

# A History of the Bildungsroman



# A History of the Bildungsroman:

*From Ancient Beginnings  
to Romanticism*

By

Petru Golban

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-0395-X

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0395-3

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## FOREWORD

The present book on the Bildungsroman development history emerged as an independent study from within the approach to a number of Bildungsromane (from the Victorian Age, the period of Modernism or late modern era, and the postmodern time) following the assumption that, like with the novel in general, certain thematic and structural elements occurred diachronically to survive, develop, disappear, change – including their status as centre and margin – in order to establish the literary system of the novel of formation as a distinct type or subgenre of the novelistic genre. Petru Golban's book attempts to overcome the lack of such a critical concern, since an exhaustive appreciation of the stature of different literary experiences with regard to their nurturing of the rise of the Bildungsroman is rare if not, except Bakhtin's "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism: Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel", totally missing.

As even high school students parrot the maxim "Art is thinking in images", Shklovsky would claim, they also echo the assumptions, we would say, that one of the most important contributions by the Germans to world literature is the Bildungsroman, that the Bildungsroman was founded by Goethe with *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* as the prototype of the form (since this novel marked the use of the principle of *Bildung*, *formation*, or as for Bakhtin, *becoming*, in matters of character representation strategies), and that the Bildungsroman (the novel of formation) flourished in English literature in the Victorian Age among the realists.

Not only among the realists in the Victorian period, we should add, and it also continued in the age of modernism in the first half of the twentieth century as both modernist and realist, and also in the postmodern period to the present displaying a larger and a more remarkable typology.

In Britain, we should though agree, the Bildungsroman became one of the most favourite literary models for Victorian realists because its fictional pattern, consisting of the literary treatment of the process of development and formation of a character in relation to society, offers the necessary extension and complexity to the literary concern with individual experience and the social background.



And we should also add, as this book argues, that the rise of the Bildungsroman did not owe solely to the Germans and Goethe. Rather, the rise of the Bildungsroman is a long and complex process, of a larger literary and continental resonance, with antecedents in antiquity and the medieval period. With regard to the English Bildungsroman, it enjoyed a significant contribution from the picaresque tradition and the rise of the English novel in the eighteenth century (with their verisimilitude, moral didacticism, social concern, and so on), and, last but not least, romantic literary practice (with its emphasis on individual experience, focus on nature, concern with the experience of childhood, the dualism of existence, and other thematising strategies). Finally, following Carlyle's moment of a threefold literary reception of Goethe's canonical Bildungsroman, this moment led to finding a way in which to produce a literary discourse that offers a particular modality concerning the figure of the main hero/heroine as being constructed in the novel, where in the Bildungsroman it constitutes the image of the individual subject in the process of becoming, growth, development, whose essence is the principle of *identity formation*.

Without assuming the task to rewrite or complete Bakhtin's unfinished study on the Bildungsroman, but pleased and willing to become one of his followers, Petru Golban argues that the Bildungsroman is a literary system with a development history. In this respect, the present book, which is the first part of a larger project, aims to reveal the process of the rise and consolidation of the Bildungsroman as a literary system from ancient literature to that of romanticism. Works and their authors are studied separately, as an object to be measured in itself, yet the writings are arranged chronologically in a developing tradition. Finally, as the book looks at some cultural and literary periods, movements and trends with regard to their terms, origins, features, main writers and representative texts, and their interrelationship and continuity, the reader will be pleased to find also a useful guide for his or her learning or strengthening of the knowledge of the historical advancement of world and English literature.

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## PREFACE

This first book in our series of studies on the Bildungsroman in English literature is in its diachronic essence a thematological and comparative approach to the novel of formation. As its title suggests, *A History of the Bildungsroman: From Ancient Beginnings to Romanticism* aims to argue the existence of a history of this novelistic subgenre.

In England, in particular, the Bildungsroman emerged as one of the most popular literary types of fiction, especially among Victorian realists, and many of the most important works of realism are Bildungsromane. The Victorian writers focusing on the relationship between the individual and society and on the principle of determinism apparently found in the Bildungsroman's concern with the process of development and formation of a character the most congenial way to treat and encompass their subjects in the complexity and large scale openings of a life experience as offered by the Bildungsroman.

But the Bildungsroman did not emerge suddenly on the literary scene in the Victorian Age. Rather, it possesses, as Bakhtin would argue in his "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism: Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel", its own development history as a distinct category, form, type, or subgenre of the novelistic genre, which is in itself a long, complex, and interesting process of rise and consolidation of a literary pattern, tradition, and literary system.

This process can be summarized as follows: from the ancient epic and novel to medieval romances to Renaissance picaresque fiction (continued in the seventeenth century) to (in English literature) the eighteenth-century rise of the English novel with its strong picaresque substratum and through romanticism and Goethe (accredited with having introduced in fiction the element of *Bildung*) to the Victorian flourishing of the novel of formation following Carlyle's moment of a threefold literary reception of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. These are the main conventions which nurture the rise of the Bildungsroman as a subgenre from ancient beginnings to romanticism. However, there are also other experiences and aspects of literary practice whose diachronic unfolding should be considered in a study on the development history of the Bildungsroman.

Among the primary influences on the rise of the Bildungsroman, some belong, like romantic writings and Goethe's canonical Bildungsroman, to

the level of “allusion”. Others, like picaresque tradition and certain eighteenth-century English novels, belong to the level of “intertextuality”. The validity of our judgements is tested through the approach to the thematising strategies in a number of literary texts that represent these literary experiences occurring prior to the Bildungsroman. We aim to disclose those elements from their literary systems that would allude, overlap, or coincide with those that form the literary system of the novel of formation. In other words, in the present book, without endeavouring to enrich or complete Bakhtin’s unfinished study on the Bildungsroman, but glad to assume the position of his follower, we aim to argue that the Bildungsroman has a development history, and attempt to reveal it by way of critical discernment.



## PRELIMINARIES

### TOWARDS A DEFINITION AND A VECTOR OF METHODOLOGY IN THE APPROACH TO THE BILDUNGSROMAN AS A LITERARY SYSTEM

There cannot be a system of existence. (...) When we speak about system we speak about a closed world, yet existence is precisely the opposite. (...) To think about existence, systematic thought must think of it as suppressed, that is different from what it actually is. (Søren Kierkegaard)

As in Kierkegaard's view, our study attempts to show that existence cannot be rigidly structured as a system. However, it also tries to prove that the subgenre of the Bildungsroman, or the novel of formation, in English literature – in its focus on particular aspects and experiences of existence – is a literary system of various, consolidated and interrelated thematic and structural elements. However, as a system, the Bildungsroman is neither a closed fictional realm nor a static or rigid one; it is alive and dynamic, complex and varied – as varied as the life samples that the novels designated as Bildungsromane reflect. Significantly, neither is the protagonist of the Bildungsroman an "*individual-model*" (Girard 37) to be imitated, like Don Quixote, and Wilhelm Meister has not become so since his followers Pip, David Copperfield, Jane Eyre, Stephen Dedalus, Jacob, Fevvers, Saleem Sinai, and many others are individuals of various sorts and roles and of particular inner and outer perspectives on existence.

Criticism both on the Bildungsroman, with a focus on particular texts, and on the history of the Bildungsroman, within both German studies and the studies of other national literatures, including English, has raised a complex controversy over such issues as the definition of the Bildungsroman; its consideration as a literary genre, or subgenre, type, species, or subspecies, and tradition; its main thematic and narrative features; its existence beyond German literature; the period of its birth and utmost flourishing; its death or, on the contrary, continuity, and, concerning the former, the period of its extinction.

To engage in such critical and theoretical disputes is not our intention. Nonetheless, first, we reject random or abusive uses of the term, as well as its being employed in expressing false scholarship. Second, we assume and rely on the premise that the Bildungsroman (1) is subject to precise definition, (2) represents a particular type of novel, (3) possesses its own history of rise, development and consolidation as a literary tradition, and, above all, (4) constitutes a system of defining elements that are rendered typological by their thematic and narrative perspectives. Third, however, we refuse to consider this system to be static; we are reluctant to proclaim the death of the Bildungsroman at the beginning of the twentieth century and place it in the context of literary history along with the romance, the sonnet, the epistolary novel, picaresque fiction, and other once popular genres. Especially within Anglo-American literary scholarship, the Bildungsroman is viewed primarily as a nineteenth-century, particularly realist, literary phenomenon; the term is used so loosely and broadly that any novel, like *The Catcher in the Rye*, or even a narrative poem like *Aurora Leigh*, that includes elements of a coming-of-age story might be labelled "Bildungsroman".

It is often forgotten, however, or even neglected that the origins of the Bildungsroman on the Continent and in English literature precede the realist tradition. To some critics, the novel of character formation emerged and became one of the most favourite literary models in the literary discourse of pre-romanticism and romanticism, movements which realism arduously rejected and aimed to replace. To others, the idea of *Bildung* "began among the Weimar classicists as an expression of nostalgia for a Greek-like many-sidedness" (Jeffers 197), where Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* reveals this nostalgia and successfully connects the rising as literary concerns romantic individualism with socially and morally focused realism.

There are a number of other connotations given to the term *Bildung*. Various critics have pointed to its spiritual essence, the idea of modern liberation, or a theological meaning (as in pietistic theology); they have related it to natural philosophy (Leibniz), or identified it with the Enlightenment, idealism, or philosophy in general, or political usage (Herder), or pedagogical usage (Campe and Rousseau). Still other voices, among which the earliest, sixteen-century pietistic theologies, emphasize *Bildung* as the "modelling oneself in the image of God", whereas natural philosophies speak about "the development of potentialities in organisms"; on the whole, the word arises from the tradition of "a theological and philosophical education/cultivation of citizenship" (Jones 445). Critics also argue that the term *Bildung* has changed its primary theological,

philosophical and especially strong pedagogical meanings into *formation* as the culmination of a developmental process. This transition occurs most explicitly in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is often regarded as a Bildungsroman that traces the self-development of spirit, its edification through adventures and pilgrimage.

The history of the term might be an interesting study in itself, but we believe that, as conceived in its essence and type, our approach to the Bildungsroman should focus primarily on literature and in particular the novelistic genre. In this respect, relying on M. M. Bakhtin's much-celebrated "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" and especially "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism: Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel" ("Roman Vospitaniya I Ego Znachenie V Istorii Realizma: K Istoricheskoi Tipologii Romana", written in 1936-1938), we would claim that, like any other important literary tradition, the Bildungsroman has its own history of development. We further hypothesise that its developmental history corresponds to, or rather is to be found in, the history of development of the novel itself as a genre, while accepting Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* ("Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship", 1794-1796) as the first canonical Bildungsroman.

Mikhail Bakhtin's "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism" consists, actually, of some surviving passages from the introductory part of a book that Bakhtin intended to write. Notwithstanding, the intention and argumentative line are clear and might be taken, as we attempt to do, as the starting point for a certain topic-related critical discernment. The destiny of Bakhtin's work is likewise remarkable in that

the manuscript tumbled into obscurity together with its author, until a scholarly renaissance led by Michael Holquist, Caryl Emerson, and several others introduced it to an English-speaking audience in 1986. Unfortunately, what had originally been a book-length manuscript now survives only in fragmentary form; Bakhtin, a heavy smoker, literally consumed his own pages when he used them as rolling papers during the German invasion of the Soviet Union. (Boes 236)

It is true that the type of novel commonly referred to as the "Bildungsroman" flourishes in British literature in the Victorian Age, becoming extremely popular among the realists. The reason behind the fact that Thackeray, Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot and others use the pattern for their novels of character formation is that the fictional model of the Bildungsroman, consisting of the literary treatment of the process of development and formation of a character in relation to society,

offers the necessary extension and complexity to the realist literary concern with individual experience and the social background, a concern which is framed within a large-scale diachronic model of human existence.

Be it highly popular and productive among the Victorian realists, the Bildungsroman has its roots neither in English literature nor in the literary trend called realism. It is in Germany that the Bildungsroman originated, and in the context of a literary movement – romanticism – against which realism emerged in its founding experience.

It has indeed become a critical cliché to consider the term and type of novel known as “Bildungsroman” one of the most valuable contributions of German literature to international letters and to view it as a product of pre-romanticism, namely *Sturm und Drang*, given Goethe’s standing, or even romanticism. Likewise, it is taken for granted that the consolidation of a literary tradition of the Bildungsroman in German and world literature occurs with Goethe’s fictional text as prototype of the form, based on the assumption that in the thematic treatment of his protagonist’s developmental process, the German writer established *Bildung*, the principle of “formation” (for us), or “becoming” (for Bakhtin), as a literary concern in fiction. In other words, Goethe furnished the essential element of a new literary system, that of the Bildungsroman, by rendering the development of his hero as a process of identity formation.

To Thomas L. Jeffers, the “idea of *Bildung* was conceived by the late-eighteenth-century Weimer classicists” (46), where the “supreme Weimer meditation on *Bildung* is Schiller’s 1793 work, *Über die Aesthetische Erziehung des Menschen (On the Aesthetic Education of Man)*” (51). Not only does *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* promote the romantic emphasis on “personalistic pursuits”, meaning “the duty to realize our individual uniqueness” (50), “an innate individuality”, but it also “projects a history of and a model for such realization that would influence Goethe and the English novelists who came after” (51), in particular romantics and their heirs such as Carlyle and Pater.

We agree, yet it would be more correct to regard Goethe’s novel as a turning point in the history of the Bildungsroman and to say that the subgenre’s developmental history is long and interesting: it starts in antiquity and culminates with Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. Subsequently, it reveals remarkable development and continuity: the newly established fictional form or subgenre flourishes on the Continent in general within nineteenth-century realism, which provides its typology; the Bildungsroman continues to a lesser extent among the realists as well as modernists in the first half of the twentieth century, but it becomes a stronger voice on the contemporary literary scene, in guises as diverse as



realist, postmodern, post-colonial, racial, of magical realism, in the discourse of metafiction, etc.

It is, we believe, the permanence of the thematic perspective of individual growth, upbringing and formation of personality of a human subject, the continuous interest in this aspect of existence to be treated as a literary subject matter, as well as the openness of the Bildungsroman to originality on both thematic and narrative levels – when its main concerns and their modes of expression reveal flexibility within the framework of the newly emerging literary periods, movements and conceptions – that represent the main source of its vitality and the reason for its still being written.

In short, as the present study, as well as others, attempts to evince, the study of the English Bildungsroman necessitates (1) a separate diachronic discussion of its origins and development until Goethe's novel. Other approaches, synchronic in nature and culturally defined, may focus on (2) the Victorian Bildungsroman, (3) the Bildungsroman in the age of modernism, and (4) the postmodern and postmodernist Bildungsroman.

The present book series covers all four concerns in three distinct books, along with our attempt at some theoretical and terminological contribution and explanation, as well as a vector of methodology that is the unifying principle of approach in all three studies. The first book pursues the development history of the Bildungsroman from antiquity to romanticism and Goethe. Given the intense flourishing of the Bildungsroman in the nineteenth century, the second book focuses solely on the Victorian novel of formation. Finally, the twentieth-century and contemporary Bildungsromane, with all their complexity and the new thematic and narrative perspectives on individual development and formation in the context of the opposition between modernity and postmodernity and between modernism and postmodernism, require separate approaches that are materialised as the concern of another, the third, independent study.

The main reason for the division of the approach to the Bildungsroman according to three major periods constitutes the different perspectives from which the literatures of the Victorian Age, of modernism and of postmodernism consider the representation of individual existence. Prior to these periods – in neoclassicism – reason, rationalism, experiment, order, common sense, social responsibility, and moral principles govern the character representation strategies in the literary works. Against these principles, in particular against neoclassical social concern and its emphasis on reason and ethics, in romanticism the main concern encompasses personal emotional and psychological states; the individual is inadaptable, superior, solitary, intellectual, separated from community,

while the relationships between the individual and society or reality are those of (1) rebelliousness and (2) escapism, the latter usually in the framework of the romantic dualism of existence.

Following, and to a certain degree continuing, the romantic emphasis on individual experience with its personal, spiritual, mainly emotional accomplishment (as in Goethe and later in *Sartor Resartus* and *Marius the Epicurean*), the Victorian realists added and emphasised the social, professional, moral and family fulfilment more than the concern with individual subject. In the Victorian Bildungsroman, as in realist fiction in general, the character receives a complex thematic representation. The shift from romanticism to realism is the shift from the individual to the general human, from the subjective to the social, from the human being as master of his or her destiny to a multitude of character types as social units, from the narrow circle of personal existence to the wide social panorama containing many social sectors and character types presented in social interaction. Realism tends to present its characters as being defined by social and economic factors. The key-terms are “determinism”, “environment”, “heredity”, in other words, “la race, le milieu et le moment”, as well as “moral didacticism”.

In *David Copperfield*, Dickens maintains alive a romantic perspective in which human personality is highly emphasised and the character is master of his destiny, independent and able to fulfil personally in spite of all social interaction and determinism. The determinism of the milieu is strong but not successful; there is no real social influence or effect on the development of personality, and the outcome is the success of character formation.

In *Great Expectations*, however, the character is highly individualised but reveals strong bonds with the background: the character is a subjected subject, dependent on his milieu; he is subject to social determinism and as such subject to inner and outer change. Social determinism is strong and successful; society influences and affects the development of personality negatively, hence the failure of character formation.

Thus, as in the latter novel, the Enlightenment’s reliance on mind and reason and the idea of their inseparability from or perfect match with world and nature are already challenged in the Victorian period. However, this challenge will reveal itself to the highest degree in the twentieth century.

Modernists like Joyce and Woolf focus on individual experience in its personal, spiritual, subjective, emotional and now above all psychological dimensions, on abstract manifestations of the mind and on phenomena that make them possible. They keep the social concern to a lesser degree, to

show the impossibility of harmony between internal and external factors, hence the character's frustration and alienation. Simply stated, such novels lack the harmony which is often constructed for their protagonists by the traditional Victorian writers of the Bildungsroman. In their attempt to achieve the a-politicization of aesthetics and to defend the high art, modernists like Joyce and Woolf promote the elevation of individual consciousness over social action and interaction as one component of a complex system of binary oppositions including culture versus science and nature, progressive versus degenerate forms and trends in human history, aesthetics versus politics, literary versus non-literary, and highbrow modernist art versus trash, kitsch, degraded mass culture. As fictionally treated by the modernists, personal experience reveals the demise of the integrated individual subject through the expression of the fragmentariness of self; the world too is rendered fragmentary through thematic and narrative organization, such as is achieved by employing the techniques of montage and collage.

The thematic components of the novel of formation are adapted by modernists as well as by postmodernists to suit their various concerns and techniques. The postmodern Bildungsroman depicts the individual as "self", as well as "subject" and "being", occupying another position in language; the result of another conception and another discourse; author and character simultaneously; "subjected" and "ordered" by dominant, legitimizing discourses; or self being socially constructed. In all these cases the accomplishment is problematic. This view of the social construction of the self ignores the evidence for the growth of an individual through the socialization process, since the theory of the socially constructed self "ignores the way the self is constituted by an individual's maintenance of an original, often idiosyncratic narrative of him or herself. This is the key to creativity in the individual" (Butler 58). Therefore, we should speak about two directions in the postmodern Bildungsroman, (1) a postmodernist view of the individual as being, self, subject that is subjected, ordered, dominated, determined, constructed, and so on; and (2) a liberal humanist view of the individual as being, self, subject that displays autonomy and self-sufficiency, that is, a free subject that creates himself or herself on the basis of his or her personal experience. Liberal humanism as a major alternative to postmodernism relies on a set of ideas which takes for granted the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the subject and argues that the human beings are free and create or form themselves and their self on the basis of their individual experience. The Bildungsroman *Never Let Me Go*, for instance, raises this problem of identity and the character is denied autonomy and self-

sufficiency. Another novel of formation, *Midnight's Children*, considers both views, but the former is a stronger voice. *Nights at the Circus* also contains both attitudes, but the latter emerges as dominant at the end. *English Music*, another postmodern Bildungsroman, argues for the latter, humanist opinion, while also reifying Harold Bloom's accreditation of the canon and individual authority.

In general, despite particular periods of its production, the Bildungsroman is often labelled the novel of youth, the novel of education, the novel of apprenticeship, the novel of adolescence, the novel of initiation, the coming-of-age novel, and the life-novel. The anglicised form the "apprenticeship novel" is highly used, yet the "novel of development" and the "novel of formation" are the most frequently used terms, often taken as synonyms. However, from a diachronic perspective on the novelistic genre concerning character representation strategies, development is different from *Bildung* or "formation", and the latter, in our opinion, is the more accurate term to be applied to novels designated as Bildungsromane.

In this respect, our further assumption is that, until Goethe's novel, the main principles in the texts dealing with life experiences are the "development" of character and the "change" of his/her outer condition, as in various picaresque novels (characters may be round but not dynamic), whereas with and since the German writer to the present, the development is a process both biological and intellectual, spatial and temporal, internal and external (characters are both round and dynamic). *Bildung* or "formation" of personality – since it represents the expected outcome of the development and is reified by the change of inner condition as well – becomes the governing principle in the thematic arrangement that focuses on the process of growth and maturation, allowing the use of the label "Bildungsroman" and its existence as a still strong literary tradition and a systemic type of novel.

Our approach will argue the validity of the ideas outlined above and suggest a possibility or even method of approach to a number of Victorian and later realist, modernist and postmodernist novels of formation.

Avoiding any critical debates with the existing scholarship of many theorists and combining historical and theoretical parts with an approach to particular texts, the present books are studies on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century English fiction as containing in its typological diversity the Bildungsroman.

In its focus on a number of Victorian and twentieth-century novels of formation, the present endeavour, which is both theoretical and critical, as well as historical, attempts to define the Bildungsroman, to reveal its status

as an established literary tradition with strong diachronic dimensions, to argue its viability as a fictional system by identifying the main thematic and structural elements of its literary pattern, and to suggest a methodological basis and a typology of approach to its thematic perspectives and narrative strategies. The practical argumentation of these goals is achieved through direct interpretative references to certain Victorian and twentieth-century English Bildungsromane, both realist and non-realist, and of both male and female authorship.

To establish a vector of methodology in the approach to the novel of formation is to conceive of an interpretative modality which determines the direction of analysis and which consists of a set of methods, an ordered system of principles of research to be used for study in such a particular subject as the Bildungsroman. Such an interpretative modality would be helpful in the attempt to select theoretical concepts and critical ideas most applicable to this research, hoping to achieve pluralism and to conclude with new theoretical and critical suggestions of our own. They receive practical argumentation through the textual interpretation of a number of English novels of formation which would eventually reveal, although they differ as sharply as the lives they reflect, certain common, typical and typological features. These features or aspects found in every novel of character formation suggest a unique approach according to some principal elements that build the unique literary structure of the Bildungsroman and grant it the status of an ordered fictional system and a powerful literary tradition.

“Tradition”, because, despite the attempts of *Germanistik* at a monopoly of the Bildungsroman, this type of novel is multi-national and, in English-language literature in particular and even more particularly in Britain, there is longevity and impact of the Bildungsroman in the nineteenth century and in the periods, modernist, postmodern and contemporary, succeeding the Victorian age. Despite certain inevitable thematic and narrative changes, such as the realist, large diachronic developmental scale co-existing with the more experimental synchronic, small, and fragmentary one, or self-sufficiency of personality giving way to subjected subjects, we can easily find a great number of twentieth-century and contemporary realist as well as modernist and postmodernist novels that can be regarded as Bildungsromane or viewed as containing its main elements, in particular identity formation, which fulfils an essential and defining function.

“System”, because of the existence of a pattern, a framework of certain common elements, both thematic and narrative, which are interrelated and dynamic in the changing of their central and marginal features and status

within the system, and because of the possibility to provide a certain definition to the Bildungsroman. In this respect, our view of the Bildungsroman suggests a type of “generic identity” of the works designated as Bildungsromane as well as makes the term “literary system” synonymous with the term “genre” – and indeed the Bildungsroman is often called a “genre” – in the sense in which Alastair Fowler discusses genres (not subgenres!) as “historical kinds” and promotes the idea of the generic repertoire: a genre’s repertoire is the “whole range of potential points of resemblance” that a genre may exhibit, and a particular genre “has a unique repertoire, from which its representatives select characteristics”; these “distinguishable features” are various and may be “either formal or substantive” (55).

To begin with the definition, the term “Bildungsroman” is of German origin, being used in German literary studies since around the turn of the nineteenth century, such as the one conducted by Karl Morgenstern in his 1819 lecture entitled “On the Nature of the Bildungsroman”. However, it gained currency much later with sociologist and philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, who employed the term either in 1913 (Jeffers 60) or earlier in his 1870 biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher, and “popularised it with the success of his 1906 study *Poetry and Experience*” (Boes 231). The earliest English use of the word dates back to its occurrence in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1910.

To the present, the definitions given to the novel of formation have been many and often confusing. As it often happens in the field of literary history and literary theory, and insofar as writing about writing (literary criticism) is concerned, the word “Bildungsroman” has become a term of abuse, flexible and vague, and often misleading; to the present its meaning and value have been continuously changed, defended, disputed, and expanded. Some critics use the term very broadly also applying it to verse narratives; others obsessively declare a canon and tradition, and offer, like Buckley, taxonomic definitions. Dilthey considers the Bildungsroman an aesthetic expression of the Enlightenment concept of *Bildung* and stresses that the Bildungsroman presents a regulated development of the hero or heroine who has to reach fulfilment and harmony by passing through various conflicts of life and succeeding and interrelated stages of growth and maturation, yet each with an intrinsic value. Martin Swales, however, does not consider the acquiring of success or a happy ending necessary in a novel in order that it be regarded as Bildungsroman, although the process of development targets the whole of an individual person that has to be revealed organically in all his or her complexity. Some critics emphasize individuality and individual change of the self in the process of formation,

whereas others look more at milieu, regarding the condition of the protagonist actively involved in the social world as essential; the latter critics would claim that the *Bildung* is “the earlier bourgeois, humanistic concept of the shaping of the individual from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience to the threshold of maturity” (Sammons 42). Some see this type of novel as indulging into wishful thinking, others as a construct of various, including aesthetic, forms of ideology.

These other voices, representatives of more recent criticism, regard the Bildungsroman also as a self-reflexive or self-reflective novel, where it is neither the experience – either emphasizing individuality or involving society – of the protagonist, nor the personal organic growth or the self-realization of the hero or heroine that counts, but the narrative process itself, which renders the “narrator’s discursive self-understanding”; here *Bildung* or formation is an “epistemological concept” and the Bildungsroman is a “discursive essay in the aesthetic mode” (Swales, *German Bildungsroman* 4). Psychoanalytical, feminist, post-feminist, Marxist, post-Marxist, structuralist, post-structuralist, postmodern, thematological, narratological, post-colonial, minority, cultural and other studies only further broaden the definition and approach. Also, since the Bildungsroman claims its origins in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, a lot of critical attention comes from German scholarship, but, as the genre flourished and became popular among Victorian and later writers in England, there are many Anglo-American and other critics that approach it too.

Notwithstanding, there are still unfulfilled analytic perspectives, such as, for instance, the one that would be offered by placing the Bildungsroman in the context of the monomyth of the hero and the quest, since such a hero’s journey is a powerful and recurring archetype deeply ingrained in human psyche and therefore representative of and fundamental to human existence. Campbell explains that the monomyth refers to a hero’s and less often a heroine’s journey that could be found in all communities; the hero of various societies passes through various phases of a journey of self-empowerment and self-recognition that should transform both the hero and the citadel forever. Campbell associates the hero’s journey to the rites of passage from childhood to adulthood in which young people take responsibilities in their community, claiming that “the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation – initiation – return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth” (30). These three elements represent “essential stages [that] define the monomythic life: the departure from the native

environment, the adventure in the unfamiliar world, and the return with a new awareness of the world. This tripartite heroic experience is framed by a proper beginning and ending" (Golban 34). As regards the Bildungsroman, "this hero's journey corresponds to a process of individual development from a disjointed sense of identity to a consolidated identity, when the individual acquires a clear sense of aspiration in life"; in other words, "the monomyth reveals human experience, in particular the process of maturation of an individual, the reaching and acknowledgment of the adult self" (Golban 34), that is, what we refer to, with regard to the Bildungsroman, as *identity formation*.

Another approach, drawing on the assumption that the Bildungsroman is a literary system within the larger system of the novel within the general system of literature and interrelated with other socio-cultural systems, would be based on Itamar Even-Zohar's theory of polysystem. Even-Zohar views literature as a polysystem, a system of systems, a complex and heterogeneous structure, coherent yet dynamic, in that its elements are in a constant agonistic relation among themselves. Applicable along with formalism to the study of literary history and genre, this view of literature as a kind of system widens the approach to literature, whose system is regarded in relation to other systems and domains such as culture and cultural studies, translation, anthropology, and so on.

But we still rely on more traditional approaches to the Bildungsroman as well as on Tynyanov elaborating on system and Bakhtin dealing with the novel, and on formalism on the whole given its emphasis on internal factors in literary historical advancement and change. In the context of the established critical debates over the issue whether Bildungsroman is "about life" or "about itself", in Swales' terms, we would accept, like Swales, both perspectives and regard the Bildungsroman as "both referential and self-constituting", as "a novel genre which derives its very life from the awareness both of the given experiential framework of practical reality on the one hand and of the creative potential of human imagination and reflectivity on the other" (Swales, *German Bildungsroman* 5).

Our approach as a rather thematic one is not, however, a promoter of referentiality and is not against any aesthetic or structuralist views, but expresses our desire to see the Bildungsroman as literary system of both thematic and narrative elements, a distinct pattern of significant thematic and structural integrity.

Among other opinions that are worth mentioning, similar to Bakhtin interpreting the development of genres as corresponding to various historical stages, and to the view of various developments in thought,



technology, science, culture, etc. as influencing literary production, Friedrich Kittler regards the Bildungsroman as a product of the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution.

More importantly, Franco Moretti views the Bildungsroman as raising the question of freedom and as a “symbolic form” corresponding to and revealing modernity. Drawing on the relationship between individual development and social values and relying on the dualistic perspective of the plot as explained by Yuri Lotman – in terms of two plot types governed either by the principle of “classification” or by that of “transformation” – Moretti finds four historical and national phases in the development of the Bildungsroman. The first phase, of the classical German Bildungsroman, shows no sign of conflict between the individual and society, since it “had found a solution in the world of ‘sociability’” (79). The second, which is that of Stendhal’s “Restoration Bildungsroman”, shows the conflict and incompatibility between individual aspirations and social requirements; Stendhal’s works illustrate how the “dialectic synthesis falls apart” and explore “the opposite poles of a wholly public existence and a strictly private passion” (79). The third phase, Balzac’s, demythicizes individual autonomy and values social integration and success instead. The fourth phase is that of the English Bildungsroman, which excludes any conflict or opposition between personal development and social requirements. Usually, the protagonist (David, Jane, Pip) behaves in a way in which order is violated; nevertheless, based on moral principles and prompted by social demands and social determinism, he or she attains maturity and receives an identity – and subsequently order is restored.

The German and French Bildungsromane value youth and change; their English counterpart gives meaning and significance to childhood, whereas youth is a problematic and negative stage which the hero or heroine must go through unchanged (meaning to keep unaltered the values of moral essence, family, and so on assumed in childhood) in order to be rewarded with social integration and achieve success of formation. Moreover, the plot of the German and English Bildungsromane is therefore dominated by the principle of classification (emphasis on traditional, pre-industrial values of stability, order, success, maturity, self-culture), and the French Bildungsroman by that of transformation (emphasis on change and youth, signifying modernity).

We may agree or disagree with Moretti, as we should with regard to some thematic aspects of the Victorian realist (also referred to as “classical”) Bildungsroman and non-realist Bildungsroman, as for instance concerning the element of change. But what is to be accepted is that the

Bildungsroman is a “‘symbolic form’ of modernity”, and modernity is “a bewitching and risky process full of ‘great expectations’ and ‘lost illusions’” (Moretti 5).

Bakhtin, in his “The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism”, defines the Bildungsroman with respect to the issue of time-space and discusses the deep “chronotopic nature” of Goethe’s foundation of the novel of formation or, as he calls it, the “novel of emergence”. Bakhtin focuses on the image of man in the novel, where the emphasis lies on “the assimilation of real historical time and the assimilation of historical man that takes place in that time”; since the problem is too broad, it can be delimited and narrowed towards what can be taken as the defining thematic essence of the Bildungsroman, which is “the image of *man in the process of becoming* in the novel” (19).

Following this, Bakhtin lists a number of works that can be viewed as Bildungsromane. More importantly, though, his presentation of the features of the subgenre results in his definition of the Bildungsroman as a type of novel dealing with “human *emergence*”. *Emergence* is synonymous with his other keyword, *becoming*, with our own term *formation*, and with the commonly used *Bildung*.

Concerning these features, Bakhtin states that novels labelled “novel of education” (*Erziehungsroman* or *Bildungsroman*) are thematically diverse and different in their emphasis on a particular aspect: some of these novels “are essentially biographical and autobiographical”, others are not; in some, what prevails is the “pedagogical notion of man’s education”; in others, “the strictly chronological plane of the main hero’s educational development” with limited plot, whereas still others have “complex adventurous plots”; but the most “significant are the differences in the relationship of these novels to realism, and particularly to real historical time” (20). Such a great diversity of thematic perspectives forces the Russian scholar, and us, in order to offer an adequate definition of the Bildungsroman, not to assign the name “Bildungsroman” to various novels arbitrarily, but to differentiate and list novels with regard to one essential aspect, which is that of *emergence* and *becoming* (“stanovlenia”), for Bakhtin, or *formation*, for us.

A great number of novels present *ready-made* (“gotovii”), static and unchanging heroes and heroines. Such an image is the image of a human being that is shifted in space and along the social ladder by the movement in his or her life and fate as depicted in the novel and by the novel’s events and escapades in which he or she is involved and which represent the plot of the novel. The protagonist changes his or her destiny, or position in society and life (from tramp, for instance, to nobleman), he or she may

attain the goal, but “remains unchanged and adequate to himself” (20), a *constant*, with a solid, permanent image – that could be highly complex, the novel disclosing many individual aspects – and a static nature of his or her unity, whereas the various aspects of the main character’s life, fortune, destiny, social position, and so on vary. In such novels, the image is that of a *ready-made* hero; in this image “of the hero itself there is neither movement nor emergence” for the hero “is that immobile and fixed point around which all movement in the novel takes place” (21).

In such novels, the plot is made of the static hero’s movement in his life and destiny, and whose permanent and ready-made features represent the prerequisite to novelistic movement. Bakhtin identifies three types of such novels, which he calls the “travel novel”, the “novel of ordeal”, and the “biographical novel”.

There are other novels, however, representing the category of the Bildungsroman, in which the constituents of the plot are the character of the human being and his or her change and emergence. In this respect, Bakhtin defines the Bildungsroman as that type of novel “that provides an image of *man in the process of becoming*” (21) and explains it by arguing that

[a]s opposed to a static unity, here one finds a dynamic unity in the hero’s image. The hero himself, his character, becomes a variable in the formula of this type of novel. Changes in the hero himself acquire *plot* significance, and thus the entire plot of the novel is reinterpreted and reconstructed. Time is introduced into man, enters into his very image, changing in a fundamental way the significance of all aspects of his destiny and life. (21, original emphasis)

Therefore, Bakhtin concludes his definition, this “type of novel can be designated in the most general sense as the novel of human *emergence*” (“roman stanovlenia cheloveka”) (21), or, as we prefer, the novel of *formation*.

The human being can emerge, become, and achieve identity formation in quite different ways, where everything “depends upon the degree of assimilation of real historical time” (21), which explains the existence of various types of Bildungsroman. As presented and further described by Bakhtin, the types of the novel of emergence would represent what we consider to be some of the main thematic elements of the literary system of the Bildungsroman.

The first two types rely on a cyclical quality and represent two kinds of cyclical emergence. The first is the “cyclical (purely age-oriented) novel” (Bakhtin 22) in which, on account of its idyllic time, a kind of “idyllic-

cyclical ingredient”, the writer presents the process of development from childhood through adolescence and youth to maturity or even later to old age, “showing all those essential internal changes in a person’s nature and views that take place in him as he grows older” (22). The second type also follows a cyclical, repeating process or path of one’s formation and emergence “from youthful idealism and fantasies to mature sobriety and practicality” (22); in such novels, life and world are a *school*, an *experience* that a person goes through, which eventually leads to resignation and often scepticism. Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* can be considered such a Bildungsroman. Bakhtin finds such elements also in Goethe, for whose novels the way was prepared by Wieland (in *The History of Agathon*, 1766-67) who originated this second type of novel of emergence. The third type, having no relationship to cyclical developmental movement, is the “biographical (and autobiographical) type” where emergence occurs in a biographical time that is responsible for “unrepeatable, individual stages” and is “the result of the entire totality of changing life circumstances and events, activity and work” (22). Bakhtin gives *Tom Jones* and *David Copperfield* as examples of such novels in which the character is created along his destiny, which is created as well; the emergence of the character’s “life-destiny fuses with the emergence of man himself” (22). The fourth type of novel of emergence, whose elements could be found in Rabelais and Goethe, is “the didactic-pedagogical novel”; here, based on a particular pedagogical ideal, the writer “depicts the pedagogical process of education in the strict sense of the word” (22-23). The fifth and last type, which Bakhtin truly considers the realist type of novel of emergence, also depicts an individual’s change and emergence but differs very much from the previous four types in that it no longer presents the world as a background – static, given, same, immobile, stable and ready-made – against which the hero’s or heroine’s emergence takes place. In the previous four types, the individual changes and emerges within a given epoch and world which do not change or emerge; subsequently, the human being has to develop, change and emerge as required by the world and the rules of life that are stable and the protagonist must recognize, assume, and adapt to them. Such a world is a school, an experience, static and ready-made, “an immobile orientation point for developing man”, with private and biographical results in terms of emergence. Unlike in these four types of Bildungsroman, in the fifth kind, which is the realist novel of emergence, and which includes Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* (but whose development was influenced greatly by Rabelais and, to a certain degree, by Grimmelshausen), the emergence and formation of identity are of a different nature, no longer a private affair,

and no longer in a given world. Rather, “man’s individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence”, in the sense that “emergence is accomplished in real historical time, with all of its necessity, its fullness, its future, and its profoundly chronotopic nature” (23).

To conclude, Bakhtin finds (1) novels with ready-made and static protagonists but with movement and change in their life and fate (the “travel novel”, the “novel of ordeal”, and the “biographical novel”); and (2) the novel of emergence, or the Bildungsroman (the novel of formation), with changing and emerging heroes and heroines with either non-emerging world (the first four types of Bildungsroman) or with an emerging world (the fifth type of Bildungsroman).

The fifth, realist type of novel of emergence, which textualises the “historical emergence of man” (24), is the most important one because what “is happening here is precisely the emergence of a new man” (23) due to the person being placed at the point of transition between two epochs, and not within any given epoch; as transition is reached in and through the person, he or she is required to become a new type of human being. Exceeding, but to a certain degree also keeping, the narrow private and biographical domain, this type of Bildungsroman depicts the protagonist as emerging “*along with the world* and reflecting the historical emergence of the world itself” (23). He or she changes along with the changing world, and the image of the character in the novel encompasses the new, larger, *spatial* domain of historical existence that includes issues such as actual reality, social values, moral didacticism, social determinism and necessity, and individual potential, freedom and creative initiative.

While distinguishing between five types, Bakhtin claims that one should focus on the last, because it is this type of Bildungsroman, the realist one, that best reveals the novel’s assimilation of real historical time in all of its essential aspects. But in doing so, since the five types are interrelated, the critic should consider this realist novel of emergence in relation to the other four types, namely the biographical novel of emergence, the idyllic-cyclical type, the idea of education, and especially the second type of Bildungsroman. We would also say that there is hardly a pure novel to represent a particular type of Bildungsroman as classified by Bakhtin, and that their various elements are predominant in one work or another, thus giving its specificity, while all of them are on the whole elements of the Bildungsroman literary system built upon the principle of identity formation. If the term “Bildungsroman” ultimately escapes precise definition or interpretation, then, no doubt, its meaning should emerge more or less clearly from the critical analysis of the Victorian and later, twentieth-century and contemporary novels the present studies are

concerned with. Such novels are recognizable within the general pattern of the Bildungsroman in spite of vivid differences in manner and matter or of having their own distinctive artistic style and narrative substance.

Still, the standard definition, to which we also subscribe, regards the term “Bildungsroman” as synonymous with “novel of formation”, and states that it names a genre or subgenre of the novel, a fictional category or species, a type of autobiographical fiction which renders the process of growth, maturation, education, apprenticeship, in general of upbringing – to which we necessarily add “formation” – of a character in his/her both biological and intellectual development within a time span typically set from childhood to early maturity.

We would define the Bildungsroman in short as the *novel of identity formation*. With certain caveats, of course; namely, that the formation of identity is textualised as a *process*, diachronic and large-scale, from birth or early childhood through adolescence and youth to entering upon adulthood; this process is rendered in a biographical or autobiographical manner as *development* – spiritual, psychological and moral, rather than physical – leading to the *formation* of personality.

Formation as the end of the maturation process necessarily implies *change* (inner rather than external); thus, the Bildungsroman portrays the protagonists, usually *round* not flat, as getting rid of their static and ready-made features and becoming necessarily *dynamic*. With regard to the other variables – having to do with country, period, and movement to which the Bildungsroman authors belong – formation may convey a multi-sided personality, or mean self-cultivation, or signify social and professional success, or be reified as the balance between inner aspirations and social demands. Formation would promise completion and happiness, but it may also end in failure, or in a combination of both success and failure as conditioned by authorial message and thematic perspectives.

Formation as the culmination of the developmental process is *identity* acquired, which is an experience that includes the realization of the self, and, along with it, of various other aspects such as a sense of who one is, gender distinction, family and professional perspectives, social and inter-human status and role, modes of thinking, communication and behaviour, personal discernment and assimilation of views, beliefs and values, and an acceptance of life as continuity and sameness.

There are many other definitions in use, such as “the novel of youth, the novel of education, of apprenticeship, of adolescence, of initiation, even the life-novel”, where education can be understood “as a growing up and gradual self-discovery in the school-without-walls that is experience” and youth can imply “not so much a state of being as a process of