

Understand the Subject:
Woolf's Use of the Bildungsroman
in *The Voyage Out* and *Jacob's Room*

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Abstract

This project explores the way in which Virginia Woolf uses and subverts the classic nineteenth-century genre, the Bildungsroman in her first novel (*The Voyage Out*) and her third novel (*Jacob's Room*) in order to posit questions about understanding subjectivity. Virginia Woolf's later novels are written in a prose style commonly called "stream-of-consciousness" or "mind-style" that her first novel is not, and her third novel, although attempts this style of prose, is quite novice in its execution. Essentially, this project argues that it was through Woolf's use and complication of the Bildungsroman genre that she was able to pose philosophical questions about subjectivity and human understanding-- never answered in a concrete manner--that develop into her later, most famous style of prose in novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway*. This paper builds on Gregory Castle's scholarly book, *The Modernist Bildungsroman*, which was written in response to Franco Moretti's seminal book, *The Way of the World*.