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■ TELLES QU'ON LES REPRÉSENTE

EMOTION AND MOTION IN CATHERINE CARSWELL'S
OPEN THE DOOR!
TOWARDS A FEMALE *BILDUNGSROMAN*

Philippe Laplace

Let no one think scorn of the feminine ideal. It is the ideal of a life and character; strong in its weakness, exalted in its lowliness; powerful over others by its abnegation of self; quick, and bright, and penetrating, not by means of acquired learning, but through intuitive perceptions sharpened by the exigencies of life and made watchful by affection; full of grace, and graciousness, and sympathy, and good counsel, it is the mainstay of families, and commands the worship of the world. The feminine ideal has ever inspired the greatest works of art. You find it in the pages of Homer, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Walter Scott, Miss Austen, Thackeray; in the marble of Praxiteles, and on the canvas of Raphael and Titian. It has been produced in all conditions of civilised life, and under all the imperfections of educational systems it has not ceased to bloom. It has been manifested as something whole and perfect in itself, and the progress of time, with all the improved processes which may be adopted, will hardly develop anything intrinsically greater. Just as no improvements in schools and colleges can be expected to produce greater individual minds, in their different spheres, than the great men of history, so no improved educational systems will give us in the female sex anything more admirable than the noble women who, in all ages, have adorned society, and whose names, in the great majority of cases, have never been known to history or to fame at all¹.

1. "Happiness and Utility as Promoted by the Higher Education of Women", [an address Delivered by Sir Alexander Grant – Principal of the University of Edinburgh from 1868 to 1884 – in opening the sixth session of the Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association on 5 Nov. 1872, Edinburgh, Edmonston and Douglas, 1872, p. 9-10.

*Open the Door!*² is, as the title indicates, a tale of motion, of movement, and of emotion. Motion and movement belong to the novel as the symbolic imagery woven by Carswell is highly imbued with a whole repertoire of journeys and transitions: from the mere action of the opening of a door to images of flying such an imagery abounds, almost *ad nauseam*, throughout the text, and, more prosaically, is reflected through restful jaunts in the countryside and train journeys undertaken by the protagonist, Joanna Bannerman. The novel actually starts with the Bannerman family embarking on a train journey from Glasgow to Edinburgh in 1896, when Joanna is twelve years old, and ends in 1914 with the thirty-year-old Joanna strolling in the Perthshire countryside of her youth with the man with whom she has fallen in love. Movement thus reflects both the personal and spiritual development of Joanna, whose education and early life we follow, from childhood to adulthood, in the late Victorian and then in Edwardian society. Joanna has, from her very early years, embarked on a quest for the illusive sentiments of love and self-knowledge. The novel narrates her sentimental peregrination.

Open the Door! has often been described as belonging to the *Bildungsroman* tradition. But Carswell's narrative choice and treatment of the genre have never been studied in detail. If for instance Margery McCulloch hinted at the specificity of Carswell's novel, she unfortunately did not pursue that line very far:

Open the Door! is in fact a twentieth-century adaptation of the *Bildungsroman* genre and as such takes its place with autobiographical novels (...). Carswell's novel is additionally interesting in that it is a female transformation of the *Bildungsroman*³.

As in every *Bildungsroman*, education is a spiritual journey towards self-discovery and to the apprehension of a feeling of personal identity; however, because of the gender of its protagonist, "emotions" play a more portentous role in *Open the Door!* than in a traditional *Bildungsroman*. We follow the love life, the disappointments and the radical positions Joanna Bannerman adopts against the conventions of her Scottish Presbyterian family and the Edwardian society in which she is brought up.

2. Catherine Carswell, *Open the Door!* with a new introduction by John Carswell, London, Virago Press, 1986, 1920.

3. Margery McCulloch, "Opening the Door: Women, Carswell and the Scottish Renaissance", *Études écossaises*, hors série, Actes de l'atelier écossais de la conférence de l'ESSE, Presses universitaires de Grenoble, Grenoble, 1994, p. 99. See also: *ibid.*, p. 100.

If various definitions have been repeatedly offered in order to characterize the *Bildungsroman* and distinguish the ideology of the genre, none of them is as accurate, and indeed as popular, as the one enunciated in 1906 by the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey:

[The *Bildungsroman*] examines a regular course of development in the life of the individual; each of its stages has its own value and each is at the same time the basis of a higher stage. The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary transit points of the individual on his way to maturity and harmony⁴.

Dilthey took Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, translated by Carlyle as *The Apprenticeship of Wilhelm Meister* (and the translation of *Lehrjahre* by "apprenticeship" significantly reflects the traditional pattern pinpointed since by critics⁵) and *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* as the paradigm of the genre, and this has endured as Goethe is still widely acknowledged as being its foremost proponent. *Bildungsromane* rest upon certain thematic features which, since Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, have hardly changed. Containing autobiographical elements they describe, with more or less uniformity, the process of development and education of a single protagonist from childhood through adolescence, leaving him at the threshold of maturity and having come to terms with his feelings of identity⁶. The links between *Bildungsromane* and autobiographies are inherent to the

4. "Eine gesetzmässige Entwicklung wird im Leben des Individuums angeschaut, jede ihrer Stufen hat einen Eigenwert und ist zugleich Grundlage einer höheren Stufe. Die Dissonanzen und Konflikte des Lebens erscheinen als die notwendigen Durchgangspunkte des Individuums auf seiner Bahn zur Reife und zur Harmonie". Wilhelm Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung: Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950), 1906, p. 250. Translated by: G. B. Tennyson, "The *Bildungsroman* in Nineteenth-Century English Literature", in Rosario p. Armato & John M. Spalek (eds.), *Medieval Epic to the "Epic Theater" of Brecht*, Los Angeles, University of Southern California Press, 1968, p. 136.

5. *Bildungsroman* (literally "formation/education novel") is sometimes translated as "apprenticeship novel": Susanne Howe, *Wilhelm Meister and His English Kinsmen: Apprentices to Life*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1930, p. 4, 6-7. Bakhtin instead uses "novel of education" and "novel of emergence" in his article: "The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism (Towards a Historical Typology of the Novel)", in M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, Translated by Vern W. McGee, edited by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 10-59 (see p. 19, 21). J. A. Cuddon prefers "upbringing or education novel". J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, third edition, London, Penguin Books, 1992, p. 88.

6. For more precise distinctions between *Bildungsroman*, *Entwicklungsroman*, *Erziehungsroman* and *Künstlerroman*, see: G. B. Tennyson, "The *Bildungsroman* in the Nineteenth-Century English Literature", *op. cit.*, p. 137-138.

genre. The connections almost appear as a natural development between autobiography and fiction. Georges Gusdorf, reflecting on the process of writing oneself / writing for oneself for instance remarked :

Il existe une correspondance assez étroite entre le *Bildungsroman* et l'autobiographie, le romancier transposant sa propre histoire en la mettant au compte de son héros; toute autobiographie digne de ce nom commence d'ailleurs par le roman d'une formation de la personnalité⁷.

Carswell's own life indeed plays an important part in *Open the Door!* as many critics have remarked. Born Catherine Macfarlane in 1879, she grew up in a stern Calvinist environment reminiscent of the atmosphere she describes in her novel. Following what her son described as "a whirlwind courtship"⁸, she had a brief and unhappy marriage to a Mr. Herbert Jackson. It ended in separation, a case which made legal history in Scotland and was followed by a long affair with an older married man. Eventually she found the person who appeared to be the "natural and ideal" partner, her soul mate, Donald Carswell, whom she had met while she was a student at Glasgow University. All these episodes are, one way or another, recalled in the novel.

Bildungsromane share with autobiographies the desire to inform and give a message to their readers. As the title explicitly indicates, *Open the Door!* is a call for liberty, and one should not ignore the exclamation mark which renders this cry more poignant. It is a strong request, almost an order, as if a voice, external or internal, the protagonist's conscious or subconscious, was enjoining her of the need to open a door, to liberate herself from imposed patterns. Moreover, we should note the irony of the protagonist's surname: Bannerman, a noun which the O. E. D. gives as an archaic scotticism for "standard-bearer, ensign", and on which Joanna's father cannot resist a pun in a letter to his wife, where, placing their duty in a religious context, he appeals to his children to be "the Bannermen and Bannerwomen of that *Better Country* to the end!" (17). Catherine Carswell's aim was therefore to impart her experience and knowledge to all her readers. She wanted them to react against the stifling predicament that Victorian and Edwardian society imposed on women. *Open the Door!*, published in 1920, therefore partakes in a campaign of affirmation of women's rights and individuality which led suffragettes to claim and eventually obtain greater social equality and, as far

7. Georges Gusdorf, *Auto-bio-graphie*, Lignes de vie 2, Éditions Odile Jacob, Paris, 1991, p. 355

8. Catherine Carswell, *Open the Door!*, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

as literature and art are concerned, gave women an autonomous voice⁹. This was a sensitive issue for Carswell who, in her autobiography, devoted a whole chapter to this point. Having put forward some widespread prejudices, she concluded :

Is a woman writer fundamentally handicapped in a whole important sphere of verbal expression? If so, why? (...) The man can give himself (and others) away passionately, wittily, blatantly, imperfectly, coarsely, neurotically, without the reader feeling that his effort or his achievement was unsuitable to a man. (...) The woman, because she is a woman, must as an artist suppress what the man as artist or as man is entitled to reveal¹⁰.

Women therefore had to change society's attitudes and perceptions in order to be able to express their true sentiments, their emotions and to be able to fulfil their artistic inspirations.

We can therefore more accurately ascribe *Open the Door!* to a variation of the *Bildungsroman* type which has developed in the twentieth century: the *female Bildungsroman*. The aim is, of course, roughly the same, but all along in her quest for self-realization, the female protagonist is confronted with different stances or dispositions because of her gender and of what is expected from her by her family and society. Not only does she have to come to terms with her environment and her background, like her male counterparts, but she also has to assert herself as an individual in the eyes of society. In order to achieve this, her first duty is to learn not to comply with the mere image of the "feminine ideal"

9. Bakhtin, in his typology of the *Bildungsroman*, stressed the correlation between the individual self-realization and social awareness and mutation: "The fifth and last type of novel of emergence is the most significant one. In it man's individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence. Man's emergence is accomplished in real historical time, with all of its necessity, its fullness, its future, and its profoundly chronotopic nature. (...) He emerges along with the world and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. He is no longer within an epoch, but on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him. He is forced to become a new, unprecedented type of human being. What is happening here is precisely the emergence of a new man". Bakhtin, *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

10. Catherine Carswell, *Lying Awake*, An Unfinished Autobiography and Other Posthumous Papers, edited with an Introduction by John Carswell, London, Secker & Warburg, 1950, p. 116. A sentiment also concurrently confirmed by another twentieth-century novelist: "La vie des femmes est trop limitée, ou trop secrète. Qu'une femme se raconte, et le premier reproche qu'on lui fera est de n'être plus femme". Marguerite Yourcenar, "Carnets de notes de *Mémoires d'Hadrien*", *Œuvres romanesques*, Gallimard, "La Pléiade", Paris, 1982, p. 526.

as promoted by Alexander Grant in the text which I gave as a preamble to this talk, an icon which, like the "Angel in the House" vilified by Woolf¹¹, deprives her of her selfhood. The means of achieving her quest for identity are not the same as the ones that would be offered to a male protagonist. The traditional hero of a *Bildungsroman* is directed towards his goal by a mentor, usually an older person or sometimes a literary or historical figure with whom he associates. He is then faced with choice and decisions, thus asserting his will and his strength of character. His apprenticeship concludes when he becomes master of his own destiny. One should remember here the patronym Goethe gives his protagonist and Carlyle's choice of translation for the title of the novel. For the Victorian and Edwardian woman, marriage was often the only option in order to advance in society, and this was usually not the result of a wilful decision.

Carswell's friendship with D. H. Lawrence is well-known. She lost her post at the *Glasgow Herald* for having praised his banned novel, *The Rainbow*, in a book-review which she covertly published without the editor's consent. In this review, Carswell hinted at her literary ambitions. Having briefly exposed the main elements of the plot, the intertwining of the couples and the despair that confusion of sentiments begot, she then highly commended D. H. Lawrence's art but nonetheless criticized him for not having presented an appropriate answer to the questions he had raised :

What he certainly does in this finely processional but mostly painful history of the loves of successive generations of the Brangwen family is to make clear his conviction that the modern heart is in a disastrous muddle where love in our modern life, instead of being a blessed, joyous, and fruitful thing, is sterile, cruel, poisonous, and accursed. (...) The modern world, according to Mr. Lawrence, is mad and sick and sad because it knows not how to love. Further, in this book at any rate, he does not go. There is no cure offered, nothing but a merciless, almost gloating description of the disease which will be strongly offensive to most readers¹².

11. Woolf, in a speech on 21/1/1931 before the London/National Society for Women's Service : "There is a villain in the piece. That villain was not, I grieve to say, our old friend [Man]. Or at least only indirectly. The villain of my story was a woman, and I propose to call her, after a figure in a well known poem, the Angel in the House". Virginia Woolf, *The Pargiters; The Novel-Essay Portion of the Years*, edited with an Introduction by Mitchell A. Leaska (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), p.xxix. See : Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House*, Fifth Edition, London, George Bell & Sons, 1878, 1854.

12. "New Novels : *The Rainbow*", *The Glasgow Herald*, n° 264, 4 November 1915, p. 4.

I believe that Carswell's intention when writing *Open the Door!* was to offer the solution absent in *The Rainbow* and, ultimately, to put forth a cure for this illness in relations between the sexes. But I will show how her depiction of Joanna's self-realization is in itself contradictory, in spirit, to the essence of the female *Bildungsroman*, as well as to the ideology which infuses the novel.

Open the Door! is set at the end of the nineteenth century in a middle-class Glaswegian family of Calvinist obedience. This allowed Carswell to question the traditional expectations of society towards women and explore Joanna's means of rebellion against this stifling background. In addition Carswell's aim is to study the broader question of gender relations. D. H. Lawrence, who read the manuscript of *Open the Door!*¹³ was aware of the analogous enterprise of Carswell in relation to his works and of the shared interest between his intentions and Carswell's. He had started what was to become *Women in Love* (also published in 1920), and he told Carswell :

I feel really eager about your novel. I feel it is coming under the same banner with mine. The "us" will be books. There will be a fine wild little squadron soon, faring over the world. Nothing shall I welcome so much as books to ride with mine¹⁴.

What Lawrence had in mind when setting *Open the Door!* in the same category as his novels was that together they were an examination of the ambiguous relationships between men and women, a study on how both sexes try to define and find that elusive sentiment of love which they pursue relentlessly.

In a letter addressed to his editor, D. H. Lawrence took pains to explain his motivations and the burning issue which infused his works :

I can only write what I feel pretty strongly about : and that, at present, is the relations between men and women. After all, it is *the* problem of today, the esta-

13. The first letter to Carswell which appears in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* is true to his equivocal style and sharp tone : "Dear Mrs Jackson, I must tell you I am in the middle of reading your novel. You have very often a simply *beastly* style, indirect and roundabout and stiff-necked and stupid. And your stuff is abominably muddled - you'll simply have to write it all again. But it is fascinatingly interesting. Nearly all of it is *marvellously* good. It is only too incoherent. But you can easily pull it together. It *must* be a long novel - it is of the quality of a long novel. My stars, just you work at it, and you'll have a piece of work you never need feel ashamed of". 29 June 1914 (letter n° 740), in J. T. Boulton & G. J. Zytaruk (eds.), *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol. 2, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 187-188.

14. 10 August 1916 (letter n° 1268), in *ibid.*, p. 639.

blishment of a new relation, or the re-adjustment of the old one, between men and women¹⁵.

Perusing carefully those relations and emotions, and what it meant for a young woman growing up at the end of the nineteenth century in a patriarchal society, is indeed one of the issues addressed by Carswell in her novel.

Bildungsromane being, by definition, tales of education, we have to consider first how Carswell describes her protagonist's education and how this contributed to her striving towards fulfilment and self-realization. It is important to bear in mind the predicament Victorian and Edwardian society imposed on women in order not only to understand what Carswell aimed at challenging, but also to appreciate the narrative confines which she was compelled to respect in order to stay within the realms of realism. For the male protagonist of a *Bildungsroman*, education is an essential part for the shaping of his personality and for his progression towards self-realization. For the female protagonist, education depended mainly on self-study and the informal classes she received without the traditional educational system. Although Joanna Bannerman can attend classes at the University of Glasgow, she cannot take an examination. We are hardly informed about the Italian course which she follows in order to become fluent in the language and thus be able to visit her aunt Perdy in Italy. Similarly, Carswell devotes only a few lines to describing Joanna's switch from High School to the School of Art when she is seventeen (p. 49). Carswell spends more time and energy describing the various students and the personal bonds between them. It is for instance during those early years that Joanna meets the man who will be her first husband, the Italian inventor Mario Rasponi and the man who will eventually become her ideal partner, the shy, bashful and unassuming Lawrence Urquhart.

As in any conventional *Bildungsroman*, the protagonist of the female formation novel needs to be guided by an older, more experienced person on her path towards self-realization. Carl Nillson appears as Joanna's mentor. The fact that he is not British contributes to the significance of his role: he is seen as a maverick, an outsider whose statements relentlessly question the system and, like Joanna's Italian husband, he does not abide by its traditions. He encourages Joanna to pursue her passion, painting, and to transform it into her main activity. Lawrence Urquhart is one of his best friends, and Carl Nillson is therefore aware of Lawrence's feelings for the woman: the two men go on holiday together and

15. Letter to Edward Garnett, 2 May 1913 (letter n° 574), in J. T. Boulton (ed.), *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol. 1, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 546.

seem to share many interests. Nillson, undoubtedly to please his friend, arranges dates between the two. Whilst travelling in utter desperation on her way to Duntarvie, Joanna comes across him on the train. He is on his way to meet Lawrence who is recovering from an illness in Scotland. He informs her of his friends' poor health and urges her to visit him. Joanna, who has now realized Nillson's role in her life, then confides:

" (...) I cannot decide anything these days. You must help me, Carl. Do, please help me!" she begged him most earnestly.

"Are you a free woman?" (...)

"Yes, she said. I'm free – quite, quite free... but I know nothing... and I am so weak. I know nothing, nothing! I can't tell what I should do. I'm blown by any wind. There seems no life in me." (384)

Joanna, who does not confide anything to her mother lest it become her mother's religious group topic for discussion, finds relief in Nillson's sympathetic but rigorous approach to life. The people who revolve around Joanna are therefore necessary to her education and the broadening of her mind: each one of them brings something to her development and helps her along the quest for self-realization. Her education is not to be found in the university course she attends, but in the exciting diversity of her friends and acquaintances' experiences. Mario Rasponi explains this bluntly when, in the University Park where he is courting her, he asks her to choose between formal education and the education life, and of course himself, can offer:

"What do you say? Will you stay and go to school there?" Mario's voice rose as he waved an arm at the darkening University. "Or will you come away and learn from me? There you will have books and bones. Here with me" – touching his breast – "you will have all that is of value, in either books or bones – you will have life." (99)

Joanna's determination to acquire knowledge appears clearly throughout the novel. She refers several times to what she calls her "ignorance": she does not know anything about life. Mario is also kind enough to remind her of her inexperience during courtship (96-8). Here Carswell differs from the classic pattern of *Bildungsromane* in so far as the protagonist does not seem enlightened by having read a book, fiction or poetry, to which he or she can refer in times of crisis. If formal higher education was obviously not available as easily to the heroine of a female *Bildungsroman*, literature would nonetheless have appeared as a natural means for increasing one's knowledge of the world and escaping one's predicament. The symbolic guideposts it offers would also have helped us to appreciate Joanna's character and personality. The only points of reference which can be

likened to a literary device are first of all the Italian legend of "La Porziuncola" which Rasponi recalls when they visit that place outside Florence: it is through a hidden door, at the back of a garden, that a married Italian woman used to welcome her lover (125). This anonymous mythical heroine spurs Joanna's conscience throughout the novel, embodying the necessary resistance women need to oppose society's conventions in order to find their true identity. The other book mentioned in the novel and which exercises an undeniable influence on Joanna's parents is the Bible. Carswell also gives it a prophetic role with the three epigraphs which introduce the three books and, in a true Lawrentian fashion, by frequently alluding to Biblical imagery in the course of the novel¹⁶. This seems paradoxical when one considers the message Carswell wishes to offer women, but this also reflects Joanna's puzzled feelings for religion. On the one hand she has grown to loathe the institution the Scriptures represent: having been brought up in this environment, she realizes the restraint and the impediment the religious dogmas pose to women. On the other hand, she is nonetheless fascinated by a certain humility and the feeling of community of spirits she finds in the Scriptures. She would like to recover those feelings of harmony between the people and the God they venerate instead of being subjected to the intransigent and nihilistic Calvinist creed her parents embraced. We can also compare Joanna's misgivings with her mother's spiritual meandering after her husband's death: the mother wanders from one church to another, but still in the Calvinist creed, in search of a Pastor who would give her the comfort and the reassurance Sholto Bannerman was able to provide her when he was alive.

Joanna's uncertainties certainly emphasize the feelings of inadequacy and nescience she endures. Carswell thus increases the significance of Joanna's quest. She has to find her own answers regarding her position in society, her identity and the development of her future life. Her emotional expectations have not yet been fulfilled and she is still looking for real love:

But with the dawn of the next day she had known that Louis no more than Bob, no more than Mario, had made her his. Nor had he committed himself to her. (...) Dimly she realized that such a union as she desired beyond all desires was

16. "The title and most of the key images of *Open the Door!* (from 2 Kings ix, the instruction by Elisha to one of his prophetic messengers, 'Open the door and flee, and tarry not') are aptly scriptural. At another crisis in her young life (...) Joanna remembers Psalm 124 (...). The novel's second part has another epigraph, this time from the New Testament (...) (Col. IV, 3)". Christopher Small, "Catherine Carswell: Engagement and Detachment", *Chapman*, n° 74 755, Autumn-Winter 1993, p. 134.

what her mother had in vain craved from her father through all the years of a marriage physically fruitful. (254)

Needless to say, such a state of confusion is a characteristic feature of *Bildungsromane*. This reflects the personal choices which have to be made by the protagonist and which are necessary in order to progress towards self-realization. For the female *Bildungsroman*, chaos and elusiveness also indicate the loss of self and the yearning after one's identity and womanhood of which she has been deprived by society's expectations. Reflecting on her mother's marriage, Joanna thinks that the stereotypical role into which she had been cast by her husband was at the heart of her mother's unhappiness. This entailed a lack of intimacy, harmony and involvement between them: marriage was certainly not what Joanna's mother had expected¹⁷. She had trapped herself by her submission and devotion. So much so that she even grew shameful of her idiosyncrasies:

When her husband was at home (...), there were but few adventures below-stairs for her. Her unpunctuality, her muddle-headedness and her slowness were very trying to a facile and naturally precise man as he was, and she was achingly aware of her own shortcomings. (14)

Joanna, after having married Rasponi, similarly experienced a period of doubt. Hardly arrived in Italy, she was already pondering: "This then was marriage! This droll device, this astonishing, grotesque experience was what the poets had sung since the beginning." (107-108)¹⁸ It is this disparity between

17. It is interesting to compare Joanna's awakening and rebellion to Ibsen's protagonist's description and accusation in *The Doll House*: "[NORA]: You have never understood me... I've been greatly wronged, Torvald. First by my father, and then by you. [HELMER]: What! Us two! The two people who loved you more than anybody? [NORA shakes her head]: You two never loved me. You only thought how nice it was to be in love with me. (...) At home, Daddy used to tell me what he thought, then I thought the same. And if I thought differently, I kept quiet about it, because he wouldn't have liked it. He used to call me his baby doll, and he played with me as I used to play with my dolls. Then I came to live in your house... (...) I lived by doing tricks for you, Torvald. But that's the way you wanted it. You and Daddy did me a great wrong. It's your fault that I've never made anything of my life. (...) I have been your doll wife, just as at home I was Daddy's doll child". Henrik Ibsen, *Four Major Plays: A Doll's House; Ghosts; Hedda Gabler; The Master Builder*, translated by James McFarlane & Jens Arup, with an introduction by James McFarlane, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 80.

18. D. H. Lawrence uses the same interjection, but his approach is more positive: "This then was marriage! The old things didn't matter any more. (...) All that mattered was that he should love her and she should love him and they should live kindled to one another, like the Lord in two burning bushes that were not consumed. And so they lived for the time". D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, London, Heinemann, 1971, 1915, p. 146-147.

dreams and reality which had brought about her dismay and disillusion with emotions and with love. All her romantic notions have been shattered by the reality of the modern world and by the expectations society has placed on people. This discrepancy plagues her relations with all her partners, from Bob Ranken – her first love – (see 60-1) to Louis Pender who would rather ignore her than risk his social status (see 317-9). It is only with Lawrence Urquhart that she finally recovers the romantic ideals she desperately craves for. As in any novel of apprenticeship, the plight experienced by the protagonist will eventually become an indispensable lesson for his or her progress. Joanna's marriage to Rasponi is an essential stage in her development. If at first she conforms to her husband's wishes, "She was humbly anxious to conform to reality – eager to accept and get used to the new aspect of things" (108), she, however, grows more autonomous and rebellious as time goes by, thus becoming an insubordinate prisoner; this indeed helps her on her path towards self-realization as she becomes conscious of her womanhood and of the necessity of leaving the "Doll's house" where her husband entrapped her:

Joanna, though now she felt both afraid and in the wrong, stared proudly at her husband, then turned her eyes away with ostentatious carelessness. Anyhow he had no right to speak so to her, and she must be angry in self-defence. At the same time there was a secret, inebriating enjoyment for her in it all. In a new way she became conscious of her power as a woman. (115)

Her independence is eventually granted to her when she comes back to Britain because of her decision to settle down in London as an artist and designer. Choosing a career, thus becoming an "apprentice", is obviously an essential stage towards "mastery" in the *Bildungsroman*. The protagonist can therefore fulfil the "Great expectations" society requires him to accomplish. Carswell leaves this episode pretty elusive: she does not describe the hustle and bustle or the romance usually associated with the vocation Joanna embraces. We are not given any detail on how she manages to sell her paintings. It is as if Carswell, in order to emphasize the spiritual dimension of Joanna's quest, did not want to insist on the material side of her life. The arrangements made by Joanna in order to gain her financial independence are not alluded to in great detail either. These are concerns of no consequence on a woman's path towards spiritual self-realization. Probably because of the prejudices still associated with women professional occupations at the turn of the century, Carswell, and other female writers, could not devote so much time describing their protagonist's evolution in a world dominated by male sway. Commenting on women's professional options, Elaine Showalter, in a monograph devoted to British women novelists, but where Car-

swell is conspicuously absent, wrote: "Victorian women were not accustomed to *choosing* a vocation: womanhood was a vocation in itself¹⁹." A remark probably still valid for Carswell's protagonist.

Having considered the genre into which *Open the Door!* can be ascribed and the feminist and social issue raised by Carswell, I will conclude by examining briefly the local and Scottish dimension of the novel and its protagonist's self-realization. We saw that *Open the Door!* is a tale of movement: Joanna Bannerman restlessly travels and settles down in various places²⁰. Concomitant with the love search she has undertaken, restless Joanna also needs to find her roots in the world. In a passing reference to D. H. Lawrence's motif, she evokes the Phoenix, the mythical bird who builds its nest before death and who is reborn of its own ashes. But she also compares herself to a "bird of Paradise", birds who, in the traditional legend, have no strong foothold in the world and are thus incessantly condemned to fly (306). After having broken up with Pender, she feels the urgent need to return to the small community of Duntarvie in Perthshire. She believes that this location, where the Bannermans used to spend their holiday, holds the answers she has been looking for and is the repository for her self-realization. The narrator had already insisted on the significance of Duntarvie, telling us prophetically at the beginning of the novel:

At that moment the twelve-year-old child entered deeply into Nature's heart, and for the first time it came to her that she might make of her rapture a place of retreat for future days. It was a discovery. Henceforth she felt that nothing, no one, would have power to harm her. (...) "If I forget thee, O Duntarvie, she whispered, let my right hand forget its cunning." (32-3)

Nature is spelled with a capital "n", and we have an inkling of its importance. Glasgow, Vallombrosa, Florence and London did not offer Joanna the peace and harmony she was longing for. It is in the idyllic setting of Duntarvie

19. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own; British Women Novelists From Brontë to Lessing*, New Revised Edition, London, Virago Press, 1982, 1977, p. 21.

20. Movement and restlessness also characterize Ursula Brangwen in *The Rainbow*: "She [Ursula] liked Anthony, though. All her life, at intervals, she returned to the thought of him and of that which he offered [marriage, and therefore stability]. But she was a traveller, she was a traveller on the face of the earth, and he was an isolated creature living in the fulfilment of his own senses. She could not help it, that she was a traveller. She knew Anthony, that he was not one. But oh, ultimately and finally, she must go on and on, seeking the goal that she knew she did draw nearer to". D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

that Joanna will run into Lawrence Urquhart and that their love will blossom. Like the phoenix she alludes to earlier in the novel she is now a new woman :

She knew then beyond all doubt that it was Lawrence and no other that was here on the moor with her. And it was only then that she was pierced through and through by the clue of her own new-born life. (394)

This return to Duntarvie nonetheless pertains to what can be ascribed to a Scottish literary tradition. Nature, in many works of the Scottish Renaissance, is the place where communion between the individual and society can be achieved, where the past fuses with the present and holds a key for the understanding of the future. From the Mother-Earth figure favoured by Gunn to the soothing and restorative effects of the land in Grassie Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*, most authors of the Renaissance show such streaks in their works. Lawrence and Joanna meet in what Carswell presents as a "Garden of Eden" where the woman encounters the chosen man amidst the most romantic setting. But here lies the flaw of the novel: Carswell makes use of the "feminine ideal" she has condemned throughout the novel. Nature is the idyllic and pristine location where the woman can discover her true identity, achieve intimate closeness with the elements and where she finds love. Her identity, her self-realization, thus conforms to the very clichés Carswell set out to denounce²¹. Prior to her rebirth, Joanna Bannerman had found peaceful rest in a stable, her nest being a stable bin which the narrator describes as a coffin, thus insisting on the renaissance of Joanna and also her communion with the earth in this dark and deep receptacle. She had bathed in a stream and nourished herself with the wild fruits found while strolling. She has thus rediscovered simple sensual pleasures and affirmed her kinship with and belonging to this natural world. After having so successfully qualified Joanna as an independent woman, liberated from all the conventions society had imposed on her sex, Carswell falls into a mere stereotypical representation of the feminine ideal. This seems to have been a common occurrence with many women writers. They did not find the fortitude to pursue their contention to the end, thus admitting the validity of the patriarchal discourse they had set off to contend. Showalter remarked about Victorian novels: "Again and again the heroines reach

21. This criticism is recurrent in almost all the articles devoted to *Open the Door!* McCulloch commented for instance: "(...) in my view this ending of *Open the Door!* distorts the feminist discourse and formal process of the novel, and seems to have been imposed by the necessities of real life biography as opposed to the logic of art." Margery McCulloch, "Opening the Door: Women, Carswell and the Scottish Renaissance", *op. cit.*, p. 100.

the brink of self-discovery only to fall back²²." This comment can be applied to the novel as well. Joanna's self-realization partakes of the traditional image of womanhood offered by such as Coventry Patmore²³. The cure offered by Carswell in order to ease the relations between the sexes is indeed very idealistic, almost romantic. Lawrence is Joanna's perfect partner, understanding everything she feels for and looking for the same kind of emotions. They both manage to open the mythical door :

But when she told, as she did, of the secret garden door of La Porziuncola, and of all that love meant to her... escape... adventure... excitement... learning... possession of the world... she found that Lawrence understood. (398)

Like Joanna, Lawrence Urquhart has been similarly cast into a role which hampered his emotional development. He confides that his mother's smothering attitude is responsible for his uneasiness with Joanna (342). He is therefore also reborn with Joanna's help: this, as in true Lawrentian style (and obviously I am here referring to D. H. Lawrence), cannot be the result of an individual undertaking: the two of them have to participate jointly, balancing each other's deficiencies and offering what the other has been desperately looking for. Despite this happy note, the novel nonetheless ends on a question mark. We can only imagine Joanna and Lawrence settling down together in Glasgow or London at the eve of the First World War. Will he prove the partner Joanna had hoped for or is she not once again deluded by love and by her romantic aspirations? And, more importantly, will Joanna retain the autonomy she has been so eager to get or, as the narratorial tone implies, will she lock herself up in cage similar to her mother's, transforming thus a female *Bildungsroman* into a worn out tale of feminine submissiveness?

22. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

23. "Boon Nature to the woman bows; / She walks in all its glory clad, / And, chief herself of earthly shows, / Each other helps her, and is glad: / No splendour 'neath the sky's proud dome / But serves for her familiar wear; / (...) She seems the life of nature's powers; Her beauty is the genial thought / Which makes the sunshine bright; the flowers, / But for their hint of her, were nought". Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House*, *op. cit.*, p. 44-47.