

# BILDUNGSROMAN

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## ABSTRACT

Bildungsroman is a type of novel which is a 'novel of formation' or a 'novel of education'. It focuses on the development of the mind and character of the young protagonist from childhood to adulthood. The genre is first introduced by Karl Mongstern in the nineteenth century and was popularized by Wilhelm Dilthey in the twentieth century. It is a German term, Bildung means 'formation' and Roman means 'novel'. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1776) was first categorized under this genre. The genre focuses on the all-round development of the protagonist. Many novelists of the Victorian period wrote under the traits of this genre. *Tom Sawyer, David Copperfield, Jane Eyre and Great Expectations* are classical examples of this genre.

**Keywords:** Novel of Formation, Novel of Education, Development of the mind and character of the young Protagonist from childhood to adulthood, coming of age novel.

This paper is an attempt to emphasize the literary genre Bildungsroman. Genres are considered to be arisen out of other already existing genres. Genres used to develop from their original concept and also get changed in their development. They even get transformed and sometimes fade away completely from the literary scenario. A true Bildungsroman is a novel in which the main character has to be given many situations, by the novelist, to gain experience and attain moral development. Bildungsroman is considered as a novel of formation or novel of education. The characters and the plot are very important for a Bildungsroman. The genre is a German term which was introduced in the nineteenth century by Karl Morgenstern and was popularized by Wilhelm Dilthey in the twentieth century.

Both, Bildungsroman and Erziehungsroman, are German terms and are subclasses of novel and they imply "novel of formation" or "novel of education". The main theme of these novels is the development of the Protagonist's mind and character from childhood to adulthood. The protagonist develops through various experiences and gets matured and it is also a sort of search for identity. The term Bildungsroman reached other nations only in the twentieth century even though it was in usage by

the German writers in the eighteenth century. The term has only rare definitions and the critics are actually in disputes towards their definitions of the genre. The genre rose amidst the disputes and controversies of the authors and critics. Susanne Howe in Wilhelm Meister and His English Kinsmen gives a definition of the genre:

The adolescent hero of the 'typical 'apprentice' novel sets out on his way through the world, meets with reverses usually due to his temperament, falls in with various guides and counsellors, makes many false starts in choosing his friends, his wife, and his life work, and finally adjusts himself in some way to the demands of his time and environment by finding a sphere of action in which he may work effectively. (Howe 1930, 4)

Bildungsroman is one such genre which raises question in a reader whether such a genre ever exists or there remains any literary work based on this genre. "What a Bildungsroman actually is ... and how many of them are there in German literature or in World literature at large, are questions still under discussion and probably unsolvable." (Thomas P. Saine 1991, 119). Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1796) was the first novel considered under this genre. The term Bildungsroman was used for the first to this novel: "*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is a novel about Bildung, although it is not a Bildungsroman in the sense in which the term has come to be used by critics and scholars. (Thomas P. Saine 1991, 139). Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1796) is a classic example of this Genre. The protagonist undergoes development of mind and character through a journey of self – realization.

Tom Sawyer, David Copperfield, Jane Eyre and Great Expectations are some of the English Classical novels which fall in the category of bildungsroman. The German bildungsroman focuses on the youth but the English bildungsroman concentrates on the childhood of the protagonist. The protagonist of the above mentioned novels are seen to be at pace with the society and they restore order at the end of the novels. They get real identity at the end of the novel.

The English bildungsroman traces the development of the protagonist along with the new experiences of the hero in his society. Bildungsroman has a deep tradition in English literature. The genre became famous as the novel of youth in Victorian England. The main idea of these novels appears to be about the early years of the protagonist's life or about the psychological or moral growth of the main character. One of the very good novels of this genre is David Copperfield\_(1849-1850) by Charles Dickens. In this novel Dickens portrays the life of David from childhood. He depicts David's childhood despair and his worldly triumph. A Portrait of the Artist as a Youngman (1916) by James Joyce is another

example for this genre. It talks about the growth of the protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, as a man and an artist. Brown Girl, Brownstones (1959) by an American author, Paul Marshall describes the growing up of Selina Boyce, in Brooklyn, New York, as she goes there as a child of migrants from Barbados. Cormack McCarthy's All the Pretty Horses (1992) sketches the adventures turn into rites of passage to manhood by the 16 year old boy protagonist John Grady Cole and two companions when travelling from Texas to Mexico.

The protagonist of this genre has temperamental loss in the beginning of the novel and was affected by the loss and was on a future journey. The main character gradually attains maturity of mind and he acquires it with much effort. Change becomes one of the recurrent themes of the genre. The protagonist is allowed, by the novelist of this genre, to undergo a long voyage or journey to grow and mature. The salient features of this genre are:

1. Development of the mind and character of the protagonist from childhood to adulthood.
2. Tension or conflicts with the outer world and the inner world of the protagonist.
3. Temperamental loss must be there which makes the protagonist to undergo a long journey.
4. Time space must be long so that the protagonist gets a long time to get maturity of mind and character.
5. The novels have to be mere records of the contemporary society in which the novel is to be published.

The reader gets involved into the novel and he too gets maturity along with the Protagonist of the novel. Both feel the character's experiences and eventually, both mature. The secondary characters are very essential for the maturity of the protagonist because they help him in his change and growth. The protagonist can be engaged and get married, can also nurse a sick person, Death of the family member or of a close relative or of a friend can be dealt with as experiences which the protagonist undergoes. A funeral can be taken place, a family secret can be revealed, he can face a dangerous fire accident, can be seriously ill, or can be made an invalid person. Ultimately the protagonist may be allowed to face death, by the novelist of the genre. The setting of the bildungsroman novel may be 'countryside setting' as it is suitable for childhood scenes. 'After School Leaving' may be apt as another setting for this genre. The genre's plot can be chronological and a protagonist of age between 18 and 23 can be of more prominence for the main plot.

The title of the novel can have the name of the protagonist as an indication to the reader that the novel is about the life of the protagonist and thus the novelist can give the reader a hint about the theme of the novel. The primary theme of the novel of this genre is the development of the mind and character

of the protagonist from childhood to adulthood. The protagonist can be made to attain philosophical maturity through loss and pain. Love, relationship, marriage, social criticism, social set up and family background are some of the other themes of this genre.

As a whole, the genre focuses on the ideas about the societal impact, psychology and morality of the personality of the main character of the novel in relation to the society. It is about the process of maturation of the protagonist. Critics have argued upon many synonyms of the Bildungsroman; the novel of education, of apprenticeship, of adolescence, the novel of youth, of initiation or even the life novel. But none of them fully substitutes a synonym for the label of Bildungsroman.

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