals the end of the classic phase of the *Bildungsroman,* but it was only the beginning of an even worse decline: the crisis of modernity itself. As Esty suggests: "After Eliot, the fissile logic of the *bildungsroman* becomes more and more apparent as it

[201] Cf. Villari, E., *Introduction* to G. Eliot, *Il Velo Sollevato*, cit., p. 26.
[202] Quoted in Raines, M., "Knowing too much: The Burden of Omniscience in 'The Lifted Veil'", cit., p. 39.

breaks down and pulls apart the entwined narrative *telê* of personal maturity and social modernization".[203] As a matter of fact, we have seen how Moretti considers the "*Bildungsroman* as the 'symbolic form' of modernity",[204] and youth a "specific image of modernity"[205] by encapsulating its turbulent features to be symbolically tamed throughout the formation: "Only by curbing its intrinsically boundless dynamism, only by agreeing to betray to a certain extent its very essence, only thus, it seems, can modernity be *represented*".[206] Yet, after Eliot the 'classical *Bildungsroman*' exhausted this symbolic function, as a reaction to a pessimistic reinterpretation of the idea of modernity around the second half of the century, due to many economic, cultural, and social reasons stemming from the mid of the century. And these causes affected the degeneration of the *Bildungsroman*, reaching its peak at the turn of the century. Therefore, the 'negative *Bildungsroman*' needed a new aesthetic and symbolic form to deal with the crisis of modernity and to continue its negative didactic function.

We will see in the next chapter how in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890-1) both the new aesthetics of the 'novel-essay', and thematically the interruption of the growing up of the 'frozen youth' cooperate to symbolize the crisis of modernity through the failure of the protagonist's coming of age. And how, this time, the agency of Dorian's failed formation originates from the post-Darwinian 'degeneration' theory which is encapsulated within the trope of the inner Gothic double. This trope regards a terrifying idea of a hereditary diseased humanity heading towards its extinction. And in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the negative part of this trope is Dorian himself as the agency of his tragic end, whilst its positive part is didactically exploited in the formative discourse of the novel, through the painting, to warn about the dangers of an excessive aestheticism. Indeed, this novel also represents one of the last examples of a 'negative

[203] Esty, J., *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, cit., p. 66.
[204] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 5.
[205] *Ibidem*.
[206] *Ivi*, p. 6.

Bildungsroman' before the disintegration of this genre in the age of modernism at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Chapter IV. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the "Frozen Youth"

The *Bildungsroman*, as any other literary form, had been very sensitive to social, economic, and political turmoil which proved their outcomes at the turn of the century. In this regard, Esty conducts a historical analysis of the *Bildungsroman* from Eliot's turning point in this decline of the novel of formation to give "insights into the fate of developmental thinking more broadly during the breakdown of nineteenth century positivist historicism and the massive but strained expansion of European political hegemony".[207]

Around the middle of the century, England witnessed a prosperous hegemony that produced an optimistic outlook in the future, since the economic growth of the middle-class made people believe anything could be possible. However, moving forward to the second half of the nineteenth century the Great Depression of the 1873 up to 1895 demonstrated the "most ominous contradictions" of capitalism, or as Ercolino defines it: "a crisis of overproduction", in which "first came the spectacular fall in prices of the 1870s-1890s and the ruin of tens of thousands of farmers".[208] As a reaction, an increase of criminality in metropolitan streets alongside an overpopulation was witnessed. On the other hand, it was also a period in which science made huge leaps forward epitomized by the evolutionary work of Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (1859), and "an unmatched era of material growth" as well, so that it was called the Second Industrial Revolution or Technological Revolution. "It became concretely evident, maybe for the first time, that the equation between scientific and technological progress, on the one side, and material and spiritual human progress, on the other, was wrong".[209]

[207] Esty, J., *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, cit., p. 3.
[208] Ercolino, S., *The Novel-Essay, 1884-1947*, New York, Macmillan, 2014, p. 39.
[209] *Ibidem*.

Consequently, the economic crisis inevitably influenced the model of "Balzac's 'novel of capitalism,' whose rushing and engaging narrative reproduced 'the feverish and anarchic features of early capitalism' lost its thrust".[210] And its young heroes could not incarnate the concept of social progress anymore:

> The robust productive life of the bourgeois revolution weakens and dissipates [...] Where the great realists Goethe, Scott, Balzac, and Tolstoy managed to produce heroes who incarnated Lukàcs's Marxist-humanist concept of social progress, the heroes of the late bourgeois novel become playthings of determinist social principles or—on the flip side—mere eccentrics trapped in the cell of the mind.[211]

Afterward Eliot had introduced a new tragic epilogue in the *Bildungsroman*, the degeneration of this genre increased further at the turn of the century until its symbolic function of representing modernity underwent a rapid process of crisis, as a symptom by extension of a general crisis of modernity itself. A decline of a symbolic form that would be definitely destroyed by "the outbreak of the Great War that would demystify the European tradition of heroic youth".[212]

And it is Oscar Wilde who brings the degeneration of the *Bildungsroman* to its peak by embedding "the motif of broken *Bildung*".[213] This motif will be achieved not only through a simple failure of maturity within a natural temporal development of the youth into an adult, but also through the interruption of the growing up which is symbolized by the trope of the 'frozen youth'. Whilst Latimer's tragic end was reached throughout his natural temporal formation from youth to adulthood; Dorian's tragic end is signalled by exposing "the progressive logic of the realist novel, using the trope of youth that does not age in the proper

[210] Ercolino, S., *The Novel-Essay, 1884-1947*, cit., p. 40.
[211] Esty, J., *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, cit., p. 102.
[212] *Ivi*, p. 30.
[213] *Ibidem*.

temporal order".[214] Wilde himself explains in his essay "The Soul of Man under Socialism" (1891) the occurrence of a 'frozen youth' when our own individuality cannot be expressed and cultivated:

> Evolution is the law of life, and there is no evolution except towards Individualism. Where this tendency is not expressed, it is a case of artificially arrested growth, or of disease, or of death.[215]

Wilde derived this idea of self-cultivation by Walter Pater and reinterprets this "artificially arrested growth" as a symbol of disruption of the formative discourse in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. "Indeed Pater, in his influential *Bookman* review of *Dorian Gray*, notes that Wilde either flouts or fails the standard of 'harmonious development' enshrined by that tradition".[216] With this trope Wilde literary disrupts the natural growth of the protagonist who gains a degree of anomaly in his social context, since the more time passes, the more people realize the strangeness of his eternal youth. This 'frozen youth', as a symbol, emphasizes a new "fragile, contradictory" feature of the *Bildungsroman* that would converge "with a number of aesthetic, literary, political, and philosophical developments that were both signs and causes of morbidity in the 'novel of progress'".[217] These aesthetic, literary, political, and philosophical developments proved their outcomes during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century; a period of general decline that not accidentally comes under the name of 'Decadence'. And in the next paragraph I will only focus on the aesthetic development of the 'novel-essay' that cooperated with the new trope of the 'frozen youth' to represent this crisis of modernity.

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[214] Esty, J., *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, cit., p. 110.
[215] Wilde, O., "The Soul of Man under Socialism" [1891], in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. V. Holland, New York, Harper Collins, 2003, pp. 1079–1104, p. 1101.
[216] Esty, J., *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, cit., p. 240.
[217] *Ivi*, p. 67.

IV. 1 *The Rise of the Victorian Novel-Essay*

How and why did this new aesthetics of the novel-essay originate? First of all, we need to consider the aesthetic and literary failure of the naturalist novel that prompted the rise of the 'novel-essay'. The failure of an inflated support of the scientific investigation of positivism, that started in France around the middle of the nineteenth century, had its consequences upon different aspects of society and upon the aesthetics of the novel as well. Balzac, Flaubert were some of the authors who Émile Zola praised and quoted for his radical program in fashioning the new aesthetics of naturalism. In *Les romanciers naturalistes* (1881) Zola listed the three essential features for his idea of the naturalist novel: the absence of the plot, the death of the hero and the impersonality. But such premises were so radical that Zola's program was destined to fail *a priori*.[218] As a matter of fact, some aspects of the naturalist novel were used by Huysmans' *Against Nature* (1884),[219] who proved the impracticability of the naturalist program and the rise of a new decadent aesthetics of the novel, the 'novel-essay', as Ercolino explains:

> The novel-essay presents the organic fusion of two distinct forms, the novel and the essay. As a genre it emerged in France, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and reached its highest formal complexity in Austria and Germany, during the interwar period. I frame the emergence of the novel-essay within the ideological crisis, which fell upon the epistemological and symbolic apparatus of modernity in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and which culminated following the disasters first of World War I and subsequently of World War II.[220]

In *Against Nature* Zola's dream of getting rid of the plot becomes true. What strikes the reader of Huysmans' novel is the absence of action, because the

[218] Cf. Ercolino, S., *The Novel-Essay, 1884-1947*, cit., p. 3.
[219] The original French title was: *À rebours*.
[220] Ercolino, S., *The Novel-Essay, 1884-1947*, cit., p. XV.

protagonist lingers in long essayistic reflections impeding the plot development at the expense of realism. Only the isolation and folly of the protagonist stand out by highlighting the predominance of the artifice over the natural; exactly the opposite result of Zola's positivist aim of a "rational observation and depiction of reality".[221] As Ercolino points out, it is from this point on that:

> Huysmans developed an antithetical aesthetics, rooted, on the contrary, in contempt toward the *Zeitgeist*. An oppositional aesthetics embodied in a new, critical, form, the novel-essay. This was a momentous break. The novel leant out toward the twentieth century.[222]

Indeed, it is the essayistic feature of the 'novel-essay' that represented an antithesis of the Cartesian model of rationality, since the essayistic form is based on discontinuity and fragmentation.[223] Therefore, this new aesthetics was destined to thwart also the typical temporal flow of the plot development in the *Bildungsroman*, through which the protagonist's coming of age is slowed down and postponed by long essayistic monologues. The "*Bildungsroman* was no longer possible: if it had been the symbolic form of modernity, the novel-essay became the symbolic form of its crisis".[224]

Nevertheless, in late Victorian Britain the novel-essay had a particular development in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. This new aesthetics started in Victorian England with Walter Pater's novel, *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), a work that Wilde, apart from Huysmans' novel, knew because of his immense esteem for Pater. Yet, with Wilde this new aesthetics found a fertile ground by blending it with the revival of a new form of the Gothic genre. During the late nineteenth century atheism and agnosticism found their full expressions in Nietzsche's anti-Christian philosophy and especially in Darwin's theory of

[221] Ercolino, S., *The Novel-Essay, 1884-1947*, cit., p. 5.
[222] *Ivi*, p. 6.
[223] Cf. *Ivi*, p. 30.
[224] *Ibidem*.

evolution.[225] The decades after the publication of the scientific work of Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (1859), there was a general social anxiety about atavism, religious disbelief, due to the spreading of the so called 'degeneration' theory. This theory was a partial and loose re-elaboration of Darwin's work by suggesting that organisms undergo phases of progress becoming increasingly sophisticated and successful, to then facing phases of regression back to barbarity.[226] As Ercolino suggests: "By then, the pressure of historical time had become intolerable" and all these changes "produced a shock wave that violently bate down on the system of the arts".[227] As a matter of fact, the exhaustion of naturalism and the anxieties risen by the post-Darwinian theory of degeneration put the basis for a renewed proliferation of the Gothic genre: a genre based on non-mimetic aspects, terror and irrationality. We have seen how after a proliferation during romantic era, around the middle of the century Gothic novels had almost disappeared due to the popularity of the realist novel and the *Bildungsroman*. Yet, this time, the *fin de siècle* Gothic evolved and became the fittest genre, borrowing Darwin's words, and the new Gothic was called 'Urban Gothic'. If during the first wave of the Gothic genre novels were set in exotic places and in medieval castles, Urban Gothic replaced castles with metropolitan claustrophobic streets. "The industrial or post-industrial city often becomes a dark, claustrophobic, and labyrinthine space, haunted by doubles, secrets, and traces of the past, refracting personal, social, or political concerns onto the urban terrain".[228] In other words, Urban Gothic rendered the non-mimetic feature of Gothic more plausible, placing the distant threat nearer, by relocating "spooky phenomena within the quotidian spaces of English modernity".[229] Especially

[225] Cf. Dryden, L., *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells*. Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2003, p. 11.
[226] Cf. Hughes, W., Punter, D., and Smith, A., *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, cit., p. 339.
[227] Ercolino, S., *The Novel-Essay, 1884-1947*, cit., p. 39.
[228] Hughes, W., Punter, D., and Smith, A., *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, cit., p. 703.
[229] Grimes, H., *The Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny, and Scenes of Writing,* London and New York, Routledge, 2016, p. 2.

terrible doubles became a split dark side of the character's identity, and arguably even more bewildering. Whilst the negative double during the first wave of Gothic was a similar-but-opposite different character set in opposition to the protagonist; during the Urban Gothic the negative double dwells within the very protagonist. Just to name some of the authors of Urban Gothic who dealt with dark inner doubles: Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890-1), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Thus, "these voices articulate nagging anxieties about writing in the nineteenth century".[230] As Dryden notices, this new narrative experimentation with the Gothic genre was an expression of the historical shift from an optimistic to a pessimistic outlook;[231] and the inner double was the unsettling representation of the emergence of a hereditary diseased humanity approaching to its extinction.[232] In other words, it could be argued that the 'degeneration' theory was a social symptom of the crisis of modernity.

However, whilst in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Lifted Veil* the Gothic tropes occur at the beginning to mark and hint at a past tragedy connected to the protagonist's failed formation whose details would be successively disclosed, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* follows a normal linear narration in which the intrusion of Gothic occurs only later in the novel emerging as gradually as Dorian's inner degeneration appears on the painting. Yet, the intrusion of Gothic in Wilde's novel preserves the same function to highlight the protagonist's tragic development culminating with his failed formation and death.

Indeed, the 'degeneration' theory in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is represented through the trope of the inner Gothic double which has a double aim: the positive double, embodied by the painting, has a revelatory power to warn about the protagonist's wrongdoings through the gradual deterioration of its image; and the

[230] Grimes, H., *The Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny, and Scenes of Writing,* cit., p. 5.
[231] Cf. Dryden, L., *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells*, cit., p. 4.
[232] Cf. *Ivi*, p. 10.

predominance of the negative double, embodied by Dorian himself, is the agency that triggers his gradual degeneration by ignoring the warnings. This degeneration symbolically impedes any kind of development and growth of the protagonist throughout his formation, who remains, thus, curbed in a static and artificial youth. Indeed, this artificial condition of the 'frozen youth' is the outcome of the emergence and consolidation of this inevitable hereditary degeneration. And it is the 'artificiality' the element of conjunction between the 'novel-essay' and the 'frozen youth'. As a matter of fact, on the one hand, the artificial and discontinued aesthetics of the 'novel-essay' destroys the linearity of the plot development, through which the *Bildung* is reached; and, on the other hand, the artificial arrested growth disrupts the temporal symbolic function of the youth's coming of age in the 'classical *Bildungsroman*'. Therefore, both aspects cooperate in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to create an ultimate 'negative *Bildungsroman*'.

In the next paragraph I will describe the crisis of this genre in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by focusing on the artificiality of the aesthetic level, with the intrusion of the essayistic form in the *Bildungsroman* "consisting in a drastic slowing down of narrative time".[233] Yet, this essayistic intrusion, as we have seen, is not only an artificial form that disrupts the mimetic and normal temporal development of the plot by bringing discontinuity, artificiality in the narration and undermining the characterization; but the essayistic monologues, especially in the first chapters of the novel, are the means through which Lord Henry manipulates and infuses in Dorian his hedonistic creed.

IV. 2 *Against the Aesthetics of the Bildungsroman*

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the crisis of the *Bildungsroman* is represented not only at a thematic level, but also through the artificial aesthetics of the 'novel-

[233] Ercolino, S., *The Novel-Essay, 1884-1947*, cit., p. XVII.

essay'. As we have argued, the essayistic form brings about a discontinuity in the temporal development of the plot by postponing the agency of the protagonist, and the artificiality of the narration through long sentences. This latter aspect is evident in the opening scene of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* which seems more a theatrical script rather than a mimetic description in a novel:

> From the corner of the divan of Persian saddlebags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs […]
>
> In the centre of the room, clamped to an upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty, and in front of it, some little distant away, was sitting the artist himself, Basil Hallward, whose sudden disappearance some years ago caused, at the time, such public excitement, and gave rise to so many strange conjectures.[234]

The artificiality is perceivable through the uncommon use of these long sentences that make the reader run out of breath. In addition, the artificiality is expressed also through the characters' dialogues which "delay and distort the linear temporality and narrative logic of biographical realism":[235]

> Wilde's paragraphs often luxuriate in long sumptuous litanies of descriptive detail, directing the reader's attention to sensory inventory rather than to plot, action, or even characterization. The combination of lyrical description, epigrammatic discourse, and dramatic dialogue that we find in the opening chapter is characteristic of the entire text—one reason it can be understood as a kind of anti-novel.[236]

[234] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray* [1890-1], ed. R. Mighall, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 2003, Chapter I, p. 5.
[235] Esty, J., *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, cit., p. 105.
[236] *Ibidem*.

Or to be more precise, as a kind of 'negative *Bildungsroman*', since the characters' conversations described in the novel seem to belong more to arrogant and conceited young men rather than to mature adults. As also Ellman highlights, apart from immoral charges, some critics defined the novel tedious and dull owing to the employment of 'puppies' as main characters.[237] Indeed, after the publication of the novel on 20th June 1890, as the lead story for the July number of the Philadelphian *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine,*[238] Wilde himself replied to these critics to defend his novel:

> 'it is far too crowded with sensational incidents, and far too paradoxical in style […] But tedious and dull the book is not'. As for puppies, he replied, 'They *are* puppies. Does he [the reviewer] think that literature went to the dogs when Thackeray wrote about puppydom?'.[239]

This reply in essential to understand that Wilde willingly adopted 'puppies' to hint at the fact that the novel breaks the continuity with the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*. And this excessive use of long sentences replacing the action with sensory descriptions proves that he simultaneously wanted also to disrupt the aesthetics of the same tradition. And we will see in the following chapters how he disrupted this tradition also at a thematic level with the 'frozen youth'.

Going back to the tradition and disruption of the *Bildungsroman*, after these long descriptions the dialogues of the two characters give hint of a young boy who is at the edge of adulthood. Lord Henry firstly makes conjectures about this boy by admiring Dorian's beautiful effigies in Basil's painting; so beautiful that Lord Henry is quite sure he should not be clever:

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[237] Cf. Ellman, R., *Oscar Wilde*, London, Vintage Books, 1988, p. 926. In the *St. James's Gazette* in June 1890, Wilde's characters were described as puppies, as the reviewer states: "Puppy No. 1 is the painter of the picture of Dorian Gray; Puppy No. 2 is the critic […] Puppy No. 3 is the original, cultivated by Puppy No. 1 with a 'romantic friendship'". Moreover, the reviewer defines the story as tedious and dull: "This is the story which Mr. Oscar Wilde has tried to tell; a very lame story it is, and very lamely it is told" (Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Appendix I, pp. 215-6).
[238] Cf. *Ivi*, p. 908.
[239] Quoted in *ivi*, p. 927.

> Your mysterious young friend, whose name you have never told me, but whose picture really fascinates me, never thinks. I feel quite sure of that. He is some brainless, beautiful creature […].[240]

Then, after Basil reveals Dorian's name, he confesses what an extraordinary influence he has had upon his life and then Basil adds further information about Dorian's age:

> The merely visible presence of this lad – for he seems to me little more than a lad, though he is really over twenty – his merely visible presence […] Unconsciously he defines for me the lines of a fresh school, a school that is to have in it all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek. The harmony of soul and body […] Harry! If you only knew what Dorian Gray is to me! […] Some subtle influence passed from him to me, and for the first time in my life I saw in the plain woodland the wonder I had always looked for, and always missed.[241]

Dorian is a "lad" to Basil, and although he is "over twenty", his is still an age of formation. Dorian is described as a simple and pure young boy whose influence is of a harmonious kind: "The harmony of soul and body". Basil explicitly describes the harmonious aestheticism of Wilde that aligns the morality of the soul with the beauty of the body: "all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek" of a higher level of experience by contemplating the harmonious beauty of a pure young boy. It is interesting how this harmonious duality between soul and body is the same that will be overturned and split after Lord Henry's negative influence over Dorian from the second chapter onwards, in which Dorian also physically appears.

[240] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter I, p. 7.
[241] *Ivi*, Chapter II, p. 13.

In the second chapter the scene is set again in Basil's house and Dorian is caught playing the piano. Lord Henry finally meets Dorian, and he is immediately struck by his face "that made one trust him at once. All the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate purity".[242] Lord Henry immediately exposes his hedonist idea of beauty: "You are too charming to go in for philanthropy, Mr. Gray – far too charming".[243] After a polite intervention of Basil stating that Lord Henry is a bad influence on anyone except for Basil, Dorian asks Lord Henry whether it is true. And from this point on Lord Henry starts off a long essayistic monologue about 'influence'. As a matter of fact, 'influence' is a keyword in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as Wilde offers negative aspects of an extreme idea of Pater's aestheticism to highlight the tragic consequences and the absent moral component:

> 'There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral […] Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul […] The aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly – that is what each of us is here for. People are afraid of themselves, nowadays. They have forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to one's self. Of course they are charitable. They feed the hungry, and clothe the beggar. But their own souls starve, and are naked […] 'I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream […] We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us […] The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful'.[244]

This essayistic monologue is the tragic turning point of Dorian's formation. Lord Henry's long dialogue aims to infuse Dorian with a new idea of lifestyle, that is,

[242] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter II, p. 19.
[243] *Ibidem*.
[244] *Ivi*, Chapter II, p. 21.

by ceding to present temptations: "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it". This idea, according to Lord Henry, is beneficial to the soul. Indeed, Dorian yields to this new creed almost immediately when he realizes his beauty will inevitably fade away. In this moment Dorian signs the pact with the devil: "If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! […] I would give my soul for that!".[245] This sentence not only represents his magic spell that makes his wish become real, but also marks his new awareness of the fact that his youth would inevitably fade away. This awareness provokes a hedonistic change in his disposition, whose future actions lead him to his deformation. Indeed, from this moment on Dorian desperately tries to make the most of his age regardless of the consequences of his actions.

Nevertheless, his desire for eternal youth seems to be the dramatic moment that would immediately trigger Dorian's journey of (de)formation through the plot development, yet it is a false trail. The discontinuity of the essayistic form momentarily postpones Dorian's agency by inserting static chapters of the discussions between characters of Dorian's background, marriage, art and other topics. However, it is from chapter VII that something changes at last. In the previous chapters Dorian has mentioned an actress he intends to marry, Sibyl Vane, and invites Basil and Lord Henry to her performance as Juliet. Sibyl's performance, though, is dull and disappoints Dorian's expectations. And it is when the performance ends that Dorian goes to talk to her and discovers that she has willingly sabotaged her performance because of Dorian's influence on her life:

> You taught me what reality is. To-night, for the first time in my life, I saw through the hollowness, the sham, the silliness of the empty pageant in which I had always played […] You had brought me something higher, something of

[245] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter II, p. 28.

> which all art is but reflection. You had made me understand what love really is.[246]

It is interesting that it is the very influence of Dorian on Sibyl that has made her renounce to her love for art, resolving her concept of love into a more mature and concrete idea. And this turning point of Sybil's maturity seems to suggest that she has become a mature woman who is ready to marry her "Prince Charming".[247]

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the lawful pact of marriage in the 'classical *Bildungsroman*' is the trope that symbolizes the willingness of the protagonist to restrain its exploding individuality; the literary "'pact' between the individual and the world".[248] Here however, this trope is again the start of the protagonist's decline which in this novel not only arrives too soon, and is besides again momentarily hinted at to be then reversed by impeding the protagonist's ultimate happy ending. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, this important moment is prevented by Dorian's immaturity and by Lord Henry's hedonistic influence. In this moment Dorian proves his new hedonistic creed, as he has a different concept of 'love': he has loved Sibyl only for her art that has been capable of stirring his imagination; her art has made her immortal every time she died onstage and then 'miraculously' returned to life backstage. And her new revelation of giving up art, right on the imminence of their marriage, makes Dorian state:

> […] 'you have killed my love. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don't even stir my curiosity. You simply produce no effect. I loved you because you were marvellous, because you had genius and intellect, because you realized the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art […] You are shallow and stupid.[249]

[246] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter VII, p. 84.
[247] *Ivi*, Chapter VII, p. 84.
[248] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 22.
[249] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter VII, p. 85.

This horrible offence against Sibyl signals, apart from his immature and shallow idea of love, also the first sign of the emergence of an inevitable, hereditary evil.

So far, we have seen how the aesthetics of the 'novel-essay' has interfered with the normal aesthetics of the *Bildungsroman* by adopting an artificial narration that slows down the narrative time by employing static descriptions at the expense of action; the use of monologues between characters; and the insertion of static chapters that momentarily block the plot development and postpone Dorian's agency until chapter VII. This chapter resumes the protagonist's agency and the plot development, but it also symbolizes the starting of Dorian's gradual moral degeneration. Indeed, Dorian becomes aware of it by noticing the aesthetic changings on his portrait as his moral warning that reveals the emergence of an inner hereditary degeneration that gradually takes possession of his actions.

In the next paragraph I will analyze the formative outcomes of the emergence and predominance of the negative inner Gothic double, as one of the features of the 'negative *Bildungsroman*'. Yet, this time the agency stems from the 'degeneration' theory; a theory that indicates that the responsibility of Dorian's degeneracy has been hereditary and inevitable, and that Lord Henry's influence has been only the trigger.

IV. 3 *The Inner Gothic Double Prevails*

As we have seen, the agency of Dorian's rising wickedness seems to be triggered by Lord Henry's manipulation. In fact, it could be argued that the emergence of Dorian's dark side is only partially Lord Henry's fault, since it is related to a hereditary agency which has always dwelled within him as explained in the 'degeneration' theory.

This was a popular theory in late Victorian society, and whose major exponent was Henry Maudsley who published in 1874 *Responsibility in Mental Disease*. He argued that "criminals were largely a product of their hereditary makeup, or

were (evolutionary) throwbacks to more primitive forms of humanity".[250] Therefore, as Mighall suggests: "By stressing the role of heredity in Dorian's actions […] Wilde was bringing the theme of the Faustian bargain up to date, giving it a degree of plausibility […] and diminishing Dorian's moral responsibility for his actions".[251] This post-Darwinian theory, as we have seen, was created as an answer in reaction to a general crisis of society. And in the novel, in chapter III, this hereditary malady is represented through the resemblances of Dorian with his ancestors: firstly, his appearances resemble his beautiful mother and then, once his painting starts deteriorating, his appearances make Dorian resemble his grandfather, "a mean dog".[252] Therefore, these physical resemblances aim to link the origin of Dorian's degeneration to his ancestors:

> So that was the story of Dorian Gray's parentage. Cruelty as it had been told to him, it had yet stirred him by its suggestion of a strange, almost modern romance. A beautiful woman risking everything for a mad passion. A few wild weeks of happiness cut short by a hideous, treacherous crime. Months of voiceless agony, and then a child born in pain. The mother snatched away by death, the boy left to solitude and the tyranny of an old and loveless man.[253]

This background is a premonition of his future development, as Mighall suggests: "Physically and morally, Dorian is a product of his heredity".[254] From a long line of debauchery, the protagonist's future criminal tendencies derive from his grandfather, but Dorian's "intention to marry the lower-class Sibyl Vane suggests that he is in part reverting to maternal type".[255] However, Dorian displays the first

[250] Mighall, R., *Introduction* to Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., pp. ix-xxxiv, p. xxxiii. "Maudsley published articles on 'Hereditary in Health and Disease' in the *Fortnightly Review* (1886), the same journal in which a number of Wilde's own essays appeared".
[251] *Ivi*, p. xx.
[252] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter III, p. 35.
[253] *Ivi*, Chapter III, p. 37.
[254] Mighall, R., *Introduction* to Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., p. xx.
[255] *Ibidem*.

sign of his wickedness precisely with Sibyl by recreating in her a pain similar to what his mother has suffered:

> A fit of passionate sobbing choked her. She crouched on the floor like a wounded thing, and Dorian Gray, with his beautiful eyes, looked down at her, and his chiselled lips curled in exquisite disdain. There is always something ridiculous about the emotions of people whom one has ceased to love. Sibyl Vane seemed to him to be absurdly melodramatic. Her tears and sobs annoyed him.[256]

Sibyl, indeed, dies as his mother and Dorian's horrible coldness of towards her feelings is the first sign of a rising wickedness that is aesthetically represented as the changings onto the portrait's effigies:

> In the dim arrested light that struggled through the cream-coloured silk blinds, the face appeared to him to be a little changed. The expression looked different. One would have said that there was a touch of cruelty in the mouth. It was certainly strange.[257]

Dorian's first reaction is bewilderment, and then his conscience starts emerging and he momentary regrets:

> […] a feeling of infinite regret came over him, as he thought of her lying at his feet sobbing like a little child […] The picture, changed or unchanged, would be to him the visible emblem of conscience. He would not resist temptation. He would not see Lord Henry any more […] 'How horrible!' he murmured to himself […].[258]

[256] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter VII, p. 86.
[257] *Ivi*, Chapter VII, p. 87.
[258] *Ivi*, Chapter VII, pp. 88-9.

Despite his momentary repentance, the imminent and inevitable predominance of his hereditary agency starts taking control of his actions. As a matter of fact, Dorian meets again Lord Henry, even though he has promised to himself the contrary. In chapter VIII, the conversation with Lord Henry about Sibyl's death makes Dorian finally ignore the moral warnings by turning himself into a total narcissist: "'Good resolutions are useless attempts to interfere with scientific laws. Their origin is pure vanity. Their result is absolutely *nil*".[259] The manipulation is completed and from this moment on his inner hereditary malady breaks free, since "life had decided that for him":

> He felt that time had really come for making his choice. Or had his choice already been made? Yes, life had decided that for him – life, and his own infinite curiosity about life. Eternal youth, infinite passions, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins – he was to have all these things. The portrait was to bear the burden of his shame: that was all.[260]

Dorian's magic portrait, indeed, is the warning element in the novel, both for the reader and for Dorian, by revealing his inner hereditary degeneracy. Portraits in Gothic fiction, as Kamilla Elliot suggests, carry an important "epistemological power", since "beyond revealing kinship and moral character, they reveal lost and hidden identities".[261] While the first wave of Gothic adopted the portrait identification to "bring down the high class and raise up the low through forging resemblances between bodies and portraits", on the other hand, "Victorian Gothic more often engages portraiture to revealing familial illegitimacy, moral corruption and the social decline of the lower-middle and bourgeois classes".[262] As a matter of fact, this general social decline in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is also portrayed in the novel: "Wilde's understanding of the city of London is

[259] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter VIII, p. 97.
[260] *Ivi*, Chapter VIII, p. 102.
[261] Elliot, K., "Gothic and Portraiture: Resemblance and Rupture" in *The Edinburgh Companion to Gothic and the Arts*, ed. D. Punter, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2019, pp. 133-147, p. 133.
[262] *Ibidem*.

clearly a dualistic one that simultaneously echoes and emphasizes the division between Dorian and his portrait":[263] The East End is characterized as degenerated and squalid, in opposition to a rich but decadent West End.

The fact that Dorian has only momentarily felt regret and shame to then change idea is a sign that his hereditary agency has inevitable taken possession of his actions, which has been demonstrated by his natural inclination towards corrupting situations and people. As the narrator suggests:

> There are moments, psychologists tell us, when the passion for sin, or for what the world calls sin, so dominates a nature, that every fibre of the body, as every cell of the brain, seems to be instinct with fearful impulses. Men and women at such moments lose the freedom of their will. They move to their terrible end as automatons move.[264]

Therefore, it could be argued that Lord Henry's influence has been only a trigger of an ever present but hidden corrupted soul. Yet Lord Henry's hedonistic influence still shapes Dorian's personal interpretation of his degeneration, as an opportunity to experience any kind of pleasure freely and safely. To put it in Elliot's words: "Dorian has not been corrupted by his age: he has been corrupted by picture identification: that is, by excessive identification with his picture".[265] It is an interesting interpretation of how Dorian can experience Lord Henry's idea of looking at life as art. Dorian resolves the threatful moral warnings into a pleasurable opportunity to 'paint' his own portrait through his actions and therefore he can literally experience his life becoming art:

> If the picture was to alter, it was to alter. That was all. Why inquire too closely into it? For there would be a real pleasure in watching it. He would be able to follow his mind into its secret places. This portrait would be to him the most

[263] Walker, R. J., *Labyrinths of Deceit: Culture, Modernity and Identity in the Nineteenth Century,* Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2007, p. 92.
[264] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter XVI, p. 181.
[265] Elliot, K., "Gothic and Portraiture: Resemblance and Rupture", cit., p. 143.

> magical of mirrors. As it had revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul […] Like the gods of the Greeks, he would be strong, and fleet, and joyous. What did it matter what happened to the coloured image on the canvas? He would be safe. That was everything.[266]

This scene is arguably the predominance of the negative double of the 'negative *Bildungsroman*', since from this moment on, the negative Gothic double metaphorically prevails by deciding to ignore the warnings and hide the portrait. And this decision marks the start of his circular development by recreating the same criminal tendency of his ancestors leading him to his tragic end.

As we have said, the two 'Dorians' are two different sides of Dorian's identity: the moral and immoral part. Additionally, Wilde reverses the normal aesthetics of the good and bad appearances by burdening the moral portrait with the effects of the immoral double, who appears immaculate on the surface. Thus, Wilde can exploit the painting as the warning element by mirroring Dorian's inner hereditary and gradual degeneracy. As Craft suggests: Wilde reinterprets the idea of mirrors stemming from Ovid's narcissus, yet complicating it in which the picture does not mirror the image but its deformation by leaving Dorian unspoiled in his state of eternal youth.[267] Nevertheless, even though at the beginning this new freedom from the aging process excites Dorian to the point that he breaks any moral code, after some years he experiences the consequences on his reputation and conscience. Only when he completes the circular emulation of his grandfather's criminality his arrested growth becomes a symbol of lifelessness rather than vitality, foreboding a tragic destiny.

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[266] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter VIII, p. 103.

[267] Cf. Craft, C., "Come See About Me: Enchantment of the Double in The Picture of Dorian Gray", *Representations,* vol. 91: 109-136, 2005, p. 115. This complex and masterfully depiction of the duality between soul and body is according to Lawler and Knott a re-elaboration of his previous short stories. Indeed, Wilde seemed to reassemble previous materials whose full potential had not been expressed, that is to say: the fairy tale *The Fisherman and His Soul* (1891) and the short story *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* (1889), (Cf. Lawler, D. and Knott, C., "The Context of Invention: Suggested Origins of 'Dorian Gray'", *Modern Philology,* vol. 73: pp. 389-398, 1976, p. 389).

Hitherto, we have analyzed the predominance of the negative inner double and how in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the Gothic double can work also on a smaller scale: "by exploring ways in which fragments or heterogeneous facets of a *single* character […] are held simultaneously apart and together".[268] And in the next paragraph we will analyze how the predominance of this hereditary agency shows its negative consequences on his formation. As the painting has magically blocked his growth by burdening itself with Dorian's aging process, the trope of the 'frozen youth' mutates its connotation from a symbol of an exciting freedom, to an eerie "sign of lifelessness".[269] Indeed, after the fulfillment of the circular regression, another feature of the 'negative *Bildungsroman*', to his ancestors' criminal tendency, the eternal youth gains its tragic formative connotation by symbolizing "the stunted individual who cannot or will not grow up".[270]

IV. 4 *Dorian's Circular Development and "The Frozen Youth"*

The trope of the 'frozen youth' is the thematic element alongside the aesthetics of the 'novel-essay' to symbolize the crisis of the *Bildungsroman* in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In this thematic regard, Esty focuses on the question of youths' narcissistic desire to last forever and identifies *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as "the archetypal expression" of this trope which later Anglophone writers adopt by "reconceiving, even deforming, the biographical plot of the *bildungsroman* […]".[271] Although an arrested growth seems a victory over the deterioration of time, it encapsulates a tragic destiny of Dorian's formation:

[268] Potter, C., "Reading Blanchot's Obscure Double: Le soi comme (dés) aster en orbite avec soi", cit., pp. 40-41.

[269] Esty, J., *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, cit., p. 28.
[270] *Ibidem*. Esty hints at the future development of this trope through some examples: Barrie's Peter Pan, Conrad's Jim, Woolf 's Rachel Vinrace and Stephen Dedalus.
[271] *Ivi*, p. 101.

> Once cut free from its embedded theologies, the trope of adolescence reveals the cruel lesson […] that endless youth is merely the obverse of sudden death. Without age–or, to be more precise, without aging–youth mutates from a figure of vitality into the very *sign of lifelessness*.[272]

By losing its intrinsic vitality, the youth is deprived of its symbolic function of representing the essence of modernity in the 'classical *Bildungsroman*'. And consequently, it becomes a sign that forebodes a tragic end. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the eternal youth changes its exciting connotation into an imminent tragedy only towards the end of the novel, when the agency of Dorian's hereditary degeneration is fulfilled becoming eerie and evident on the painting. As we have argued, the painting's Gothic degeneration is a "disciplinary sign, a warning of what might happen if the body is imprisoned by its desires or if the subject is unable to discipline him–or herself fully and successfully";[273] a warning that the protagonist does not take seriously into consideration in time resulting "in social death, outlaw and outcast status, and ultimately physical demise".[274] But let us analyze how the trope of the 'frozen youth' forebodes this tragic end after the fulfillment of the gradual circular reaffirmation of Dorian's hereditary criminal tendency.

Dorian's initial degeneration is immediately perceived by Basil Hallward the day after the protagonist decides to ignore the aesthetic warnings of his portrait:

> Something has changed you completely. You look exactly the same wonderful boy who, day after day, used to come down to my studio to sit for his picture. But you were simple, natural, and affectionate then. You were the most unspoiled creature in the whole world. Now I don't know what has come over you. You talk as if you had no heart, no pity in you.[275]

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[272] Esty, J., *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, cit., p. 28. Italics mine.
[273] Halberstam, J. *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1995, p. 72.
[274] *Ibidem*.
[275] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter IX, p. 105.

From this moment on Basil tries to help Dorian, but he starts lying to the painter about why he has hidden the portrait. This resisting behaviour marks a tragic and irreversible direction of Dorian's deformation: "Yes, Basil could have saved him. But it was too late now".[276] Indeed, Dorian indulges even more in his degeneration by accepting a strange "yellow book" from Lord Henry that causes an even worse influence upon himself:

> After a few minutes he became absorbed. It was the strangest book he had ever read. It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in dumb show before him. Things that he had dimly dreamed of were suddenly made real to him. Things of which he had never dreamed were gradually revealed.[277]

After this last negative influence from Lord Henry, the narration is interrupted and resumed some years later, when Dorian is twenty-five years old. Despite all this time, Dorian cannot free himself from the influence of the yellow book, and the reader can only imagine what grim actions he might have performed. Such macabre hints are offered by the further degenerations of the portrait's effigies which uncannily remind Dorian of his grandfather's:

> Hour by hour, and week by week, the thing upon the canvas was growing old. It might escape the hideousness of sin, but the hideousness of age was in store for it. The cheeks would become hollow or flaccid. Yellow crow's-feet would creep round the fading eyes and make them horrible. The hair would lose its

[276] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter X, p. 115.
[277] *Ivi*, Chapter X, p. 120. This yellow book has been identified as Huysmans' *À Rebours* (1884). As Wilde wrote in 1892: the book was "partly suggested by Huysmans' *À Rebours* […] It is a fantastic variation on Huysmans's over-realistic study of the artistic temperament in our inartistic age" (Letter to E. W. Pratt, Postmark 15th April 1892, in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Holland, M. and Hart-Davis, R., London, Fourth Estate, 2000, p. 524). As Mighall points out: "However, the book is only partially modelled on Huysman's 'breviary of Decadence'. Wilde had originally given this book a fictitious title and author, *Le Secret de Raoul par Catulle Sarrazin*, but cancelled this in the typescript, wisely shrouding the book in mystery, hinting at rather than specifying a number of likely candidates" (Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Notes, p. 244).

> brightness, the mouth would gape or droop, would be the wrinkled throat, the cold, blue-veined hands, the twisted body, that he remembered in the grandfather who had been so stern to him in his boyhood.[278]

The trope of the 'frozen youth' starts losing its vitality, since the painting's youthful features are gradually replaced by old ones. And this changing of connotation coincides with the circular reaffirmation of his hereditary legacy now more and more evident on the painting. As we have argued, from the turning point of Dorian's decision of ignoring the warnings, his formation has plunged into the same criminal past of his ancestral legacy. This bond between Dorian and his ancestors becomes clear in this passage, since it is confirmed aesthetically by the painting's transformation of Dorian's features into his grandfather's. And probably also Dorian's actions that have deformed in this way the painting have been similar to his grandfather's. Therefore, Dorian's deformation is heading towards the same circular and inevitable direction of his ancestors.

Additionally, also for the others around him his 'frozen youth' starts changing its positive connotation becoming a sign of eerie bewilderment. Indeed, since the aging process is carried by his portrait, Dorian appears strangely young for his age. And his eternal youth starts assuming an evident degree of timelessness in his social context. On the contrary, all the other people around him are naturally aging and "look at him with cold searching eyes, as though they were determined to discover his secret".[279] Nevertheless, Dorian ignores both people's rumors about him and the warning of the painting: he decides to be totally absorbed into the pleasure of eternal youth regardless of the morality and consequences. A decision that eventually provokes soon the same isolation from society by even more highlighting the tragic destiny of his formation. As we have described in the previous chapter, the impossibility to confront with the real world hinders an important aspect of the journey of formation: "Self-development and integration

[278] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter X, p. 118.
[279] *Ivi*, Chapter XI, p. 136.

are complementary and convergent trajectories, and at their point of encounter and equilibrium lies that full and double epiphany of meaning that is 'maturity'".[280] Again, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, we have not only a metaphorical lack of self-development, but also the lack of integration, which this time occurs because of a negative reputation of Dorian's behavior makes others avoid him:

> It was remarked, however, that some of those who had been most intimate with him appeared, after a time, to shun him. Women who had wildly adored him, and for his sake had braved all social censure and set convention at defiance, were seen to grow pallid with shame or horror if Dorian Gray entered the room.[281]

The narration is interrupted again and is resumed when Dorian turns thirty-eight. Chapter XIII is the fulfilment and the tragic culmination of Dorian's degeneration, since it prompts him to commit the most horrible deed a human being is capable of, namely murder. The ancestral criminal tendency has been completely fulfilled by replicating his grandfather's scandal. However, Dorian exacerbates this ancestral criminality by personally killing his friend Basil, whilst his grandfather has employed another one to commit this deed. Therefore, Dorian brings a further pejoration to his long line of hereditary debauchery, because the victim not only has been his friend, and he had even wanted to help him out of an uncompromised love for him; a love that since the beginning suggests a homosexual attraction. However, before the murder, when Dorian comes across him in the streets, he pretends to have not seen him, but Basil, then, asks him many questions and especially about some rumours regarding his corrupting influence. And in a desperate last effort of helping him, Basil almost prays Dorian to redirect his life conduct back to normality:

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[280] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 19.
[281] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter XI, p. 136.

> I do want to preach to you. I want you to lead such a life as will make the world respect you. I want you to have a clean name for a fair record. I want you to get rid of the dreadful people you associate with […] Let it be for good, not for evil. They say that you corrupt every one with whom you become intimate, and that it is quite sufficient for you to enter a house, for shame of some kind to follow after.[282]

Nevertheless, Dorian seems completely indifferent to his words, and then Basil starts wondering whether he has really known him and claims to see his "soul".[283] To this request Dorian leads him to his top landing where the portrait has been hidden, and shows Basil a bewildering revelation:

> An exclamation of horror broke from the painter's lips as he saw in the dim light the hideous face on the canvas grinning at him. There was something in its expression that filled him with disgust and loathing. Good heavens! it was Dorian Gray's own face that he was looking at! The horror, whatever it was, had not yet entirely spoiled that marvellous beauty.[284]

The reader is not informed how the features of the portrait are degenerated, yet Wilde hints at a dreadful deterioration, sufficient to make Basil kneel and pray for Dorian's repentance. However, it is too late, and Dorian is moved by an intense hatred only by watching his portrait:

> Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips. The mad passions of a hunted animal stirred within him, and he loathed the man who was seated at the table, more than in his whole life he had ever loathed anything. He glanced wildly around. Something glimmered on the top of the

[282] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter XII, p. 145.
[283] *Ivi*, Chapter XII, p. 146.
[284] *Ivi*, Chapter XII, p. 149.

> painted chest that faced him. His eye fell on it. He knew what it was. It was a knife that he had brought up […] He moved slowly towards it, passing Hallward as he did so. As soon as he got behind him, he seized it, and tuned around […] He rushed at him, and dug the knife into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man's head down on the table, and stabbing again and again.[285]

This important passage highlights how the agency of Dorian's actions is totally out of his control. Consequently, after his murderous deed Dorian falls into a paranoic state by feeling continuously haunted by his past deeds and in a constant threat. As a matter of fact, Sibyl's brother reappears seeking vengeance, and ironically Dorian succeeds in escaping from him only because of his too young appearances.

Nevertheless, the very state of 'frozen youth' that has saved his life and has been an exciting freedom, now becomes a torment: he is continuously haunted by his conscience and needs opium to anesthetize his agony. In other words, he is blocked in a living nightmare. Thus, the fulfillment of his hereditary degeneration coincides with the changing of connotation of his eternal youth, which now gains a tragic formative connotation foreboding a tragic epilogue. Indeed, Dorian's impossibility of moving on metaphorically represents his impossibility of becoming adult and completing his formation. Consequently, Dorian's inner torments and sufferings highlight how worthless his eternal youth has been to the point that he wishes to restart his life by erasing his sins, but it is too late. Dorian reaches a melodramatic moment of supposed repentance and is aware that as long as there would be the portrait as a proof of his corruption, he cannot move on, since the portrait, as we have argued, has been not only the proof of his corruption but also the element that has magically blocked his aging process. Therefore, he decides to stab the painting, but it is as though he stabbed his own soul. It is

[285] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter XIII, p. 151.

unclear whether Dorian is aware of this consequence. Nevertheless, it could be argued that he has unconsciously stabbed his soul with an intention of suicide, as an ultimate deed to soothe his perpetual, agonizing existence. And after this deed Dorian's failed formation becomes clear.

It is again the painting which employs a last Gothic expedient to mark this failure: after Dorian has stabbed the portrait, those who enter into his room find its effigies back to purity and unspoiled youth, as they have been at the beginning of Dorian's formation; and now it is Dorian, lying dead on the floor, who is burdened with those old and deturpated features of the portrait:

> When they entered, they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was.[286]

By restoring the proper moral aesthetic of the painting and the immoral aesthetic of Dorian, this last scene clarifies which has truly been the positive and the negative double of the two 'Dorians'. Moreover, the restoration of the initial unspoiled beauty of the portrait represents the failure and worthlessness of the protagonist's coming of age, as if his journey of formation had never started.

As we have argued, Dorian's hereditary degeneration has been interpreted through an excessive idea of aestheticism, which has led him to his tragic end. This degenerated aestheticism was an extreme re-elaborated version of the influence of Pater's 'Conclusion' of *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873) which is embodied in the character of Lord Henry. Yet, as we have seen in the novel, Basil represents Wilde's balanced aestheticism in which the morality of art plays a major part, and this morality of art derives from Wilde's other

[286] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* cit., Chapter XX, p. 213.

model: John Ruskin. Indeed, "the word 'aesthetic'", as Ellman suggests, "became a bone of contention between Ruskin's disciplines and Peter's".[287] Both authors offered Wilde different points of view about the same artistic concept of beauty, from which Wilde created his own balanced aestheticism. "Though both Ruskin and Pater welcomed beauty, for Ruskin it had to be allied with good, for Pater it might have just a touch of evil".[288] When Wilde started studying at Oxford in 1874 during his three years, he never met Pater in person until his third year. Yet during his first year "he came under the spell of his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*".[289] Pater had a notorious influence on Wilde's aestheticism, especially in his prose style and his ostentatious lifestyle, but Wilde treated "Ruskin as the father of this renaissance".[290] The outcome of Wilde's aestheticism was a harmonious re-elaboration of the Christian moral beauty of Ruskin, in which Wilde advocated a validation of individual pleasures; a teaching originating from the notable 'Conclusion' of Pater's work in which he urged his readers to "to burn always with this hard, gemlike flame".[291] However, Wilde's contemplation of beauty was not a mere sensual pleasure, but an "access to a higher level of experience" that "helps to explain the apparent paradox that the deeply moral Ruskin should have had such an influence on the […] deeply immoral Wilde".[292] In other words, "The Beautiful, which for both Wilde and Ruskin was also the Good, set the standards by which life could be criticised, and through which a better life could be aspired to".[293]

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[287] Ellman, R., *Oscar Wilde*, cit., p. 168.
[288] *Ivi*, p. 70.
[289] *Ivi*, p. 167.
[290] Hewison R., "'From you I learnt nothing but what was good': Ruskin and Oscar Wilde", *The Wildean,* vol. 1: 93-105, 2016, p. 99. "Wilde told the editor of the *Dublin University Magazine*: 'I always say clearly what I know to be true, such as that the revival of culture is due to Mr Ruskin'".
[291] Pater, W., *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* [1873] ed. Donald L. Hill, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1980, Conclusion, p. 189. As Hewison reports: "Wilde, who was said to know this passage off by heart, later told Yeats that he never travelled without the book, and that it was 'the very flower of decadence'" (Hewison R., "'From you I learnt nothing but what was good': Ruskin and Oscar Wilde", cit., p. 99).
[292] Hewison R., "'From you I learnt nothing but what was good': Ruskin and Oscar Wilde", cit., p. 103.
[293] *Ibidem*.

In the next paragraph I will argue how Wilde willingly exploited a degenerated re-elaboration of Pater's concept of Beauty in the character of Lord Henry to warn the reader about the consequences of an excessive idea of aestheticism by exploiting the last feature of the 'negative *Bildungsroman*', namely the negative empathy. This empathic mechanism is exploited to make readers vicariously experience Dorian's tragic outcome by empathizing with his suffering. A negative didactic function typical of what we have seen belonging to the 'negative *Bildungsroman*' and anticipated in "A Preface to 'Dorian Gray'".

IV. 5 The Warning of a Tragic Aestheticism and the Negative Empathy

> The artist is the creator of beautiful things.
>
> To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.
>
> The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things.
>
> The highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography.
>
> Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault.
>
> Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope.
>
> They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only *Beauty*.
>
> There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.
>
> […]
>
> The moral life of man forms part of the subject-matter of the artist, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium.
>
> No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style.
>
> No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything.
>
> Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art.
>
> […]
>
> All art is at once surface and symbol.

> Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.
>
> Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.
>
> It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.
>
> Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital […].[294]

This is Wilde's "A Preface to 'Dorian Gray'", published in March 1891 in *The Fortnightly Review;* the same preface which would be added a month later to the second edition of the novel.[295] The necessity of writing this preface was due to accusations of critics who defined the novel immoral, and especially to advocate the freedom of the artist as "the creator of beautiful things".[296] By suggesting his creation as a 'beautiful thing', Wilde ironizes directly towards those who labelled his work as 'immoral', since the "lowest form of criticism" of these critics ("Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things") reveals that they "are corrupt without being charming". Indeed, according to Wilde they did not understand that "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all." In fact, Wilde by stating that the real "morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium" suggests the presence of a moral dimension in his novel. And as a modern attack against the 'politically correct', Wilde asserts how an "unpardonable mannerism" would be to oblige an artist to have an "ethical sympathy". He thinks "no artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything" also controversial aspects.

However, some critics stressed the paradox of the preface as both a defensive strategy to prevent further immoral attacks to his novel, and a paradox Wilde

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[294] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., The Preface, pp. 3-4. Italics mine.

[295] Cf. Ellman, R., *Oscar Wilde*, cit., pp. 930-1. In the second and extended version of 1891 Wilde also added some other important scenes and characters, such as the opium den and Sibyl's brother, James Vane (Cf. Adut, A., "A Theory of Scandal: Victorians, Homosexuality, and the Fall of Oscar Wilde", *American Journey of Sociology*, vol. 111: 213-48, 2005, p. 218).

[296] Already before the first publication, Wilde felt that he should have toned down some daring scenes. Indeed, before the publication of the first version, he had already started working at a revision by toning down some explicit homosexual scenes. This decision was taken because, as Adut highlights, the Victorian society was horrified by the idea of homosexuality and Britain was the only country in Europe at the turn of the century to consider homosexuality a crime. Nonetheless, Wilde's effort had been frustrated by other accuses of immorality. Cf. Adut, A., "A Theory of Scandal: Victorians, Homosexuality, and the Fall of Oscar Wilde", cit., p. 214.

shared with himself,[297] since whilst he states "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all", he then deals with immoral aspects in the novel only to be paradoxical.[298] As Pudney suggests: the complex and contradictory relationship of what he states in the preface with the rest of the novel represents his intellectual commitment that goes beyond his attachment to Aestheticism, since "the Preface underlines Wilde's profound love of paradox, one that always tempered his apparent embrace of Aestheticism".[299] As Wilde also wrote in "The Truth of Masks" (1891):

> Not that I agree with everything I have said in this essay. There is much with which I entirely disagree […] For in art there is no such thing as a universal truth. A truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true.[300]

On the contrary, as Ellman highlights, all these 'immoral' aspects of the novel were part of Wilde's intention to warn about a possible "tragedy of Aestheticism";[301] since "*Dorian Gray* is the aesthetic novel *par excellance*, not in espousing the doctrine, but in exhibiting its dangers".[302] It is exactly the negative didactic aim of the 'negative *Bildungsroman*', as we have seen in the previous chapters. As also Quintus points out: "despite the intentional lack of rigour in defending his own aesthetic, Wilde's critical anima nevertheless embraces causes which have educational and moral dimensions".[303] For Wilde, indeed, aestheticism was a problem rather than a creed,[304] and this problematic aspect dwells in his meaning of "Beauty". Indeed, the years of the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were also a watershed for the aestheticism in Britain,

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[297] Cf. Pudney, E., "Paradox and the Preface to 'Dorian Gray'", *The Wildean,* vol. 1: pp. 118-123, 2012, p. 122.
[298] *Ivi*, p. 121.
[299] *Ivi*, p. 122.
[300] Wilde, O., "The Truth of Masks" [1891], in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, cit., pp. 3384–3437, pp. 3436-7.
[301] Ellman, R., *Oscar Wilde*, cit., p. 910.
[302] *Ivi*, pp. 908-9.
[303] Quintus J., "The Moral Implications of Oscar Wilde's Aestheticism", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 22: 559-574, 1980, p. 573.
[304] Cf. Ellman, R., *Oscar Wilde*, cit., p. 896.

since Wilde gave to the movement a new complexity allowing "'a higher ethics' in which artistic freedom and full expression of personality were possible […]", by adding also "another feature of aestheticism, the invasion of forbidden areas of thoughts and behaviours".[305]

Yet, how does the reader perceive this warning? As in the previous chapter, it is conveyed through the mechanism of negative empathy: "Even in the depiction of what is miserable and disturbing, works of art allow us to feel the human", as art is only a medium through which "it can allow us to perceive negativity as beautiful by bringing its human dimension to the *fore*".[306] As we have seen in *The Lifted Veil*, the warning message is clarified only by making the reader vicariously experience the negative outcomes of the protagonist's wrongdoings. This 'empathic distress' in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is supported by the omniscient narrator, as the factor of the "situation", who displays Dorian's entire tormented consciousness. And this time, the narrator's comments on Dorian's condition are aimed to highlight his miserable perspective of living such a tormented life deriving from the homicide of Basil and the other consequences of his past actions:

> The consciousness of being hunted, snarled, tracked down, had begun to dominate him […] And yet if it had been merely an illusion, how terrible it was to think that conscience could raise such fearful phantoms, and give them visible form, and make them before one! What sort of life would his be if, day and night, shadows of his crime were to peer at him from silent corners, to mock him from secret places, to whisper in his ears as he sat at the feast, to wake him with icy fingers as he lay asleep! As the thought crept through his brain, he grew pale with terror, and the air seemed to him to have become suddenly colder. Oh! in what a wild hour of madness he had killed his friend! How ghastly the mere

[305] Ellman, R., *Oscar Wilde*, cit., pp. 883-4.
[306] Ercolino, S., "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism", cit., p. 246.

> memory of the scene! He saw it all again. Each hideous detail came back to him with added horror.[307]

This passage perfectly describes how the omniscient narrator vividly displays Dorian's tormented consciousness by making the reader experience his same condition and triggering the factor of "character identification". Yet, as we have argued, this identification has a disturbing and negative quality, because if we sympathize with his suffering, at the same time the reader is also repulsed by his past crimes. Therefore, by having this uncomfortable identification with Dorian the reader can feel the warning about an emulation of his actions, since he or she can vicariously experience the tragic outcomes of such actions. And thus, also in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the negative didactic function is explicit making it one of the last 'negative *Bildungsroman*'.

[307] Wilde, O., *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, cit., Chapter XVIII, p. 192.

Conclusions

> And when the new psychology started to dismantle the unified image of the individual; when the social sciences turned to 'synchrony' and 'classification', thereby shattering the synthetic perception of history; when youth betrayed itself in its narcissistic desire to last forever; when in ideology after ideology the individual figured simply as a part of the whole – then the century of the *Bildungsroman* was truly at an end.[308]

Thus, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* represents one of the last 'negative *Bildungsroman*', that, as we have argued, employ negative aspects in order to warn the readers against an emulation of the protagonist's wrongdoings. By analyzing this feature alongside the intrusion of Gothic, the circular development of the protagonist and the predominance of the negative alterity/double in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *The Lifted Veil* (1859) and in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890-1), we have described the gradual degeneration of this genre during the second half of the century and its crisis at the turn of the century. Indeed, "the protomodernist Wilde" and "the semimodernist Wells" are the two main British authors that "self-consciously take apart the narrative pieces of the *bildungsroman*" by describing "crippled egos who are disintegrated into mere functions rather than integrated into a harmonious personality".[309] And their works put the basis for the rise of twentieth-century modernism where the definitive disintegration of this genre took place.

As a matter of fact, after *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, besides the exhaustion of the symbolic function of youth, the 'negative *Bildungsroman*' soon loses also its negative didactic function and the journey of formation becomes a useless and empty shell. For instance, in Britain, Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure* (1895) highlights the 'obscurity' of formation, since the good-hearted protagonist

[308] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* cit., p. 228.
[309] Esty, J., *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development*, cit., p. 30.

has no responsibility for his failed formation. In fact, his failure is undeserved: his tragic end occurs because of a corrupted and predatory world in which there is no gleam of hope in the future; an ominous future that, indeed, soon experiences two disastrous World Wars. As Ercolino points out, although the *Bildungsroman* entered in an irreparable crisis, it still marked the last masterpieces, since the inertia of literary forms consists in the fact that:

> once they have exhausted their symbolic function, before disappearing or turning into something else, they remain within the literary system for a while, and in some cases are still able to preserve a considerable, regressive, fascination.[310]

The same uselessness of the *Bildung* in Hardy's novel was witnessed also in Germany, where this genre was born, with Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain* (1924), in which "never a *Bildung* had been so rich and complete; never a *Bildung* had been so *useless*".[311] With this novel Mann demonstrated that the "*Bildungsroman* was forever exhausted, and *The Magic Mountain* was its swansong".[312] And approximately twenty years after, Mann again highlighted also the crisis of the very historicism that had been strictly connected with the birth of this genre: "exactly 150 years after the publication of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*" his pastiche novel *Doctor Faustus* (1947) revealed that "the Germany that Goethe helped build was lying in ruins".[313] Therefore, "in the end, nothing was left of the form of the *Bildungsroman*: a phase of Western socialization had come to an end, a phase the *Bildungsroman* had both represented and contributed to".[314]

[310] Ercolino, S., *The Novel-Essay, 1884-1947*, cit., p. 42.
[311] *Ivi*, p. 44.
[312] *Ivi*, p. 45.
[313] Boes, T., *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the "Bildungsroman"*, cit., pp. 157-8
[314] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, cit., p. 244.

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