

ABSTRACT

Westerlund, K., 1990. Escaping the Castle of Patriarchy: Patterns of Development in the Novels of Gail Godwin. Acta Univ. Ups., *Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia* 73. 174 pp. Uppsala. ISBN 91-554-2605-0

The themes of Gail Godwin's novels parallel issues brought into focus by American feminism during the 1970s and 1980s. Of primary importance in Godwin's fiction is individual female development; it is intimately tied to, even dependent upon, her female characters' relations to men. This study is an exploration of developmental patterns among the main female characters in Gail Godwin's novels from these decades. In Chapter 1, the major branches of contemporary American feminism are presented in an overview intended to provide a background to Godwin's fiction. Chapter 2 outlines the feminism inherent in Godwin's novels and introduces her treatment of the theme of Southern womanhood, so important in most of her work. Chapters 3 through 5 present close readings of her novels, focusing on female patterns of development as linked to the treatment of male-female relationships. The Conclusion summarizes the above analyses. It is suggested that three phases can be discerned in Gail Godwin's novels of the 1970s and 1980s: female subordination and a concomitant lack of development and fulfillment in *The Perfectionists* and *Glass People*; awareness and rebellion against subordination in *The Odd Woman* and *Violet Clay*; and the seeds of transformation—female and male—primarily in *A Mother and Two Daughters* (but present also in *The Finishing School* and *A Southern Family*). 'Escaping the castle of patriarchy' does not, in Godwin's work, entail revolutionary changes: instead, a slow and gradual transformation is visualized, acknowledging the deep significance of one's historical and geographical past.

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