

BILDUNGSROMAN AND COMING-OF-AGE: UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENT FICTION THROUGH SOCIOLOGY

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Abstract: *‘Bildungsroman’ and ‘coming-of-age’ are distinct terms used for literary genres that are largely similar, but that, in many ways, have been defined differently throughout time. Currently, both what they have in common and what they do not share can create confusion when studying genres or preparing an academic paper. This article aims to synthesise various points of view on the two. It proposes the use of sociology to better understand the developmental period in texts pertaining to one or the other genre.*

Key words: *bildungsroman, coming-of-age, literary genres, developmental period, literary analysis*

1. Introduction

When it comes to literary analysis, I consider it important to understand the genre a text belongs to before attempting to prove any claim because it frames arguments and challenges in either an advantageous or disadvantageous manner, which could affect how a thesis is presented and perceived. Nevertheless, a genre can be challenging to define, and understanding it could delay the progress of a research paper or even bring it to an abrupt end. Personally, I struggled in the early stages of my doctorate, particularly because the genres I was working with were not easy to outline. I am now compiling my findings into an accessible, digestible article that aims to save time and provide clarity for anyone interested in bildungsromans and/or coming-of-age fiction. I will begin by describing how various experts have viewed the two over time, then discuss how sociologists understand the developmental period of a person. Towards the end, I will synthesise the opinions presented into what eventually came to be my own view of the aforementioned genres: an inseparable duo that offers a classification for fictional texts that portray the physical, mental, and emotional growth of an innocent individual into a person with a stronger sense of self and the means to integrate into society.

2. Bildungsroman

As alluded to previously, the genre of bildungsroman can be difficult to understand due to a lack of consensus on what it means for a novel to be a part of it. However, the ways in which it has been defined might at least provide the beginning of an idea about how to achieve that. Therefore, I believe it is worth investigating James Hardin’s *Reflection and Action*, which has already compiled opinions from the most notable experts. According to him, it has been debated if even using the term ‘bildungsroman’ is fitting for the genre (1991:x) and that its meaning in literature became: “any work that describes, even in the most far-fetched way, a protagonist’s formative years” (Hardin 1991:x). This manner of referring to it influenced individuals such as Jerome Buckley – who argued that even though ‘bildungsroman’ cannot be defined, its meaning can be deduced from what is common in the literary pieces belonging to this category and encyclopedias such as the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, which at the time, described the genre as an educational novel primarily about the German culture (Hardin 1991:x).

The issue with both definitions is that they are too general; they leave too much room for interpretation. Buckley’s angle would be viable if everybody agreed on which books can be

classified as bildungsroman and which cannot, without exception, but this is an ideal situation that cannot be achieved, since there is no proper definition to help classify them as either one or the other. As for the *Oxford Companion*, while I think it is true that anybody can learn something about the world from even a piece of fiction, saying that a bildungsroman is an educational novel is not very accurate, considering the intent behind any literary work, which varies from author to author. There is simply no evidence that all bildungsroman writers intended to strictly educate the public.

At the center of the problem of defining the bildungsroman, Hardin states, is the word 'Bildung', which, in the 18th century, meant formation, or the development of personality (Hardin 1991:xi). In the 19th century, the idea of cultivation was added to it, "education and refinement in a broad, humanistic sense" (Hardin 1991:xi). 'Formation' and 'cultivation' are quite vague, but they both refer to the growth a person experiences during their transition phase into adulthood, if what sociologists understand by coming-of-age is to be taken into account. When a person is between, but not limited to, 18 and 25 years old, their entire being undergoes changes that typically define them as an adult in the future. Physical changes should be indisputable, but they also change at a psychological level – the way they view the world, the way they interact with other people, the way they solve issues etc.

Returning to Hardin, he notes that, despite Bildung's originally being associated with formation and cultivation, over time scholars began to forget the word's history and began using it "in a loose, casual, arbitrary, or undifferentiated manner" (1991:xi). In addition, it has multiple meanings in German, which can cause misunderstandings or incomplete understanding (Hardin 1991:xi). One of them concerns the aforementioned developmental process. Another is "a collective name for the cultural and spiritual values of a specific people or social stratum in a given historical epoch and by extension the achievement of learning about that same body of knowledge and acceptance of the value system it implies" (Hardin 1991:xi-xii).

In other words, 'Bildung' can refer to the social and cultural expectations of any group of people at any given time and the process of learning, understanding, and accepting those expectations as absolute. Perhaps 'absolute' is too strong, but Hardin's words would indicate that anyone going through Bildung ends up placing a lot of importance on that value system. Overall, the term is semantically complex to the point that forming a definition for 'bildungsroman' based on it alone is difficult, especially when considering translations from German to any other language (Hardin 1991:xii).

Hardin states that a potential solution to the problem posed by 'Bildung' was suggested by Jürgen Jacobs and Markus Krause, who came up with the idea of linking the term "to the intellectual and social development of a central figure who, after going out into the world and experiencing both defeats and triumphs, comes to a better understanding of self and to a generally affirmative view of the world" (1991:xiii). Simply put, they combined the initial proposal of focusing on what all Bildungsromans have in common (in this case, a main character followed along for a lengthy period of time) and the previously mentioned meanings of 'Bildung'. This idea may have been influenced by the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, who argued that the focus of the Bildungsroman is:

a young man of their time: how he enters life in a happy state of naivete seeking kindred souls, finds friendship and love, how he comes into conflict with the hard realities of the world, how he grows to maturity through diverse life experiences, finds himself, and attains certainty about his purpose in the world (1985:335).

Both of these appear quite similar and straightforward, but there is one aspect that they share, which I must dwell on just a little longer: the concept of Self.

According to J. David Velleman, the author and editor of the collection of essays *Self to Self*, at least back in 2006 when the book was first published, the majority of philosophers thought that “the self is a proper part of a person’s psychology, comprising those characteristics and attitudes without which the person would no longer be himself” (2006:1). In his view, however, “‘self’ does not denote any one entity but rather expresses a reflexive guise under which parts or aspects of a person are presented to his own mind” (Velleman 2006:1). In other words, the self is not a metaphysical version of a person that harbors everything that individualises the said person. Instead, it resembles a mirror that reflects back to them what that person is like. Therefore, the self is not one, but many, or at least three, as presented by Velleman (2006) in the following sections of his introductory section: the self-image, self-sameness, and the autonomous self.

To put it simply, self-image is a version of oneself that somebody constructs based on how others view them (Velleman 2006:4). For example, people around a person, whether or not they know the person, think of them as a fellow member of society. So the person thinks of themselves as a member of society as well. Of course, the opposite is also possible: an ostracised person can view themselves as having no place among other people. The self-image is the driving force behind individuals comparing themselves to others and empathising with others’ attitudes towards them (Velleman 2006:4).

Self-sameness refers to the consistency of a person over time, relative to their past and future selves (Velleman 2006:5). These past and future selves are not conceptually different from a present self. Still, they may reflect different traits than it. Self-sameness is linked to the self-image “because [somebody] can fashion his self-image and at the same time fashion himself in that image” (Velleman 2006:7), and that self-image directly influences their past and future selves. Both of these selves, then, become available to the present self, the first one through experiential memory, the second through a mode of anticipation (Velleman 2006:5). Their purpose, or rather the only role they can perform, is to give a person an identity as part of a two-pronged process, the other being the construction of the self-image (Velleman 2006:6-7).

The third and final self is the autonomous self, or the self that performs actions. A person can distinguish which actions are theirs and which are not by referring to their cause; they caused some, some were not (Velleman 2006:7). As a result, to perceive the autonomous self is to have causal understanding, which requires causal reasoning (Velleman 2006:7). Causal reasoning is a reflexive method which generates a mirror effect that sends back to the one employing it that which conducts the said reasoning in the first place, “that part or aspect of the person which seeks to understand events in terms of their causes” (Velleman 2006:7). Therefore, the autonomous self, the one who causes something to happen, is the one who can use causal reasoning and, in doing so, gains causal understanding, which means that the person can tell what was caused by them and what was not.

Returning to my initial point about what a bildungsroman means, both the definition provided by Dilthey and the one proposed by Jacobs and Krause should now be clear. To reiterate, while keeping in mind everything I have just presented about Self, the bildungsroman is a narrative that portrays a typically lengthy episode in the life of a character who, in the beginning, is uninitiated in regards to the world as a whole, but then gains experience that enables them to understand the social and cultural aspects of it, as well as the way the people around view them, how consistent they are in relation to their past and future selves and what actions they are responsible for. I personally believe this is a reasonable way to describe the genre. Before I close this section and move on to other literary perspectives, however, I think I should additionally go over the feminist concerns highlighted in *Reflection and Action*.

Dilthey’s view of the bildungsroman was cited most often in research on the genre (Hardin 1991:xiv). Nevertheless, it was not perfect in the eyes of feminists because it directly

or indirectly implied that the protagonist must be a man. Feminist bildungsromans were, then, written, but while some argued that the genre fitted well with the movement, Hardin writes, others were of the mind that a woman cannot be the main character of such a novel because her social circumstances are too different from a man's (Hardin 1991:xvi-xvii). Hardin explains that a collection of essays about female development in fiction, *The Voyage In*, used Jerome Buckley's point of view to state that women "do not have a chance to develop as males can, cannot leave the country for the city [...] cannot sever family ties as easily as men, cannot indulge in the sexual affairs considered obligatory (by Buckley) without suffering expulsion from society, and cannot have an active role in society and so come to terms with it" (Hardin 1991:xvii).

The problem here is naturally the reliance on Buckley's convictions, which are not accurate enough to apply to a genre such as bildungsroman. It is true that women did not have the same freedoms that men did, even in 1983 when the collection was published (Hardin 1991:xvii), but there is no reason, for example, for a little girl to go through exactly what David Copperfield did and not have her journey called Bildung. Besides, sexual affairs are by no means a requirement for the development of this kind, a point Hardin himself appears to imply.

3. Coming-of-Age

Kenneth Millard broaches the idea of coming-of-age in American novels in his *Coming of Age in Contemporary American Fiction*. He too begins by referring to Hardin and Buckley and the German bildungsroman, writing that "the word 'bildungsroman' was coined in Germany in 1819, and it means a novel recounting the early emotional development and moral education of its protagonist ('bildung': formation; 'roman': novel)" (Millard 2007:2). This definition is not as detailed as Dilthey's, but it does cover all the aspects listed by him; as long as finding friendship and love is the emotional development and the struggle with the harshness of reality, as well as finding oneself and one's purpose, are part of the moral education. "'Bildungsroman' has been widely adopted," Millard goes on, "as a term in literary criticism to characterise the generic conventions of any novel of youthful development" (2007:2). As previously presented, this is something Buckley did, by focusing on what all bildungsromans have in common, and it is something that Hardin condemned. Millard himself brings up the two points of view. Still, instead of picking a side, he concludes that while it was difficult to define the bildungsroman in the context of German culture, it is even more challenging to do so in the context of the United States (2007:3).

The fact that, semantically, 'coming-of-age' is used to mean 'to reach full legal adult status' (Millard 2007:4) naturally does not help the situation either. "In terms of literary genre the expression 'coming-of-age' is conventionally used of adolescence" (Millard 2007:4). Still. At the same time, Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye* and Huck from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, presented by Millard as the earliest instances of American bildungsroman protagonists, are teenagers; neither of them becomes an adult by the end of their respective stories. Moreover, coming-of-age novels with adult protagonists are, in fact, something Millard touches on when pointing out that there is no fixed moment when a person is completely done with their formative process (Millard 2007:4). This means that the bildungsroman cannot be defined in terms of the nature of the events that occur in it or the relationship between the age of the central character and their development.

Therefore, Millard sought to shift his perspective to "the dramatisation of that 'innocence' which childhood and adolescence are often believed to exemplify" (Millard 2007:5). This is something that all coming-of-age writings share and it is too simple as a concept to leave room for interpretation, so it is unlikely for him to end up in the same position as Buckley, which makes it a safe starting point. Moreover, innocence is deeply tied to what the

author calls the “American national mythology” (Millard 2007:5), which may offer insight into the creative process behind contemporary American bildungsromans. This mythology refers to how America came to be.

According to him, “one particularly prevalent conception of the United States is that it originated as a nation by means of a decisive break with an Old World that had grown corrupt and moribund” (Millard 2007:5). Of course, this refers to the British colonisation of the so-called New World and the subsequent war for independence. The initial move of leaving Europe behind “was widely understood in terms of a fresh start for mankind, both economically and spiritually, by which new opportunities would lead to a different future and a dynamic society that was innovative, forward-looking, and based on egalitarian principles of personal freedom” (Millard 2007:5).

The colonists promoted this vision using “the figurative language of adolescence to describe the New World’s emergent autonomy as a colony as it struggled to establish its own individual social identity independent of Old World habits and practices” (Millard 2007:5). Therefore, America is like a teenager who rebels against their European parents and sets out to build a life for themselves based on their own values and priorities (Millard 2007:5). This is akin to what Holden does in *Catcher in the Rye*, for example. By drawing this comparison between the birth of the American nation and a stereotypical teenager, Millard suggests that coming-of-age novels follow the pattern of the former.

The author, then, turns his attention to the scholar Leo Marx, who claimed that “the mythology of the American nation as a new beginning for mankind is a version of pastoral” (Millard 2007:6), which “encourages the veneration of an idealised past that probably never existed in the first place” (Millard 2007:7). In other words, the myth not only pretends that there was nothing before it, but makes it seem like America at its inception was the best version of itself. This implies that people, writers included, should always strive to recreate that young, innocent nation, yet uncorrupted by everything that came after. It is a conservative ideology that critics have taken issue with (Millard 2007:6-7).

Because of the political implications it poses and, more importantly, because it does not apply to all coming-of-age novels, the American national mythology, and implicitly the concept of innocence, are not enough to build a definition for the genre. Millard notes: “the contemporary coming-of-age novel might be usefully understood as walking the line between presenting its protagonist as a newborn who is innocent of history and of depicting a protagonist whose coming-of-age consists principally of acquiring historical knowledge” (Millard 2007:7). Simply put, the main character must not only be oblivious to how the world works, but they also have to come to an understanding about how they ended up on a journey of development by the end of the novel as well.

This way, they come of age “specifically by understanding his or her place in history” (Millard 2007:11). Based on everything Millard wrote, a definition could be built for the bildungsroman, using the aforementioned requirements for the protagonist as a base, but I believe it would not be significantly different from Dilthey’s. The conclusion the former arrived at seems to be just a particular case of the lead figure’s discovering their purpose in the world. Nevertheless, there is value in it, as the American literary product can indeed be called a bildungsroman, even though it has no direct connection to the genre that flourished in 19th-century Germany.

Another author who tackles coming-of-age novels is Jennifer Ann Ho. Still, instead of looking at America as a whole, as Millard did, she focuses on a minority community: Asian-Americans. In *Consumption and Identity in Asian American Coming-of-Age Novels*, she examines how a particular aspect of Asian culture, namely food, influences the development

of Asian-American teenagers. Implicitly, she seeks to redefine the bildungsroman by being inclusive of ethnicity. It is not that she disagrees with Hardin, and by extension with the precursor German experts who dedicated themselves to the study of the genre, but she suggests that those early definitions are not fully applicable to ethnic minorities because their growth differs from that of European-Americans (Ho 2005:6). A non-ethnic American only has to concern themselves with society as a whole, but an Asian-American must navigate both the expectations of America and those of their ethnic community (Ho 2005:6).

In the beginning of his introduction to *Reflection and Action*, Hardin expresses his dissatisfaction with how imprecisely 'bildungsroman' had been defined and how loosely the term was used (Hardin 1991:x), but Ho (2005) points out that this has been beneficial for feminists such as the editors of *The Voyage In* (7). "Re-envisioning the bildungsroman through the lives of women protagonists," she states, "allows readers to understand the distinct impact of gender in the coming-of-age process" (Ho 2005:7). This naturally furthers the feminist agenda. In a similar fashion, an Asian-American protagonist should allow readers to understand the impact of ethnicity on the said process. None of this would be possible were the concept of Bildung not as complex as it is. Its unstable nature enables Ho to essentially explore a new type of main character and a new form of coming-of-age.

Once again, her goal is not to refute "the principles of bildungsroman established by the earliest critics of the genre" (Ho 2005:9). On the contrary, her definition of the genre does incorporate them, but "it also attends to the differences of race, gender, and specifically ethnicity in the development of Asian-ethnic American protagonists" (Ho 2005:9). The novels she selected for her study all "follow the same pattern: a young protagonist embarks upon a journey—mental, emotional, or physical—instigated by a crisis of identity, and after his/her literal or philosophical adventures, s/he reconciles with his/her home (symbolized most often through his/her Asian-ethnic family) and his/her Asian-ethnic American identity" (Ho 2005:9). In other words, in the case of an Asian-American, their understanding of the world and of themselves has to do with them coming to terms with their hyphenated identity. Indeed, "Asian-ethnic American protagonists must not only negotiate their individual selves against the larger Euro American society, but also against the society of their families—often defined by an Asian-ethnic ancestry in conflict with the hegemonic values of the dominant order" (Ho 2005:9).

Before ending this section and continuing with sociology's view on the developmental period, I will include a simpler point of view regarding the literary genre as well. Hardin, Millard, and Ho have been quite complex in their wording, so I believe it is beneficial to reassess and reaffirm their knowledge in terms that are easier to understand to avoid confusion. In the opening of a collection of short coming-of-age stories, Steven Otfinoski (2009) associates the development of any teenager with "sexual maturation, personal identity, awareness of death, and other major life issues" (Otfinoski 2009:7). All of these sound like particular cases, but they can all be reduced to the idea of learning about the various natural and artificial systems that surround a teenager, as well as what the said teenager is like as a person.

Sexual maturation might seem like the odd one out because of its link to the physical body, since none of the previous definitions or attempts at a definition specifically mention anything related to anatomy or biology. However, its presence does not alter the fact that most of the aspects listed by Otfinoski align with what the previous experts theorise. Nevertheless, they are but a piece of the whole. What is missing is Bildung, the key component, which, incidentally, the editor arguably alludes to later by stating: "Experience in the world helps to shape and mold these characters and to make them, in most cases, better human beings and more able to cope with the adult world they are about to enter" (Otfinoski 2009:11). While

Otfinoski does not provide a clear definition of the bildungsroman, the aforementioned aspects and reference to Bildung imply that, yet again, there is a person able to grasp, in some capacity, the genre's essence. Bildung is an elusive concept, so perhaps that is all that is needed.

4. The Developmental Period

Unlike literary experts, who cannot reach a consensus regarding the bildungsroman, even though they can agree on a set of defining characteristics, sociologists seem to view coming-of-age in the same light. For Annette B. Hemmings (2004), author of *Coming of Age in U.S. High Schools: Economic, Kinship, Religious, and Political Crosscurrents*, coming-of-age "is conceptualized as a two-pronged process of identity formation and community integration" (2). Identity formation "is construed as a process of working through and situating a multifaceted enduring self that reflects adolescents' most deep-felt psychocultural commitments" (Hemmings 2004:2). Community integration "involves the particular strategic adaptations adolescents make as they navigate conflicting discourses in multilayered cultural crosscurrents flowing through community domains of American life" (Hemmings 2004:2).

Simply put, identity formation means establishing a self that can accurately act as a mirror, while community integration refers to the solutions created to deal with conflicting cultural aspects in a society. Recalling Velleman's theory about Self, the former can be done by constituting a self-image that a person can reflexively recognise as true and that the people around them can accept. Of course, the image must be maintained in order not to generate confusion or, worse, an existential crisis, so self-sameness is also necessary. The latter, then, requires the autonomous self; for causal reasoning is key when it comes to taking action. Hemmings, however, uses a different term in the context of identity formation: enduring self.

The enduring self is made up of a person's "innermost psychocultural commitments" (Hemmings 2004:6). It is the way in which they relate to other people, to everything material, natural, and spiritual, and to time and space (Hemmings 2004:6). In other words, the enduring self represents how they perceive and understand the world around them. "It is not a unified whole but a multifaceted entity" (Hemmings 2004:6), one that constantly shifts based on the development and circumstances of the individual (Hemmings 2004:6). Moreover, even if it is constantly changing, it "gives people a sense of continuity with the past while simultaneously providing them with an inner compass of meanings for negotiating the present and charting the future" (Hemmings 2004:6). Overall, it seems that the enduring self is a combination between the self-image, self-sameness, and even the autonomous self, due to personal views always influencing actions; Hemmings (2004) alluded to this as well (2004:6). Therefore, it appears that the enduring self is not much different from the three aspects of the Self theorised by Velleman.

In addition to the enduring self, Hemmings distinguishes the situated self and the endangered self. The former "is the outward expression of a person's understanding of what activities are linked to what goals and how one must behave in order to reach desired ends" (Hemmings 2004:6). In short, it is what somebody does, thus not unlike the autonomous self, in accordance with their situational awareness. Since situations change in time, the "expressions of the situated self shift from situation to situation as individuals adapt to different rules, norms, values, and other cultural pressures" (Hemmings 2004:6). For example, "expressions boldly displayed in one context may be carefully suppressed in another" (Hemmings 2004:6). This suppression, however, this adaptation to cultural pressures may sometimes prove too much for the enduring self, which can become an endangered self (Hemmings 2004:6). It is indeed possible for an environment to threaten the integrity of the self-image, of the enduring self in this case, which, as mentioned before, can lead to an existential crisis. Once again, there is some overlap between the words of Hemmings and those of Velleman.

Returning to the definition of coming-of-age, so far I have addressed identity formation, but not community integration. What community integration is might be clear, but how it can be done – not so much. Hemmings (2004) argues, in fact, that achieving it is hindered, or at least made difficult, by a set of crosscurrents that teenagers are exposed to (2004:8). She already announces them in the title of her book, but she elaborates further that economy, kinship, religion, and politics represent domains where more specifically-defined crosscurrents operate, such as dominant culture, liminal trends, popular culture, undertows, ethnic tributaries, local family worlds, and youth culture and subculture (Hemmings 2004:9).

Dominant culture, as the name may suggest, is White America, “grounded in middle-class Anglo- and Western-European values and lifestyles” (Hemmings 2004:8). It promotes freedom of choice. Still, at the same time, it indoctrinates the population to adhere to “economic norms, conventional nuclear family values and arrangements, mainline Judeo-Christian religious theologies, and nationalized political ideologies” (Hemmings 2004:8). Everybody must aim towards such a lifestyle, regardless of their ethnic background, in spite of its being built by Caucasians for Caucasians.

Liminal trends are destabilisers of dominant currents (Hemmings 2004:8). They appear at the so-called edges of a culture or society and ‘poison’ the consecrated norms, altering them in the process. An example of a liminal trend would be the concept of a family that is not comprised of a husband, a wife, and children, but, instead, refers to a single parent and their child/children, homosexual parents and their child/children (Hemmings 2004:9), or even people with no blood relations. Popular culture refers to “the vulgar, commodified, industry-driven common culture of everyday life” (Hemmings 2004:10): “It is spread through media by fashion, film, television, music, and other industries” (Hemmings 2004:10), and it is meant for and consumed by the general public.

The undertows are, to put it simply, the other side of the coin. They “constitute the cultural underside of what a community value most” (Hemmings 2004:10). If, for instance, a community values economic success and the competition needed to achieve that success, then the undertow is people doing whatever it takes, no matter how unethical, to overtake the competition and get rich (Hemmings 2004:10). Or, if a community values personal happiness in relationships, including the sexual kind, then the undertow is “an easing of constraints on sexual indulgences and other pleasurable yet potentially risky intimacies” (Hemmings 2004:10). Undertows are a natural part of society (they cannot exist without values and arguably values cannot exist without them), but that does not mean that they are not potentially threatening.

Ethnic tributaries are a set of traditions, customs, beliefs etc. that a certain minority is trying to hold on to or to revive in a world where the dominant culture is other than theirs (Hemmings 2004:0). They are typically of a religious nature, but “they also reinforce intergenerational patterns of family, economic, and political security” (Hemmings 2004:10). Local family worlds means “cultural systems containing knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, norms, and emotional responses that are peculiar to members of particular families” (Hemmings 2004:10). In other words, they are environments where a particular set of rules applies, where teenagers have to act in an almost telegraphed manner. “Adolescents in their families encounter detailed prescriptions for how they are to perform domestic roles and responsibilities, relate to relatives and nonrelatives, act in gender-appropriate ways, dress, talk, work, worship, and play,” (2004:11) Hemmings (2004) writes. These prescriptions may be similar to the social conduct they perform outside of the local family world, such as with friends, or completely different. It depends on how the family establishes them.

Finally, youth cultures and subcultures “are currents produced by teenagers themselves and are the most direct expressions of the attitudes youths have toward cultural currents”

(Hemmings 2004:11). Youth cultures are more general. They reflect behavioural patterns that adolescents have, including alienation, social rebellion, the desire to fit in by looking attractive, popularity, and having fun (Hemmings 2004:11). These patterns are distinguishable and generally antisocial. They seem to go against what adults stand for when it comes to social conduct (Hemmings 2004:11), but “they actually derive much of their content and many of their practices from dominant meanings, media-generated popular culture, and other adult productions” (Hemmings 2004:11).

Compared to youth cultures, subcultures are more specific. Within them, “particular groups of teenagers reorder existing meanings in a fashion that reflects their own personal predilections, cultural backgrounds, and social locations” (Hemmings 2004:11). They come into being by “projecting a group image through styles of dress, hairdos, and adornments; a demeanor made up of facial expressions, gaits, and postures; and an argot or special language code for communication” (Hemmings 2004:11). The intent of teenagers acting like this seems to be “to set themselves off from groups to which they are historically or personally opposed” (Hemmings 2004:11).

In her book, Annette B. Hemmings defines coming-of-age as a process that, on the one hand, involves identity formation and, on the other, community integration. Identity formation refers to establishing an enduring self that, despite constantly evolving, provides a sense of continuity over time for a person. Community integration comprises the strategies someone uses to fit in. They are under permanent influence from the various crosscurrents that exist in a society, which can make the said integration difficult. Although the author’s work is deserving of merit (there is no doubt in my mind about it), I think what she provides is only an overview of what it means to come of age. Therefore, before I move on to the second part of this section, I find it necessary to go into a more specific approach as well.

In *Emerging Adulthood in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett writes: “coming-of-age in the 21st century means learning to stand alone as a self-sufficient person, capable of making choices and decisions independently from among a wide range of possibilities” (2006:4). By ‘self-sufficient’, I understand somebody who earns enough money to cover their basic necessities, which makes me think of the English bildungsroman, as described by James Hardin, where financial success is seen as part of the protagonist’s development. Independently making choices and decisions should imply that the person understands enough about the world and about themselves to be able to do so. Moreover, the fact that there are multiple possibilities additionally indicates a degree of intellectual maturation, for if the individual is innocent, they are unlikely to see beyond what they want for themselves.

Arnett defines emerging adulthood as a kind of alternative for coming-of-age that does not leave as much room for interpretation. The latter is a period that can include adolescence, as I have mentioned before, at least in fiction, and can extend indefinitely, while the former has been roughly theorised as the age between 18 and 25 (Arnett 2006:4). This does not mean that development stops at 25, however, as it is possible to continue beyond that point depending on circumstances that I will discuss soon. As for what emerging adulthood actually is, what it is characterised by:

it is the age of identity explorations, especially in the areas of love and work; it is the age of instability; it is the most self-focused age of life; it is the age of feeling in-between, neither adolescent nor adult; and it is the age of possibilities, when optimism is high and people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives (Arnett 2006:7).

There are multiple aspects of emerging adulthood, such as identity and mental health, and a multitude of social and cultural areas, such as relationships and school or work, that the process impacts and is impacted by. Jean S. Phinney (2006) suggests that members of an ethnic minority may have their emerging adulthood shortened or extended depending on their community's expectations (117-118). Some of them are pressured into helping their families run a business or even to marry early and have children, which can accelerate their development (Phinney 2006:117-118). Also, the process can be shortened if people settle as adults in the same place where they grew up. If they never leave their community, they will not encounter other ethnicities, which will prevent them from questioning their own identity and reconstructing it (Phinney 2006:121). Otherwise, if they do leave, coming to terms with their ethnic background may take some time, slowing the process (Phinney 2006:121).

William S. Aquilino points out that family relationships have a significant influence over emerging adulthood. For example, "parental acceptance and support for independence have been linked to higher self-esteem, individuation, and feelings of love, and worthiness among college students, whereas parental denial of autonomy contributes to hostility and impaired social functioning in emerging adulthood" (Aquilino 2006:201). Simply put, positive exchanges between parents and children have a positive effect on the latter's growth, while negative exchanges have an adverse effect. This not only affects emerging adults but also the people they come into contact with, including their future children (Aquilino 2006:201). Regarding sexuality, Eva S. Lefkowitz and Meghan M. Gillen (2006) state that "most lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) individuals experience their first same-sex sexual attraction, same-sex sexual behavior, and self-labeling as LGBT during adolescence," (Lefkowitz and Gillen 2006:240) which means that "by emerging adulthood, the majority of LGBT individuals already consider themselves to be LGBT" (Lefkowitz and Gillen 2006:240).

5. Conclusion

Bildungsroman is a genre based on a term that many experts, including James Hardin, Jerome Buckley, and Wilhelm Dilthey, have attempted to define. Nevertheless, the core notion of Bildung seems too complex to allow for the easy formation of a definition, which has remained consistent in the case of Kenneth Millard's and Jennifer Ann Ho's efforts to define coming-of-age as well. Therefore, I have suggested that, to discuss texts that portray development, a simplified view of key characteristics, such as innocence, growth, understanding, etc., is necessary, similar to what Steven Otfinoski proposed. From a sociological standpoint, coming-of-age, theorised as emerging adulthood by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, is a developmental period between adolescence and adulthood when people explore the world and themselves, seeking to create an identity and integrate into society, as Annette B. Hemmings argues. This period of development is influenced by and influences a person's ethnic background, human relations, and sexuality.

Based on my findings, I believe the genres are too similar to be considered distinct. Rather, I view coming-of-age as a natural succession of bildungsroman in the American space. At the same time, they are not identical and have not even been defined in the same way, but they share enough elements to fall under the umbrella of development fiction.

In addition, the various sociological perspectives presented reinforce many of the literary ones, but for the sake of efficiency and not getting lost in details and numerous definitions, a simple approach might be the most suitable. As a result, I would argue once more that both include fictional texts that portray the physical, mental, and emotional growth of an innocent individual into a person with a stronger sense of self and the means to integrate into society.

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