

The Bildungsroman Genre: Defining the Old, the New, and the Same

John Au

St. John Fisher College

Abstract:

The Bildungsroman genre focuses on the coming of age and rites of passage of an adolescent and/or young adult and is recognized for how it educates its readers about personal growth and self-consciousness. From the early nineteenth century, the coming of age genre had literary elements and functions that prominently differed from other types of novel genres. Now compared to our twenty-first century's bestsellers, the elements and values that made the genre significant and "original" has blurred over time. These "coming of age" qualities have become popularized in other book genres that target towards youth and adolescent readers. Books that revolve around an adolescent going through tough times can argue that this kind of plot is considered part of the genre. Another is putting a book into the coming of age category because it "educates" teenagers with morals and important life lessons. But in order to resolve these claims, we need to define what the genre is. To investigate this problem, readers need to know what are the essential and fundamental components required in this genre, including why they are necessary as well. Also, conducting a comparison between an old and contemporary Bildungsroman novel will help define the genre. The reason for this investigation is aimed towards definitional purposes. By acknowledging the true definition of this genre, we are able to recognize what the genre consists of. Moreover, this would allow readers to know the difference between this genre and similar ones. The methods used in this research process involves several types of archives and documents to read, such as paper, electronic, living, visual, and audio sources. Other tools I would utilize would be interview scripts and possibly the actual interview conducted as well as the use of reports and surveys. As for my preliminary findings, I have found several scholarly articles that

mention the history and literary aspects of the genre. Furthermore, the majority of the articles have referred to many example books that mention why they are considered part of the Bildungsroman genre.

Introduction:

Coming of age novels are known to educate its readers about personal growth and self-consciousness, usually towards adolescents and young adults. This genre of literature allows individuals to understand the subjects of rite of passage and liminality. The stories tend to have the protagonists depart their stage of being a youth and entering adulthood. In the early nineteenth century, this type of novel refers back to the Bildungsroman that prominently differed from other types of novel genres. The books did not just allow readers to intellectually develop, but socially as well. Based on its etymology meaning “formation novel,” the literary values of this genre that made it significant has blurred over time due to cultural and societal adaptations. These “coming of age” qualities have become popularized in other book genres that target towards youth and adolescent readers. Some readers may believe that J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series and Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* saga can be considered as coming of age novels, but one of the necessary elements these books lack are the realism within the storyline. On the other hand, books that do demonstrate definite coming of age qualities are J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* and William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*—due to the books exemplifying true human nature. Even though the time and culture has progressed in life and literature, the definition and components have remained the same, with the exception of cultural adjustments made within the story. On the other hand, readers may still be

unaware on what is considered a coming of age novel; however, by acknowledging the true definition of this genre, we would be able to recognize what the genre consists of. At the same time, this would not only allow readers to know the difference between this genre and similar ones, but also conduct a comparison between the contemporary coming of age novels and the ones that initiated the Bildungsromans in the first place.

The Bildungsroman genre can be defined as a complex type of novel due to its context. The stories are not just forms of literary entertainment, but education as well. In order for the novels to educate its readers, the genre must inform them through several literary aspects: psychological, social and cultural, philosophical and aesthetical, and historical. The focus is not aimed towards the surrounding circumstances and problems, but towards the protagonist's personal growth and development.

The Bildungsroman Genre:

The Bildungsroman genre was not introduced until the 1820's by German philologist Karl Morgenstern. On the contrary, the term "Bildungsroman" was not commonly brought up in literature studies until 1870 by German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey's research claims that the first novel that initiated the genre was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, published in 1795. In Dilthey's case, he explains that:

The protagonist engages in a double task of self-integration and integration into society. For Dilthey, the first implies the second, and thus he reads the Bildungsroman as a fundamentally affirmative, conservative genre, confident in the validity of the society it depicts, and anxious to lead both hero and reader to a

productive place in that society. (Columbia University, n.d.)

Evidently, this is the basic purpose and meaning of the Bildungsroman, a novel that “forms” and/or educates. As mentioned, the genre was not fully recognized until some of the novels had been published a few decades afterwards. The several noted aspects were not the only components necessary for this genre.

At the same time, there were fundamental elements required in the novel; otherwise, it could be considered as another type of novel, similar to the situation today of not knowing which category a book is in. For example, the difference between an epic novel and a coming of age novel is that an epic novel shows:

The protagonist who influences his surroundings. Coming of age novels presents more of the people and the surroundings influencing the protagonist and explaining to us the gradual formation of his inner self that is to be presented.

Also, this type of novel shows more events and happenings with their emotional effects on the protagonist, whom we should see becoming through himself.

(Hardin, 1991, p. 17)

Picaresque novels are similar, yet differ through structure and themes. The two types of novel do portray realistic stories of a protagonist going off onto an adventure; however, picaresque novels focus more on the materialistic side of life. According to Miles and Gottfried’s “Defining the Bildungsroman” (1976), this genre is “composed of a number of episodes loosely strung together while the Bildungsroman is a progression of connected events that lead up to a definite denouement” (p. 122). The confessional novel can be slightly mistaken with coming of age novels as well. Similar to the Bildungsroman, it does focus on the thoughts and reflections of the protagonist, but just

solely upon that and nothing else. In brief, the protagonist is a spiritual outsider, yet the novel is written retrospectively in order to find a pattern. Overall, the “picaresque novel is turned outward toward society, and the confessional novel is turned inward toward consciousness whereas the Bildungsroman maintains a peculiar balance between the social and personal, being able to explore interaction” (Miles, 1976, p. 122). Based on Miles’ taxonomy of novels, the Bildungsroman genre appears to be a combination of several novel genres (Figure 1-1). In a way, it consists of common literary and narrative components, such as a protagonist going on a journey without prior knowledge or experience, passages reflecting upon the individual’s psyche, or a satire of the presented time and setting. On the other hand, the coming of age genre is set to be more structured and composed to incorporate its role in literature; and again, that is to educate its readers.

Figure 1-1: Taxonomy of Novels

Type of Novel	Literary Aspects
Hero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The protagonist is an influential factor to his surroundings • Focuses on the special task or journey • Usually chronological
Picaresque	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turned outward toward society • Emphasis on materialism • Episodic
Confessional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protagonist is spiritual outsider • Turned inward toward consciousness, more on the thoughts and reflections • Retrospective

Bildungsroman

- Protagonist is influenced by his surroundings
 - Balanced of both society and consciousness
 - Chronological
-

Along with its meaning of a “forming novel,” it emphasizes the concept of liminality. The protagonists or “heroes” of the stories are liminal beings with an “empty personal slate.” In this case, they are characters that may be “represented as possessing nothing which their behavior is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint” (Turner, 1969, p. 359). The authors of the coming of age genre made their protagonists a culmination of several other characters from other types of literature. What tends to happen is that the main character of a Bildungsroman is composed of other literary components found in other protagonists of other kinds of storytelling or literature. For instance, “the origins of its characteristic hero have been traced to a number of conventions and traditions: to the hero of the old moral allegories, to the picaresque hero who in his travels meets all sorts and conditions of men, to the Parzival—German romance—figure learning slowly through his trials, to the Renaissance man bent on exercising to the full his many talents” (Buckley, 1974, p. 13). Based on the characterization of a hero in these novels, the protagonist is most likely to carry the same values due to his/her literary role in the story, a liminal being. It seems that no matter what the plot of the story is or what conditions and circumstances the hero is in, the characterization between one hero and another is most likely to be similar. According to W.C. Hendley’s “An Old Form Revitalized: Philip Roth's Ghost Writer and the Bildungsroman” (1984), he explains, “we often find the protagonist of the Bildungsroman in an uneasy relationship with his father or without a

father at all” (p. 89). Writers of this genre are more likely to focus on the main character’s early life or past. By examining what the protagonist has gone through already, readers are able to see how he/she developed before going through the liminal stage of adolescence. This component of the novel acts as a precursor to help put together the character’s true persona.

The Literary Aspects of the Novel Genre:

For readers to learn how the protagonist overcomes moral and human challenges, we must understand how his/her identity develops. One of the main purposes of the Bildungsroman is to have the protagonist continue into society with acceptance. The method in attempting to achieve continuance and acceptance is through psychological means, not through the assimilation of an existing society. A common misconception of this genre is having readers think that by having the protagonist finally integrating into a particular group or society, the character has fully matured and identified him/herself. In reference to Miles and Gottfried, the Bildungsroman concentrates more towards the emotions, thoughts, actions, and reflections of a total personality: physical, emotional, intellectual, and moral. At the same time, it is an attempt to balance the “social and personal” sides where it is played out through chronological connected events. Moreover, the writers also stress how the focus should be heavily put upon the protagonist’s mental growth and continual search for “psychological elaboration, self-questioning, self-awareness, and self-consciousness” (1976, p. 122). By concentrating more on the main character’s psychological progression, this allows readers to examine the protagonist’s emotions and his/her thought process of dealing with particular conflicts. It also gives

readers the opportunity to explore and analyze his/her own progression of identity and what steps he/she had done to reach maturity. In brief, the psychological segment of this genre lets readers observe how these liminal beings have walked out of their childhood and into adulthood as well as the transition in between.

Focusing on a protagonist's mental growth is necessary in trying to define the coming of age genre. But in order to study the protagonist's development, readers must put some emphasis on what is happening in the story, particularly what the culture is like and his/her stance in society. In accordance with Richard D. Beards, the protagonists in these books cannot fulfill their "personal journey" unless they come across certain crucial concerns such as vocation, religion, mating, and identity (1974, p. 205). For instance, Beards explains how protagonists tend to design and shape their own lives when the culture within an educative institution—such as a school or church—is in disorder. The concern of mating permits us to examine how the progressing main character interacts and/or exploits the member of the opposite sex. For religion, it lets readers observe how one becomes aware and summons their faith at specific situations, whereas identity, as mentioned, allows us to study the protagonist's self-development (Beards, 1974, p. 211-212). When a protagonist overcomes these concerns, the experience will heighten his/her sense of self. According to Buckley's *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (1974), it states that "the Bildungsroman in its pure form has been defined as a "novel of all around development or self-culture" with a more or less conscious attempt on the part of the hero to integrate his powers, to cultivate himself by his experience" (p. 13). The social and cultural feature within the genre coincides with the purpose of the psychological aspect. In a way, it also allows the readers to analyze the protagonist's

processes, yet the emphasis is more on how he/she reacts to the “cultural forces” he/she comes across.

To have the Bildungsroman genre be effective in its educative part, it must be written well, aesthetically and stylistically. Unlike the other aspects of the coming of age genre, the philosophical and aesthetical part does not strongly emphasize on the personal growth of the novel’s protagonist. Based on this segment, it is more on the need to make the reader feel like he/she is feeling connected. According to James Hardin, the Bildungsroman “genre overlaps with older types of novel, but is considered to be more philosophical” (1991, p. x). This type of novel is easily distinct compared to the other types since it has a balance between philosophical and aesthetical. In this case, the literature is able to teach about moral issues; but in order for readers to understand, there must be a personal connection between the reader and the author on the way it was written and what it consists of. In reference to Fritz Martini’s *Bildungsroman--Term and Theory* (1991), he explains how:

The novel appears as a transitional form between reality, that is, “history” and poesie. It deceives through the impression of reality wrought by prose and, in fictive narration, weaves with... the prosaic mood in which people usually find themselves into an entertaining poetic work. Moreover, it encourages the cultivation of the reader more fully than any other types of novel. It presents material according to the laws of beauty, as an artwork and it communicates to serve a purpose, to teach, and to improve. (p. 17-18)

Besides being educated through the protagonist’s thoughts, emotions, and reactions, readers are learning moral values through the connection they have with the protagonist,

the book, and/or the author. If the reader builds a relationship with either the main character or author, then he/she will have some sense of reliability, familiarity, and personal growth. In other words, if an individual realizes what the protagonist is going through and the situation is realistic and believable, a bond will form and he/she can be informed by what the character does in the novel to overcome an obstacle. Based on this part of the Bildungsroman definition, it is necessary for the novel to be written realistically and with the author's aesthetics and beliefs; otherwise, the objective of educating the novel's readers will have no effect since they would not believe such things could happen.

The historical features of the Bildungsroman give the author the opportunity to make a correlation between the text and the history. In a way, the novel can help provide a reflection of what the time, setting, and culture was like in the novel. In accordance with Tobias Boes' "The Apprenticeship of the Novel: The Bildungsroman and the Invention of History, ca. 1770-1820" (2008), the writer states how the individual formation of the protagonist progresses along with the historical development of time and setting he/she is in. Furthermore, "the novel works with concrete examples rather than with abstractions and traces how the currents of history pulse through ordinary objects" (p. 275). Coming of age writers also concentrate on the time and setting to help depict what society was like and how the characters reacted within it. At the same time, the sense of image and life the author created had also taught readers about social and individual development, particularly through the protagonist's progression in the story from beginning to end. Hardin's *Reflection and Action* (1991) described how the "Bildungsroman readily accommodated the concerns of a new middle-class reading

public, willing to be absorbed by the history of an individual and gratified to see how its collective experience of social mobility might be rendered as the individual's pursuit of an ideal of self-development" (p. xxiv). Based on the concept of this aspect, we are able to study how the factors derived from the protagonist's surroundings affect his/her growth and development. From that, we are able to take what we learn into consideration. In comparison to the psychological and social-cultural aspects, the historical does not focus upon the protagonist's emotional behavior or the issues and concerns he/she encounters, but the steps, reactions, and directions the protagonist makes in the place he/she is settled in.

Case Studies: What Makes These Books a Bildungsroman?

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*

As noted, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* is recognized to be the first novel of the Bildungsroman genre. Goethe portrays the protagonist, Wilhelm, as a young male who comes across two paths of either continuing his family's business or directing himself to the career of being a theatre actor. Wilhelm goes on a pursuit to marry an actress and go against his father's wishes, but plans go awry when he realizes she is with another man; thus, leads Wilhelm to take an alternative direction. On his journey, the protagonist encounters several companions along the way, which these characters are covert literary tools used to educate Wilhelm about the aspects of life, transitioning into adulthood, and him as a human being. The supporting characters inexplicitly teach Wilhelm these aspects as they come and go, significantly unfolding the

story even more. Goethe's protagonist then attempts to find a way into the Tower Society—a group of enlightened aristocrats—which his acceptance into the group begins to tie up the story's loose ends.

Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship fits the structure of what the Bildungsroman is composed of, in reference to Morgenstern's research. The main character's journey consists of many of the components, such as the plot being written in a chronological manner and having companions assist him on his adventure. To write a coming of age novel in a linear storyline is essential and one of the foundational elements that make it part of the genre. Boes discusses how the Bildungsroman is written this way due to its reflection upon how certain areas tell and organize time. From this, he explains:

Goethe explicitly theorizes this interconnectedness...which Germans and Italians tell time and organize their days. Germans, Goethe insists, rely on mechanical clock time to synchronize their activities; Italians, on the other hand, organize their lives according to the rhythms of the seasons...In other words, the two cultures resolve the opposition between cyclical and "emergent" or "linear" temporalities in different ways: in the German system, the linear element predominates, while in Italian society, cyclical patterns are still given a greater weight. (Boes, 2008, p. 278)

Having a literary work be told in a linear fashion allows the occurring events to be connected. If the protagonist's chain of events and actions are chronological and connected, it makes learning about him/her easier. In this case, readers go straight from point A to point B and comprehend how the protagonist got to a certain position as well

as why he/she got there. Throughout Goethe's novel, Wilhelm's actions were tied to an end result—good or bad—that educated and/or helped him reach the sense of adulthood. Examples from the book would be his path of not following his father's directions, attempting to marry Mariane, and meeting particular characters that were related to someone of importance later into the story. Overall, writing the story linear and chronologically make it easy for readers to comprehend the protagonist's actions and decisions. From that, readers are able to learn more about the character's development and thought processes.

The character of Wilhelm is a similar variation of the typical male protagonist in the coming of age genre. For instance, Goethe's protagonist had quite an uneven relationship with his father, which Wilhelm was to follow his business of collecting debts, but decided not to. As said, he was easily influenced by his surroundings—both the time/setting and characters—where his marriage proposal to Mariane, joining a theatre troupe, and losing individuals that were close to him were factors to his self-growth and consciousness. Attaining values from other individuals is another foundational component that can be found in the coming of age genre. The protagonist is usually at his/her own free will to accept these values. Goethe believes that, “communal cultivation of all human powers is desirable and excellent. But the individual is not born for this; everyone must form himself as a particular being—seeking” (Engelberg, 1963, p. 103). At the same time, Boes explains that a character tends to leave behind a significant value in one scene where the protagonist will use to its fullest—later on in the story (2008, p. 270). This component allows the protagonist to reflect and absorb what he/she does not realize is happening around him/her. Goethe and Boes' claims help portray the reality of

self-growth and awareness. In coming of age novels and real life, human beings obtain knowledge and wisdom on our own—in a way, we learn from our mistakes and the events we experience—but we cannot learn everything by ourselves. The people we encounter in life can sometimes lead us to experiences that will help us get through difficult times in life. From those experiences, we are given the opportunity to educate ourselves. By the time Wilhelm overcame obstacles with his companions, gaining experience on the way, the value of learning from other humans can be portrayed when Wilhelm receives his *Lehrbrief*, a certificate of apprenticeship. From the certificate, it states how “it is impossible for the individual to fulfill all one’s capabilities and attain all the goals of humanity alone” (Saine, 1990, p.122). This part of the story emphasizes the value of being educated by others, yet remaining true to yourself as an individual. The end of Goethe’s novel correlates with the idea of what to expect when entering society as an adult. In other words, we all learn from each other and ourselves, but the way we develop and think is the element that makes us diverse within society.

Along with the idea of the protagonist learning from others, it is also important for that idea to be clearly displayed and understood by readers. If readers do not see or comprehend what the purpose of the book is, readers will not be educated by its values. According to Boes’ other article “Beyond the Bildungsroman: Character Development and Communal Legitimation in the Early Fiction of Joseph Conrad” (2007), Goethe “creates a sense of community not by allowing for projective identification, but rather by leading his audience to the recognition that another human life... can nevertheless contain a moral that may help make sense of one’s own existence” (p. 128). In reference to Boes’ article, he claims how the author was able to let individuals recognize their own selves

due to the character's self-reflection and identification in the story. Furthermore, "the more inner life and the less outer life a novel portrays the more noble and elevated it will be" (Hardin, 1991, p. 88). As a result from this literary component, reading about a character's self-reflection and personal recognition permits us to analyze more about the protagonist, dealing with similar situations like in real life, and our own self-reflection and consciousness. Therefore, accentuating more on the protagonist's internal conflicts is more valuable than concentrating on the external situations.

The overall storyline of a Bildungsroman novel must be realistic; otherwise, readers would not believe such values could be accomplished or attained in reality. An element the author uses to make the story realistic is by incorporating it with current issues or conflicts at the time. In this case, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*:

Borrows from the English novels of social realism, a devotion to mimetic detail, an obsession with plausible plot and character development, and most importantly, a celebration of the ordinary and the everyday... Also, wars and social upheavals do exist in *Wilhelm Meister*, but they are relegated to the background of the action. In volume 4, chapter 4, for example, a marauding army is briefly mentioned, but it ultimately does not influence Wilhelm and Serlo's travel deliberations" (Boes, 2008, p. 275-276).

As mentioned, the Bildungsroman novel focuses more on development of the character, not the surroundings or incidents that occur to the protagonist. If the book was to detail the historical or current events that happened, readers would lose focus and the values would pertain more about the events—why and how they occurred—rather than the

protagonist. But by partially hiding it in the background of the main character's setting, it might allow readers to acknowledge how the protagonist reacts to what is happening around them.

To also make the novel believable and interesting, readers get the sense of Beards' four concerns that apply to the Bildungsroman's values. An example that Goethe uses is the concern of religion in his book. Based on the novel, the author portrays:

Wilhelm's belief in fate as one of the major themes. At crucial points in the odyssey from his parents' home to Natalie's castle, whenever he stands at a crossroads and must choose a course of action, he looks to the heavens for guidance and is strengthened in his determination by omens which he interprets according to his present desire. (Saine, 1990, p. 128)

As noted, a protagonist coming across some of Beards' four concerns from the article "Sons and Lovers as Bildungsroman" are necessary in a Bildungsroman novel. The concerns of vocation, religion, mating, and identity let readers examine and analyze a protagonist's development. In a way, when a character is in an educative institution, interacting or exploiting the member of the opposite sex, being conscious of a particular faith, or reflecting on his/herself, readers get to see the process of how he/she reacts to it. In other words, a protagonist encounters one of the concerns and we get to explore—from beginning to end—how he/she overcame the concern and what did the protagonist learn from that experience. From the second book of the story, Wilhelm's process of resorting to faith is looked upon as irresponsible, by the country pastor, since he gave himself up to unquestioning faith (Saine, 1990, p. 129). By including the situation of Wilhelm's faith

being questioned, it not only shows how it he is being educated, but how this example can be related towards readers in reality.

Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is recognized to be a contemporary coming of age novel that takes place in the United States during the 1990's. The book received quite the controversy for its explicit subjects, such as drug and alcohol use, sexuality, suicide, and abuse. Chbosky's novel is composed into an epistolary format where readers get the story through a series of letters, written by an anonymous adolescent male protagonist. The story starts with the protagonist being given the alias name of Charlie and proceeds with how his best friend had just committed suicide. In the midst of his grieving, Charlie must face his first year of high school alone and unguided. As the school year goes by, he meets new friends—Sam and Patrick—that introduce him to friends, partying, and adolescent issues that unbind his introverted personality. The more Charlie is exposed to teenage problems that he is unfamiliar with—in this case, dating, relationships, homosexuality, and trauma—the more he finds out about himself as well as a childhood secret he bears. By the end of the story, the issues that Charlie faces, allow him to find acceptance and a better understanding of life.

One component of the Bildungsroman genre that significantly stands out in Chbosky's book is the realness and believability. The author not only made the story realistic enough for readers to believe and follow, but it explicitly displays adolescent issues openly. According to an interview on Word Riot, journalist Marty Beckerman

explained that, "part of the reason why Perks connects with so many kids is because the situations described in the book are so universal, but it seems like the people who challenge the book don't want to admit these things happen" (Beckerman, 2005, p. 1). In response, Chbosky stated, "the more you talk about it, the more you take away its power and its mystery, and people can make much more informed and mature decisions about these things" (Beckerman, 2005, p. 1). Because of the book, it has been noted that it had saved two teenagers from committing suicide. In the story, Charlie and his friends deal with the issue of teenage pregnancy and abortion. By actually showing the severity of the situation and not ending it with a happy, fairytale-like outcome, it depicts the reality of the situation where such incidents can occur in real life. As previously said, the reality in coming of age novels—from the eighteenth century to contemporary—is vital to the genre. It not only makes the story realistic and possibly relatable, but it proves the fact that such human growth and personal development can happen in real life. Especially in these current times, certain adolescent issues within the stories become more complicated and risqué. A novel's content must be realistic and specific enough so readers are not misguided into making the wrong choices. In other words, writing discreetly or slightly imaginary can give readers the wrong idea on what can be done to overcome a personal obstacle, in relation to what a protagonist does in the story. By having the writer telling it as it actually is in real life—using the book as a tool—readers can be educated by the protagonist's actions, decisions, thoughts, and overall personal development.

Like Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Beards' concept of the four concerns can also be applied to Chbosky's novel. In this case, the concerns of vocation and mating seem to be most acknowledged, especially since Charlie gets his experiences

through high school. As for the concern of mating, there are various types of relationships going on—heterosexual, homosexual, incest, and companionship between opposite and same sex individuals. For vocation, readers get to see how Charlie opens up more as he is exposed to unfamiliar culture inside and outside of school. An example would be his English teacher giving him extra books to read, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Catcher in the Rye*, where he then discusses the meaning of the book and how it is sometimes significant to him. At the same time, he does the same with other pop culture references—The Beatles and *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. The concern of mating tends to run throughout the book. Despite the unusual way of naming this concern, it pertains more towards the interaction and/or exploitation between two characters with some kind of relationship. Charlie becomes very conscious and aware of these various relationships and how they somewhat function. From the story, we learn how Charlie uses his first girlfriend, Mary Elizabeth, to get closer to Sam; however, this angers both female characters since they realize what Charlie was doing. On the other hand, Patrick—the gay supporting character—explains how homosexual love is rough and not simple, yet these troubles can exist in any other kind of loving relationship. Furthermore, when Charlie covertly reveals that he was molested by a family member during his childhood, it gives readers quite the impression on why he may be shy and non-social around people. The way Charlie portrayed these interactions as well as the histories of some characters exemplifies how Charlie became the person he was in the first letter and how he personally grown as a person because of his interactions with people and opening up to them.

The way Chbosky composed his book is also viewed as a prominent element.

From the coming of age genre aspect of writing linear and chronologically, this is emphasized through the way the writer delivers the story. For instance, “the format of letters allows readers to immediately get into the mood of the narrator” (Bodart, 2002, p. 194). The use of an anonymous introverted protagonist also permits readers to deal with several issues without feeling too judged. Charlie’s letters do reflect chronological storytelling where the events and characters’ actions are connected to each other, similar to having a cause and effect relationship. With the content of one letter leading up to another letter, this helps keep track of the protagonist’s development. For example, Charlie usually mentions a situation that he was involved in. The letter that succeeds after tends to follow up on how the situation is resolved or continued. In the book, an example would be how at one point, Charlie confesses his feelings about Sam; however, the next letter reveals a scene of the two characters, sharing a conversation, which leads to Charlie’s first kiss, and causes him to discuss about his perceptions about love and relationships afterward. At the same time, letters like this are connected to upcoming ones whereas Charlie continues to deal with his amorous feelings for Sam, yet remains to be in a relationship with another girl he feels less passionate about. In brief, the use of letters to tell his story acts as a consistent data log or journal of what happens to him, yet is heavily concentrated on his thoughts and reactions. Thus, readers get to keep track of how he is progressing as a character and how he came to a certain resolution of a situation.

Brief Case Comparison:

Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Despite the time and setting, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* bear similarities (Figure 2-1). Both protagonists have the inability to go through their personal journey alone, yet are passive and empty individuals who desire to focus on themselves. Wilhelm is more “concerned with his own feelings and the products of his imagination that he takes note only of what touches something inside of him... The only obvious source of any education he may have had, any views he may have formed about life and the world, is the literature he has read” (Saine, 1990, p. 130-132). In comparison, Charlie does quite the same—as previously said—when he comes across a particular book or song that has meaning to him and the circumstances that surround him. By acquiring human values and experiences, they no longer become blank slates of a human being. Going through their journeys allows the protagonists to realize how they are going to continue further in life and how to properly overcome what may come in their way. Moreover, Wilhelm and Charlie endure the deaths of several people who were close to them. In Goethe’s novel, Wilhelm’s father, Mariane, his mistress, Aurelie, Mignon, and the harper all passed away. As for Chbosky’s story, Charlie’s best friend Michael and his aunt Helen are not alive as well. This goes along with the idea of the protagonist can go through grievance and guilt, without it severely affecting them to make wrong choices.

Case Study Novel	<i>Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship</i> (1795-1796)	<i>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</i> (1999)
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Late 18th century Germany • Leaving behind the family business to enter the Tower Society • References political views • Targets the concern of religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Late 20th century America • Topic of drugs and alcohol use, sexuality, suicide, and abuse • References popular culture • Targets the concern of

vocation and mating

Similarities

- Companions as assistance, problems also exist between them in both novels
 - Male protagonist goes on a journey of self-realization
 - Story timeline is chronological and ties in with historical contexts
 - Deals with certain crucial concerns (Vocation, Mating, Religion, and Identity)
-

Conclusion:

As of the twenty-first century, the Bildungsroman genre has not significantly changed. The literary aspects that make it part of the genre has remained the same, yet with the exception of the setting and circumstances being slightly adapted to the referred culture within a story. By defining what makes it part of the genre, readers will be able to know which particular books goes in a specific literary category. It is also important to verify whether a book is a Bildungsroman so readers can have some clear sense of knowing the content within the novel is practical. In other words, if the protagonist's process of self-growth and acceptance is real enough in the story, readers can actually learn from his/her process of actions, decision, and mistakes; thus, leading to making better decisions in reality.

References

- Beards, R. (1974). Sons and Lovers as Bildungsroman. *College Literature*, 1(3).
Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25111041>
- Beckerman, M. (Interviewer) & Chbosky, S. (Interviewee). (2005). *An Interview with Stephen Chbosky by Marty Beckerman* [Interview transcript]. Retrieved from <http://wordriot.org/template.php?ID=552>
- Boes, T. (2008). Apprenticeship of the Novel: The Bildungsroman and the Invention of History, ca. 1770-1820. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 45(3). Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&hid=111&sid=946109d7-15ce-4a3e-8857-77a687304526%40sessionmgr111>
- Boes, T. (2007). Beyond the Bildungsroman: Character Development and Communal Legitimation in the Early Fiction of Joseph Conrad. *Conradiana*, 39 (2), 113-134.
- Buckley, J. (1974). *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Columbia University. (n.d.). The European Bildungsroman. Retrieved from <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/english/orals/Bildungsroman.htm>
- Engelberg, E. (1963). Escape from the Circles of Experience: D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* as a Modern Bildungsroman. *Publications of Modern Language Association of America*, 78(1). Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/view/461231>
- Gottfried, M., & Miles, D. (1976). Defining the Bildungsroman Genre. *Publications of Modern Language Association of America*, 91(1). Retrieved from

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/461404>

Hardin, J. (1991). *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*. Columbia, SC:

University of South Carolina Press.

Hendley, W.C. (1984). An Old Form Revitalized: Philip Roth's Ghost Writer and the

Bildungsroman. *Studies in the Novel*, 16(1). 87-100.

Larrett, W. (1980). German Bildungsroman Review of The German Bildungsroman from

Wieland to Hesse. *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 13(2). Retrieved from

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1345317>

Martini, F. (1991). Bildungsroman—Term and Theory. In J. Hardin (Ed.), *Reflection and*

Action: Essays in the Bildungsroman (1-25). Columbia, SC: University of South

Carolina Press.

Saine, T.P. (1990). Was *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* Really Supposed To Be a

Bildungsroman?. In J. Hardin (Ed.), *Reflection and Action: Essays in the*

Bildungsroman (118-141). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.