

Mothers and Daughters: The Female English Bildungsroman, 1811-1915

This dissertation analyses the mother-daughter-relationship of five female apprenticeship novels. In the course of the study of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* (1865), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915) modern feminist, psychological, and psychoanalytical theories concerning the mother-daughter-conflict and female development are considered as well as autobiographic material and the authoresses' oeuvres. The historical context, the social and psychohistoric conditions, and changes in England during the 19th and beginning 20th century (especially concerning family, female socialisation and role training, motherhood, children's education) are studied and the features and achievements of the female Bildungsroman, that experiences an upswing during this time, emphasized. The dissertation shows the development of the female apprenticeship novel concerning its presentation of mother, daughter, and mother-daughter-relationship and also the enormous progressiveness of this genre concerning the description of details of this relationship.

The analysis demonstrates that all novels show complex and problematic mother-daughter-relationships, that for the daughters are on the one hand traumatic, but on the other hand lead to self-discovery and autonomy. The texts present the mother-daughter-relationship as highly ambivalent, oscillating between love, identification, aggression, rejection, rivalry, and rebellion. In this way they serve to correct the female doctrine and the ideological mother image of the Victorian period as much as the cliché of childhood as an idyllic condition without conflicts, and thus anticipate psychological discoveries and efforts of later periods.

Furthermore, it becomes obvious that the authoresses put their own problematic mother-daughter-relationship into literary form and thus try to overcome it; that the fictitious mother-daughter-relationships often have a compensatory function.

The fact that the analysed novels admit to the mother-daughter-relationship so early such an importance, constitutes their rank and justifies their place in the English literature and culture.