

# Victorian Fiction as a Bildungsroman



# Victorian Fiction as a Bildungsroman:

*Its Flourishing and Complexity*

By

Petru Golban

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Victorian Fiction as a Bildungsroman: Its Flourishing and Complexity

By Petru Golban

This book first published 2019

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

Copyright © 2019 by Petru Golban

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-3826-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3826-9

# CONTENTS

Preface .....	vii
Preliminaries.....	1
Towards a Definition and a Vector of Methodology in the Approach to the Bildungsroman as a Literary System	
1. Victorianism, Realism and Its Alternatives, and the Bildungsroman ...	60
1.1 The Victorian Age and Literature Speaking Diversity	
1.2 The Victorian Novel and Realism	
1.3 The Intellectual Background and Critical Theory Speaking Diversity	
1.3.1 Philosophy and Theory Shaping Realism	
1.3.2 Philosophy and Theory Shaping Alternatives to Realism	
1.3.3 The Novel-Related Theoretical and Critical Thinking	
1.4 The Victorian Bildungsroman: Towards a Fictional Typology	
1.4.1 The Representation of Personality as Identity Formation	
1.4.2 The Actual Childhood and the Archetypal Image of the Child	
1.4.3 The Larger Society and the Experience of Urban Life	
1.4.4 Formation as Success or Failure	
1.4.5 Biographical Substratum and the Novel	
2. The Victorian Novel as Argument.....	176
2.1 The Non-Realist Male Bildungsroman: Artistic Individualisation and Individuation	
2.1.1 Thomas Carlyle and <i>Sartor Resartus</i> : The Origins of the English Novel of Formation	
2.1.2 Walter Pater and <i>Marius the Epicurean</i> : The Quest for Insight and a Congenial Philosophy in Lieu of Materialistic Comfort	
2.2 The Realist Male Bildungsroman: The Character and His Twofold Maturation	
2.2.1 William Makepeace Thackeray and <i>The History of         Pendennis</i> : The History of Self and the History of the Age	
2.2.2 Charles Dickens and the Double Vision of Formation: <i>David         Copperfield</i> and <i>Great Expectations</i>	
2.2.2.1 The Circular Journey of David: Formation Achieved	
2.2.2.2 The Linear Journey of Pip: Formation Ambiguous	

2.2.3 George Meredith and <i>The Ordeal of Richard Feverel</i> : The Intrusion of Tragedy	
2.2.4 Thomas Hardy and <i>Jude the Obscure</i> : The Obscurity of Formation	
2.2.5 Samuel Butler and <i>The Way of All Flesh</i> : Looking Back in Anger at the Formative Process	
2.3 The Non-Realist Female Bildungsroman: Movement, Gender, and Genre Distinctions	
2.3.1 Emily Brontë and <i>Wuthering Heights</i> : The Romantic Side of Development and Formation	
2.3.2 Elizabeth Barrett Browning and <i>Aurora Leigh: A Poem in Nine Books</i> : New Genre and Gender Perspectives of the Formative Process	
2.4 The Realist Female Bildungsroman: The Power and Extent of Individual and Social Consciousness in Development	
2.4.1 Charlotte Brontë and <i>Jane Eyre</i> : Emotional Drives versus Rational Control	
2.4.2 George Eliot and <i>The Mill on the Floss</i> : The Incompatibility of Romantic and Realist Phases of Development as Formative Failure	
Concluding Reflections .....	307
The Typological Circle of the Victorian Bildungsroman	
Bibliography .....	347
Index .....	358

## PREFACE

The producers of literature share a similar attempt to institutionalise a system as the result of their creative effort and differ according to the modalities chosen to reify such an attempt. Authors are also differentiated by being referred to as “traditional”, when they conform to the established literary conventions, or as “innovative” when they reject the normative and prescriptive tradition. In literary history, the terms *innovation* and *tradition* are also used to refer to different periods, movements and trends.

Every new literary period, or movement, or trend results in and rejects the previous ones on the basis of the opposition between normative tradition and experimental innovation. Tradition and innovation are parts of a single process of literary change and development, contrary but interrelated, emerging in different periods under different names and in the system of different movements, trends and literary works, rejecting and succeeding each other, but from the second half of the nineteenth century to the present day co-existing as two distinct dimensions of literature.

In English literature, the *Bildungsroman* – vouched by a number of predecessors and based on a long developmental process from antiquity through romanticism to establish itself as a fictional subgenre with Goethe in Germany<sup>1</sup> – flourished as a self-contained literary system due to the aesthetic efforts of various Victorian writers facing this co-existence of tradition, as realism and, to a certain extent, post-romanticism, and of innovation, as symbolism, aestheticism, and other forms of the avant-garde.

English fiction, whose *Bildung* started in the eighteenth century, reached its maturity in the Victorian Age, and significantly, a great number of novels are *Bildungsromane* dealing with the development and becoming of a protagonist. The novel of identity formation became popular in particular among the realists, who, in their concern with the relationship between the individual and society, thematised identity development as a process with biographical implications and discussed issues such as the relationship between personal development and social demands, individual autonomy and social integration. The development of

---

<sup>1</sup> See our previous book *A History of the Bildungsroman: From Ancient Beginnings to Romanticism* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018).

the protagonist as identity formation requires this process to end in social fulfilment which would assist and sustain the spiritual accomplishment.

The formation of personality in relation to the background remains the main thematic line in most of the realist Bildungsromane, in which, as in realism in general, the author emphasises the realistic principle of fidelity to actuality in its representation, of being true to life, the social concern and the issue of determinism, the moral and didactic values of literature, while attempting to avoid what is subjective and fantastic in literary expression. Nevertheless, there are cases in which a writer like Charles Dickens or Charlotte Brontë could not avoid the heavy reliance on the sentimental, emotional, subjective, in particular in rendering child characters, and on mysterious element, by which revealing still strong connections to romantic or even earlier literary traditions. Also, Charlotte Brontë, in *Jane Eyre*, nuances the newly founded fictional tradition by promoting a self-assertive woman as main character.

The protagonist of the realist novel of formation is required to achieve social success, for which the necessary condition is the character's spiritual change. Actually, the inner change is more than necessary: it is inevitable as well as reified by action or external stimuli which determine the inner perspectives of existence. In order to achieve formation, the character must reach a proper correlation of inner, spiritual, romantic perspectives in the process of becoming (intelligence, moral strength, emotional and imaginative capacity) with exterior, practical, realistic perspectives of development (social integration, professional and financial success). This aspect of the Victorian novel of formation is best expressed in *David Copperfield*, for example, or in *Jane Eyre*. In other words, the hero in development must avoid any unilateral, one-sided consideration of the formative process, for, though successful as distinct parts, the inner and outer perspectives once divided cause the failure of psychic completeness and individual formation. This is the main reason why in *Great Expectations* and *The Mill on the Floss* the success of formation is a mere failure.

Personality formation is, therefore, a process consisting of both spiritual and social development, where the spiritual aspect includes mainly intellectual or moral maturation or both. The realist Bildungsromane focus yet primarily on external, materialistic, practical, in general socially related component of formation. As indispensable to this social concern, the realists would often treat thematically the moral element, which to them represents the most important spiritual issue in the process of character formation.



But there are certain authors of Victorian Bildungsromane that refuse to speak about the social accomplishment and focus primarily on the inner component in the individual's formative process. Such writers, including Thomas Carlyle and Walter Pater, are more interested in self-realisation than in socialisation, and emphasise the individual developing consciousness, the maturing self.

Actually, tailoring the Bildungsroman within a philosophical treatise, Carlyle with his *Sartor Resartus* can be considered the first author of the English novel of formation. Later in the period, and apart from Carlyle handling playfully the romantic tradition – and from Emily Brontë creating a gothic context for character development – Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* is another, perhaps the strongest, alternative to the Victorian realist novel of formation.

Moreover, in their concern with the insight of the character, these authors often reject the principle of moral maturation and focus instead on other subjective and spiritual elements, such as religion, philosophy, aesthetics, knowledge, intelligence, self-discovery, and the complex range of emotional and psychological states.

By being concerned with individual experience rather than social and moral issues, the Victorian non-realist novels of formation reveal a more radical departure at once from the traditional realist Bildungsroman and from the realist novel, in general. Emily Brontë with *Wuthering Heights*, Thomas Carlyle with *Sartor Resartus* and Walter Pater with *Marius the Epicurean* are some of those writers who – yet making possible and sustaining together with the realists the consolidation and flourishing of the Victorian Bildungsroman as a literary system in itself – conceive and argue differently from the realists for the importance of insight rather than the milieu in the formation of personality. Among them, Pater offered an alternative to Victorian realism and positivism on both theoretical and practical levels, as a producer of both critical thinking and imaginative writing.

As we shall see presently, in Victorian Age, the Bildungsroman is established and flourishes as realist and non-realist, male and female, “readerly” and, to a certain extent, “writerly”, optimist and pessimist, didactic and individualist. Despite its diversity, the Victorian Bildungsroman encompasses in its system various but constant thematic components such as the formation of identity, biography, childhood, city, education, profession, love, parental figures, and so on. Our main concern would be to disclose this diversity, while arguing about the existence of a Bildungsroman literary system, and to answer questions such as what kind

of Bildungsroman a particular work is, or what kind of formation is promoted in it.

In the first part of our book, we focus on period, its intellectual and literary background, and discuss the main elements of the thematic and narrative movement in a novel of identity formation. Our interest in Victorian fiction, in general, and in some of its most representative novels, in particular, is not aimed to disclose the condition of the novel in the Victorian Age or to point out the huge amount of theoretical perspectives in the study of its prose fiction as much as it is expected to assist us in keeping the unity of concern and the essence of our approach: the Victorian novel as Bildungsroman. For this purpose, we allot much of the Victorian fictional discourse to be the expression of an artistic process of rendering the characters' personalities as growing and forming within certain spatial and temporal realities from childhood to maturity.

In the second part of our book, we focus on particular authors and literary works designated as Bildungsromane, where the list includes the following: Thomas Carlyle – *Sartor Resartus* (1836); Charlotte Brontë – *Jane Eyre* (1847); Emily Brontë – *Wuthering Heights* (1847); William Makepeace Thackeray – *The History of Pendennis* (1848-1850); Charles Dickens – *David Copperfield* (1849-1850) and *Great Expectations* (1860-1861); Elizabeth Barrett Browning – *Aurora Leigh: A Poem in Nine Books* (1856); George Meredith – *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859); George Eliot – *The Mill on the Floss* (1860); Walter Pater – *Marius the Epicurean* (1885); Thomas Hardy – *Jude the Obscure* (1896); and Samuel Butler – *The Way of All Flesh* (1903). Our textual approach to certain thematic and narrative perspectives in these Victorian novels of formation, supported by our teaching experience, is aimed to achieve the practical argumentation in our study in order to disclose the flourishing, unity and complexity of the fictional system of the Victorian Bildungsroman.

The present book continues our first work in our series of studies on the Bildungsroman in English literature, namely *A History of the Bildungsroman: From Ancient Beginnings to Romanticism*, which discloses the rise of the Bildungsroman as a self-standing literary system. Like the previous one, *Victorian Fiction as a Bildungsroman: Its Flourishing and Complexity* would meet the requirements of teaching aid and consequently the needs of students of English in their literature classes, while also representing an attempt at academic research in English literature. This second book in our project should be useful to anyone concerned with Victorian studies and Victorian fiction, in general, and with the Victorian Bildungsroman, in particular, experts and novices alike, university students and lecturers, and the more general reader who would feel that his

or her readings in English and world literature would be enriched by the present book.



## 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. (Sören 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, nor Wilhelm Meister has 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, emphasise *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 hypothesize that its developmental history corresponds to, or rather is to be found in, the history of the 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 a romantic perspective in which human personality is highly emphasised and the character is master of his destiny, independent and able to be fulfilled 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 a perfect match with the 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, legitimising 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 socialisation 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 and makes the term “literary system” synonymous with the term “genre”. 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 a 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 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 a 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 the 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, demythicises 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 with 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 recognise, 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 that 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”