

Helmut Werner Klug
(9212780)

The French Lieutenant's Woman:
A Bildungsroman?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
1. THE BILDUNGSROMAN: THEORY	3
1.1. THE GERMAN BILDUNGSROMAN	3
1.2. THE ENGLISH BILDUNGSROMAN	5
2. <i>THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN</i>: AN ANALYSIS	6
2.1. ASPECTS OF NARRATOR AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE	6
2.2. CHARACTER ANALYSIS	9
2.2.1. <i>Charles: The Protagonist</i>	9
2.2.2. <i>The Role of the Minor Characters</i>	11
3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	13
WORKS OF REFERENCE	14

INTRODUCTION

The reception of the novel by literary criticism has resulted in various different and sometimes almost contrary theories. Some of them claim *The French Lieutenant's Woman* to be a Bildungsroman. The aim of this paper is now to analyse in how far this theory can be verified. As an introduction to the topic I will provide a general definition of the term "Bildungsroman" and along to that list the main characteristics of this genre. The theoretical facts given in the first chapter will function as a basis for analysis of the novel itself. Here I will mainly concentrate on the role of the narrator and the presentation of the different characters. Another focus will be on the general idea of "Bildung" a Bildungsroman has to convey. I will firstly present the facts indicating that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a Bildungsroman and secondly I am going to show in which aspects the novel does not represent the typical structure of this genre. Finally I will try to formulate an answer to the question if the *French Lieutenant's Woman* can be referred to as a Bildungsroman or not.

1. THE BILDUNGSROMAN: THEORY

First of all I want to summarise the main characteristics of this type of novel and I will try to set up a kind of underlying structure which novels labelled "Bildungsroman" have in common. Furthermore I want to outline the main features of the English Bildungsroman, which in contrast to its German model has never played that important a role in literary history.

1.1. The German Bildungsroman

The term "Bildungsroman" was introduced by the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey when writing a biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1870. He defines this kind of novel as "the development of a human being in various stages, forms and periods of life" (Bildungsroman: Quotations) and formulates five main points that are characteristic. (cf. *ibid.*) Most important is the idea of "Bildung" which results in the shaping or even the formation of the main character, who, as a rule, is a young man. The novel should emphasise the uniqueness of the protagonist and reflect the figure's private life and thoughts; at the same time these also have to mirror the age and culture the novel is set in. A third point is the autobiographical reference to the author, which Dilthey calls the "conscious and artistic presentation of what is typically human through the depiction of a particular individual life". (*ibid.*) He also stresses the connection with psychology, referring to the then new idea of the psychology of development. Last but not least a Bildungsroman should represent the ideal of humanity, meaning that, as to fulfil his goal of life, the protagonist has to gain full realisation of his human potential. To sum up, Dilthey regards the Bildungsroman as "the cultivation and

harmonious development of the whole personality , the attaining of a goal that is happy blend of the material and spiritual". (ibid.)

In his book *Der deutsche Bildungsroman* Gerhard Mayer analytically approaches this topic by comparing the most important German novels of this genre; he summarises the main characteristics of the Bildungsroman and emphasises that these particular features have remained invariable from the introduction of this genre in the 18th century until today. (cf. 19 – 20)

Like Dilthey Mayer defines the Bildungsroman as a novel in which the protagonist, who normally is a boy or a young adult, struggles to find his own personal identity which finally has to reflect a certain consistency and continuity. In most cases this struggle is initiated by the social and cultural environment of the main character who is thus forced to work out and adopt the right, the respectable way of living in order to be able to fully blend with society. During the struggle with himself and the demands of society the character is remodelled due to social and moral values which as a final stage helps him to define his own abilities and limits. What is more, he gains the ability to see the differences between his behaviour and society's demands. Due to this change in character he is able to define his social status and also capable of living up to it. At the end of the novel the protagonist has generally reached a stage of development which allows him to be a genuine member of society and he is finally allowed to decide on an individual, adult way of life.

According to the plot of a Bildungsroman, the forming and shaping of an individual identity, the novel is centred on the protagonist. The minor characters have the function of supplying additional information on the protagonist. In some way they do not have a life of their own; they represent different parts of his physical and emotional life, which allows the author to give a more detailed picture of the main character's inner development. So generally speaking, the character of the protagonist is not portrayed by his actions but by the reactions of the other characters: "Der Romanheld ist daher, um mit Schiller zu sprechen, 'zwar die notwendigste, aber nicht die wichtigste Person. [...] An ihm und um ihn geschieht alles [...] eben weil die Dinge um ihn her die Energien, er aber die Bildsamkeit darstellt und ausdrückt [...].'" (ibid. 20) This is also the reason for the fact that in most Bildungsromanen the main character never carries out any form of exciting action; it is the secondary characters that do so.

The role of the narrator in the Bildungsroman is another important characteristic: his aim is to guide the reader through the novel and help him gain conclusions from the story which he should apply to his own life. The struggle of the main character and his successful integration into society is meant to encourage the reader to reflect his attitude towards his own environment and culture. In general, the plot is based upon the humane attitude of the narrator, who wants to provide the reader with an exemplary story of a misled character, who finally manages to integrate into society. So the narrator tries to set up a logical, linear, and in most cases chronological development of the plot. By giving additional information, chapter headings as well as judging, commenting or introductory speeches he again supports the reader in understanding the idea of "Bildung" conveyed in the novel.

According to Mayer all these facts presented above make up the invariable structure of the German Bildungsroman; they are meant to provide a basic approach onto the topic in order to establish a general characterisation of the genre.

1.2. The English Bildungsroman

The Bildungsroman was introduced into English literature by the translation of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. This translation by Thomas Carlyle in 1824 (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*) determined the reception of this genre. (cf. *ibid.* 391) Most important to note is that English literature did adopt most of the structural features of the German model but the educational ideals, mainly the aspect of "integral development" of an individual character, have not been generally accepted. Due to the English definition of education and development which works on a pragmatic level, this shaping of a character can be seen as a process of "self-formation". It mainly concentrates on specific, i.e. centred on the protagonist, forms of social and moral education; the idea of a self-reflexive inner formation of a character which also analyses the factors of general human development has not found its way into English literature.

The result of these differences can be seen in the various terms this kind of novel is addressed with: e.g. "apprentice novel", this refers to Carlyle's translation; or "novel of adolescence", which is commonly used for American post-war novels. Today the most frequently used term, especially in English literature, is the term "Bildungsroman". Nevertheless, the definition of this term is set too wide and the defining characteristics are kept too generally formulated. So in his book Mayer tries to establish characteristics for the English Bildungsroman which he derives from some major works of this genre (i.e. novels by Disraeli, Lytton, Buttler, Maugham, Joyce, ...). Again, his aim is to formulate invariable features that can function as a basis for a clear definition of the term "Bildungsroman". (cf. *ibid.* 391 – 406)

The plot is defined by the social struggle of a young, inexperienced protagonist who desperately wants to find his position in life. His way to manhood is determined by errors and failures which in the end help him to outgrow his illusions. At the threshold of manhood he is then able to accept his inner self and is now able to be a worthy member of society. This struggle for formation of the character is a process of self-development which is in most cases expressed in linear and chronological succession of the plot. Within this process the protagonist has to undergo different stages of development that are also often marked by a change in location.

Another similarity to the structure of the German Bildungsroman are the roles of the individual characters: the protagonist has to fulfil the role of a central character; the others are meant to be the functional supplement for the character portrait of the protagonist. Therefore they hardly ever have a "life" of their own, although they are the figures that carry out the major action of the plot: they are used to outline traits similar to those of the main character, or on the other hand, are meant to portray contrary characters. It is also possible that some can work as a kind of mentor figures, who help the protagonist to find the right way in life.

As mentioned above the central idea of an English Bildungsroman is the process of self-formation; in other words: the protagonist has to find out about his personal position in life. Besides the struggle for social acknowledgement this also includes the shaping of his moral and cognitive abilities. This is why the English Bildungsroman can be said to have a strongly developed cognitive angle, meaning that the process of formation and its documentation throughout the novel is based upon the reflection of the protagonist. Another factor supporting this thesis is that the main character generally has a receptive rather than an expressive attitude towards his surroundings, which again implies an inner reflection of the events happening around the protagonist.

The comparison of the main characteristics of both the German and English Bildungsroman clearly shows that the underlying structure is identical. This, however, is not surprising since the genre was “imported” into English literature. What is much more important is that the Bildungsroman soon developed a life of its own so that the genre was able to blend fully with the English literary tradition and culture. Another astonishing fact that may emphasise the importance of the genre is that the tradition of the Bildungsroman was continued in America after World War II (March, Bellow, Ellison, ...), whereas literary research in Western Europe proclaimed the death of this genre. Therefore I think that this is clear evidence for the fact that the Bildungsroman, a genre that was introduced into literature at the beginning of the 18th century, has managed to keep alive throughout the centuries and all the different literary periods up until post-modernism.

2. THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN: AN ANALYSIS

The aim of this chapter is to show whether the novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles can be referred to as a Bildungsroman or not. The analysis is based upon the theoretical aspects presented in the chapter above and I am going to structure the following pages according to the characteristic features presented there: narrative voice, main and secondary characters, the aspect of “Bildung”, ... The facts and observations that I am going to present are largely based upon an essay by Mahmoud Salami (cf. Mahmoud Salami: pp. 105 – 134.) which, in contrast to other contributions on this topic, covers most of the various literary aspects arising in John Fowles's novel.

2.1. Aspects of Narrator and Narrative Technique

The most striking fact about *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is the use of different narrative techniques and of different authorial voices. The novel starts off with an intrusive and omniscient, typically Victorian, narrator: “I exaggerate? Perhaps, but I can be put to the test, for the Cobb has changed very little since the year of which I write; [...]” (Fowles: *The French Lieutenant's Woman* [TFLW] p. 10) The narrator not only comments the whole narrative but he also intrudes in order to make comments on the characters. As well as the narrative voice the structure of the novel shows other, typically Victorian features: so for example the suspension of plot or the shift in situation which would support the form of serialisation. This can be clearly noticed when comparing the

ending of Chapter four and the beginning of the next chapter: the former ends with a focus on Sarah, while the latter starts with a detailed description of Ernestina.

Nevertheless, this illusion of a Victorian novel is soon broken by the narrator, who introduces his modern 20th century point of view. So in Chapter three he alludes to devices totally unknown to Victorian society and the illusion of the typically Victorian novel is broken. “[Charles] would probably not have been too surprised had news reached him out of the future of the air plane, the jet engine, television, radar: [...]” (TFLW p. 16) In Chapter 13 he finally reveals himself as a modern narrator when he admits to live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes (cf. TFLW p. 80). In the same sentence he questions the character of his narrative, which is quite interesting since both, Robbe-Grillet and Barthes, are regarded as leading theorists on modern fiction.

It is also in Chapter 13 that the first person narrator suggests to stand out against the third person narrator when he admits not to be able to control the thoughts and movements of his characters; he denies having all the god-like qualities associated with the classical role of a narrator. The first person narrator occurs in different roles, surveying the scene with a modern and ironic eye, constantly reminding the reader that this is not a typically Victorian novel: he is artist, novelist, teacher, historian and critic. The third person narrator, on the other hand, represents all features associated with an omniscient narrator: in addition to the aspects presented in the paragraph above he misleads the reader and sometimes even ridicules his characters.

“He would have made you smile, for he was carefully equipped for his role. He wore stout nailed boots and canvas gaiters that rose to the encase Norfolk breeches of heavy flannel. There was a tight and absurdly long coat to match; a canvas wideawake hat of an indeterminate beige; a massive ash-plant, which he had bought on his way to the Cobb; and a voluminous rucksack, from which you might have shaken out an already heavy array of hammers, wrappings, notebooks, pillboxes, adzes and heaven knows what else.” (TFLW p. 43)

The use of two different narrative voices creates a certain effect within the novel: the narrator seems to become just another character of the story, and first and third person narration overlaps. This illusion of the narrator being a fictional character finally dissolves when he appears in person: first as a fellow passenger in the train in Chapter 55 and a second time in the last chapter.

This overlapping of narrative voices also creates a narrator who I could imagine in a Bildungsroman. According to Gerhard Mayer the narrator guides the reader through the novel and this Fowles's narrator clearly does. The main argument for this assumption is the blend of historical fiction and fictional history which demands this splitting of the narrative voice. I think that I have to explain this chiasm by giving the following citation: “[...] perhaps the most convincing view of the novel's narrative technique belongs to Dwight Eddins who describes it as ‘a *Victorian* novel that is a contemporary novel *about* the Victorian novel’” (*italics mine*) Salami p. 106) The novel is set in the Victorian era, which demands a certain kind of narrative that is provided by the third person narrator, but on the other hand Fowles does not want his novel to be seen as “only” a historical or a Victorian novel. “I don't think of it as a historical novel, a genre in which I have very little interest.” (Fowles: *Notes on an unfinished novel*, [Notes] p. 161) Therefore he has to give some reference to

his modern point of perspective; and this is done through the voice of the first person narrator. To formulate it according to Mayer's definition the narrator has to guide the reader through this constant switch of perspective and ideology: it is the narrator's duty to let the reader be aware of the fact that the narrative is a modernist novel set in the Victorian era. This difficult task can only be solved by the narrator giving additional information and explanation to the reader, which is another characteristic the typical narrator of a Bildungsroman has to fulfil. Considering the epigraphs that function as chapter headings, the numerous footnotes and all the excursions into Victorian history I claim that this demand is again met by Fowles's narrator.

At this point it is also important to focus on how the narrator helps the reader to understand the process of "Bildung" Charles has to go through. What is even more important at this point is to reveal the underlying basis, the main topic of the novel, which is probably done best by giving John Fowles own intention towards the novel: "My previous novels were both based on more or less disguised existentialist premises. I want this one to be no exception [...] an existentialist before his time, walks down the quay and sees that mysterious back, feminine, silent, also existentialist, turned to the horizon." (Notes pp. 165 – 166) So the development Charles has to undergo is a change from a typically, though modern, open-minded Victorian pattern of thought to an existentialist one. The overall topic is freedom: Charles's, Sarah's, the other characters' and even the reader's freedom. I think that this fact is expressed appropriately by Salami in his concluding paragraph: "[...] I must emphasise that the entire narrative structure of the novel is itself an act of 'freedom' from illusion to all participants in fiction." (p. 133) The topic of freedom is also the topic the narrator wants the reader to identify with, and this again, providing aspects to identify with, matches with the typical picture of the narrator of the Bildungsroman.

Here the narrator works again on different levels: firstly there is Charles and his struggle to overcome his Victorian mind, secondly the narrator claims his characters to be free of authorial supervision and at last there is the reader whom the narrator allows to break free from the narrative illusion. Salami puts this last claim as follows:

"[...] the narrator frees the reader from the restrictions of the omniscient, godlike narrator and provides him / her with the possibility of being a character in this fiction. Like Charles, the reader must face the anxiety of freedom by himself / herself without the help of the narrator and without his authorial domination. The reader must undertake the task of linking the various layers of texts, epigraphs, fiction with history and most importantly the two epochs within which the novel is submerged." (pp. 133 – 134)

The second claim that "characters are allowed total freedom" is more difficult to verify. The main question, however, is if it can be verified at all, since it is the narrator who arranges the texts in the novel. According to Salami (cf. p. 118) the narrator is only concealing his real authority so for example in Chapter 55 when he flips a coin in order to decide how to end his narrative. Nevertheless, the narrator insists on not being the omnipotent Victorian god who knows all the moves of his characters beforehand and in Chapter 13 he gives a definition of his status: "The novelist is still a god, since he creates [...] what has changed is that we are no longer the gods of the Victorian image, om-

niscient and decreeing; but in the new theological image, with freedom our first principle not authority.” (TFLW p. 82) What the narrator does is to break the illusion of being the authoritative voice by providing the further illusion of not being it, insisting on the fact that the characters are allowed their freedom. Since this is done constantly throughout the narrative I think that the narrator even succeeds in this aspect.

This chapter was meant to analyse the role of the narrator in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* according to the invariant characteristics provided by Gerhard Mayer and in the paragraphs above it has clearly been shown that this narrator matches the typical narrator of the Bildungsroman. The next step is to focus the analysis onto the different characters of the narrative to examine their different functions and their relationship to each other within the text. Here again I want to start off with the assumption that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a Bildungsroman and the following analysis is meant to prove this right in respect to the theoretical facts presented in Chapter 1. Any factors indicating that the novel is not a Bildungsroman will be summarised later on in a separate chapter.

2.2. Character Analysis

2.2.1. Charles: The Protagonist

The first picture we get of Charles is that he is a Victorian gentleman who is in all respects at the height of his time: he belongs to the upper class, has a set position in life and a promising future in marrying Ernestina Freeman. He is dominated by the social conventions of his time, particularly in his attitude towards women, and the only thing he lacks is mystery and romance. Nevertheless, his first meeting with Sarah is the initiating point for his process of “Bildung” and although he teases Ernestina for revealing all the “sordid facts” about Sarah he is deeply impressed by that strange woman who seems not to belong to the same age which he lives in. (cf. TFLW pp. 14 – 15) Actually this meeting starts a sequence of mystery and romance in the course of which Charles realises that there is an alternative to the puritan world of Ernestina: the free and spontaneous world of Sarah. In short, his first meetings with Sarah sharpen his awareness of that existentialist freedom she embodies and throughout the novel he is torn between the conventional Victorian ideas and this proposal of personal freedom.

According to Mayer the protagonist has to go through different stages of awareness which show the progress in his development; this can also be seen in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The first stage is when Charles the Victorian comes in touch with the ideas of existentialist philosophy, provided by Sarah. It stretches as far as Chapter 44 where the novel is brought to a sudden, traditional ending. Throughout all these chapters Charles is torn in between behaving the normal, Victorian way, rating his short relationship with Sarah as a minor, unimportant incident or accepting the full consequences of not behaving in an appropriate Victorian manner. He is fascinated by the enigma Sarah represents and wants to solve it but on the other hand he is caught in his Victorian pattern of thought. This can for example be observed when he and Sarah are discovered at the Barn

by Sam and Mary: “You have been playing with fire, my boy.” (TFLW p. 152) Nevertheless, he decides to visit Sarah in Exeter and this decision marks the beginning of his second stage of development: He is prepared to accept the consequences of not behaving like a Victorian in order to fulfil his personal ideas. But he is still caught in this particular pattern of thought; maybe this is best expressed by his intention to marry Sarah: he has yet not fully understood the ideas of existential freedom. Charles enters the third stage of development when he realises that Sarah has left without leaving any trace for him to follow. It is then when he settles to follow the path he had decided to take, whether he will be able to find her or not. The months he searches for Sarah are the final stage of his development in which he is able to get the taste of freedom he once tried to gain. His meeting with Sarah at the end of the novel is the final test he has to go through: here again the reader is presented with two different endings. In the first, Chapter 60, he is happily united with Sarah and therefore fails to reach his goal. But in the second, Chapter 61, he successfully brings his process of “Bildung” to an end:

“The river of life, of mysterious laws and mysterious choice, flows past a deserted embankment; and along that other deserted embankment Charles now begins to pace, a man behind the invisible gun carriage on which rests his own corpse. He walks towards an imminent, self-given death? I think not; *for he has found an atom of faith in himself, a true uniqueness, on which to build [...]*” ([*italics mine*]TFLW p. 366)

The ending of this novel bears at the same time another typical trait of a Bildungsroman: although the final stage of development is successfully reached and the novel has ended properly it is in some respect an open end which shows the protagonist at the threshold of a new life. In other words, the character is left on his own at a stage which for him marks a totally new beginning.

A further characteristic, especially for the English Bildungsroman, is the cognitive angle, as I have explained before. This is another feature that can be found in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*: throughout the novel Charles's struggle is constantly reflected in his thoughts. The best example to prove this is the scene laid in the church in Exeter after Charles had had sexual intercourse with Sarah. The dialogue (TFLW pp. 283 – 284) between his two inner-selves, the new existentialist and his old Victorian one, portrays his inner struggle. This dialogue is also a crucial point in his development and just a few paragraphs later he realises the goal Sarah and he himself want him to reach: “For a moment he could not seize it – and then it came. To uncrucify!” (TFLW p. 285) Here Charles finally realises what the whole thing was about: it was not meant to bind him but the reverse: to free him. I think that this aspect, the emphasis on an inner self-formation, gives *The French Lieutenant's Woman* the typical character of an English Bildungsroman. The whole process of “Bildung” is centred on the protagonist and the German idea of integral development of the character is left aside.

2.2.2. The Role of the Minor Characters

In a Bildungsroman minor characters are meant to give additional information on the protagonist or they provide a basis for comparison; they are functionally related to the main character. This chapter is intended to show how this works in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The characters I am going to analyse fulfil a different function each, i.e. their relationship to Charles and the thereof resulting differences or similarities are meant to describe Charles's process of development.

Ernestina, the typical Victorian girl is introduced to help the reader understand Victorian attitude, especially Charles's typically Victorian attitude towards women, an attitude he has to reject in the end. She is portrayed as a perfect member of Victorian society and a perfect member of the nouveau riche. Throughout the novel the author creates a character in Ernestina which exemplifies the "perfect lady". From anything she does it becomes clear that she has been raised to be a full segment of society. Her main concerns in the novel are filling her days with proper activities, such as reading or embroidery; shopping and preparing for her role as a wife, and looking pretty. What she does is behaving in an acceptable manner for her position. If she had acted in a different way she would have been outlawed from contemporary society. The point of comparison to Charles is this way of proper behaviour he fails to follow when he rejects her in order to obey his personal urge to free himself of all conventions. The novel also reveals what he would have gained if he had acted differently: "Charles and Ernestina did not live happily ever after; but they lived together, though Charles finally survived her by a decade (and he earnestly mourned her throughout it)." (TFLW p. 264)

Darwinist theory plays an important role throughout the whole novel and although Charles manages to change in respect of existentialism he fails to develop in the sense of the theory of evolution. Nevertheless, in the novel there is one character who obeys the laws of evolution – the survival of the fittest: Sam, the man-servant. It is he who manages to climb the social ladder from the status of a servant to that of a businessman. At the beginning of the novel the narrator remarks upon Sam's class-consciousness: "And he showed another mark of this new class in his struggle to command the language." (TFLW p. 39) So in the novel Sam is a counterpart to Charles, who insists on living according to the new found theory of evolution, who sees himself as a Darwinian but fails to live up to it. He realises his failure at the point when Mr. Freeman, a man who severely rejects this revolutionary theory, tries to apply Darwinism on him: "But he was unhappy; alien and unhappy; he felt the enormous apparatus rank required a gentleman to erect around himself was like the massive armor that had been the death warrant of so many ancient saurian species." (TFLW p. 230)

A typical feature of the English Bildungsroman is the use of a mentor figure, a character who is an experienced person and who can be asked for advice. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* this role is taken by Dr. Grogan, whom Charles visits in order to get advice on how to deal with Sarah. Charles gladly accepts Dr. Grogan as a mentor figure since he regards him as an experienced man and scientist, and what is more, both share the same interest: Darwinism. The problem, however, is that Dr. Grogan, although he sees himself committed to Darwinism, is in all respects a Vic-

torian gentleman and in giving Charles advice he acts according to this: he portrays Sarah as mentally ill, a Sphinx, a destroyer of men who are inexperienced enough to be allayed by her. He is even able to produce a matching study of a similar case that happened in France. (cf. TFLW Chapter 28) Firstly Charles is eager to accept Dr. Grogan's help but soon he realises how wrong Dr. Grogan's advice is: "Why had he allowed Grogan to judge her for him? Because he was more concerned to save appearance than his own soul." (TFLW p. 189) These lines also clearly depict Charles's inner development.

Last but not least I have to discuss the role Sarah plays in this novel. Since its publication literary science has seen many different interpretations of Sarah's character, which I do not want to deal with in this paper. What I will do is outline her role in this narrative: as I have already mentioned it is her, who initiates the process of change in Charles, i.e. Charles absorbs the theory of freedom through her. Or as Salami puts it: "[...] she embodies the theme of freedom in every respect." (p. 128) Her uniqueness results from the complete mystery she poses to all participants: the characters, the readers and even the narrator cannot see the inner side of her character. "Who is Sarah? Out of what shadows does she come? I do not know." (TFLW p. 80) Throughout the novel her character is constructed through the eyes of Charles and out of the interpretations of other characters. Nevertheless hers is the most important role of the novel, since she has to guide Charles on his way to freedom; she provides Charles with a constant existential impetus. This can for example be seen when she seduces Charles to visit her in Exeter by sending a letter only containing the name of the hotel in which she resides. "Through this act of seduction, Sarah brings Charles to the ultimate decision: either to choose freedom and sleep with her or to remain forever confined within the boundaries of convention and duty." (Salami pp. 128 – 129) The character of Sarah best matches the citation by Schiller given in the first chapter of this paper: The protagonist is the most necessary character of the narrative but he is not the most important. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman* the most important character is Sarah, who not only guides Charles through his different stages of development but who also directs the course of the whole narration.

The results of the analysis of the minor characters presented in this chapter has again proved that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* can be regarded as a Bildungsroman. The role of the narrator, the development of Charles's character and finally the minor characters resemble most of the theoretical facts presented in the first chapter. Nevertheless there are some theoretical aspects which do not go along with what can be found in this novel. These and the answer to the question if *The French Lieutenant's Woman* can finally be regarded as a Bildungsroman will be presented in the following chapter.

3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters I have tried to prove that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* can be categorised as a Bildungsroman. The narrative voice, the role of the protagonist who outgrows his illusions through errors and failures that shape his mind and character, the strong focus on the cognitive aspect of the protagonist's inner formation, and finally the roles of the minor characters all indicate that this novel is indeed a Bildungsroman. In addition to this, I have found several factors on the structural level implying the opposite.

The major argument is that Charles does not fit the role of a protagonist of a Bildungsroman since he is not the right age: at the beginning of the novel he is thirty-two years old. (cf. TFLW p. 16) In a typical Bildungsroman, however, the development of the protagonist starts when he is a boy or a youth and ends when he enters the age of manhood, i.e. the plot stretches over several years. This description of the time span of a Bildungsroman is another criterion *The French Lieutenant's Woman* does not meet: the narrative starts in March 1867 and ends in December 1868 which makes the time span just slightly more than one and a half years. Besides, the structure of the plot is not linear since the description of almost every character features flashbacks on their personal history; and what is more, the chronological order of the events is very often violated. This can be exemplified by the interview Charles has with his uncle (Chapter 26), which is presented to the reader after his return to Lyme. (Chapter 24). Considering the violation of these few but still very important, if not vital aspects of the Bildungsroman one is forced to say that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* cannot be regarded as a typical example for this genre.

With its main focus on existentialism the novel still most strongly emphasises the idea of "Bildung", the development of the protagonist's mental approach towards his environment. This is why I claim that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* can be referred to as a Bildungsroman. My main argument for this assumption is the approach of literary criticism towards the novel:

"John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is both an experimental novel and a historical novel, focusing on England in the 1860's. Its double role has allowed its reviewers to praise it on one level while criticizing it on the other, though there are things to praise and to blame about both its shapes" (Brantlinger p.339)

The main discussion which followed the publication of this novel was how it could be characterised according to given genres of fictional prose, but as the citation above shows, it is not possible to place in one single category since it embodies certain characteristic features of different genres and equally disregards others. This is also what Fowles does to the genre Bildungsroman: he processes some very important aspects of this category while neglecting others at the same time. So I see *The French Lieutenant's Woman* as a Bildungsroman to the same degree as it is a historical novel or an experimental novel.

WORKS OF REFERENCE

- *Bildungsroman: Quotations*. (<http://webdesk.com/quotations/bildungsroman.html>)
- Brantlinger, Patric; Adam, Ian and Sheldon Rothblatt. "The French Lieutenant's Woman: A Discussion." *Victorian Studies* 15.1 (1971): 339 – 356.
- Fowles, John. "Notes on an Unfinished Novel." MacCormack, Thomas, ed. *Afterwords: Novelists on their Novels*. New York: Harper, 1969. 160 - 175.
- Fowles, John. *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. New York: Signet, 1970.
- Mayer, Gerhard. *Der deutsche Bildungsroman: Von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1992.
- Salami, Mahmoud. *John Fowles's Fiction and the Poetics of Postmodernism*. Cranbury: Associated UP, 1992.