

UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS IN BRATISLAVA
FACULTY OF APPLIED LANGUAGES

Registration number: 106007/M/2024/36124048426796036

**FEATURES OF BILDUNGSROMAN IN NOVELS THE
CATCHER IN THE RYE AND BLACK SWAN GREEN**

Master thesis

2024

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Master thesis

Study programme: Foreign Languages and Intercultural Communication

Field of study: Philology

Department centre: Department of Intercultural Communication

Thesis supervisor: PaedDr. Eva Stradiotová, PhD.

Bratislava 2024

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AFFIRMATION

I hereby affirm that this thesis represents my own original research and writing and that I have referenced all appropriate source materials.

In Bratislava on

.....

(student's signature)

ABSTRAKT

ŠTEFANOVIČOVÁ, Ema: *Features of Bildungsroman in novels The Catcher in the Rye and Black Swan Green*. - Ekonomická univerzita v Bratislave. Fakulta aplikovaných jazykov; Katedra interkultúrnej komunikácie. - Vedúca záverečnej práce: PaedDr. Eva Stradiotová, PhD. - Bratislava: FAJ EU, 2024, 77 s.

Diplomová práca sa zaoberá Bildungsromanom, žánrom tradične zameraným na psychologický a morálny vývoj mladého hrdinu, ktorý vstupuje do sveta dospelých a hľadá spôsob, ako sa vyrovnáť s problémami, s ktorými sa stretáva. Cieľom diplomovej práce bolo komplexne preskúmať žáner Bildungsroman v literatúre a konkrétne analyzovať jeho prejavy v románoch J. D. Salinger *Kto chytá v žite* a Davida Mitchella *Trináť mesiacov*. Jednotlivé kapitoly opisujú žáner, polemiku okolo neho, jeho charakteristické črty, stručne charakterizujú autorov a ich diela a následne kapitoly opisujú konkrétne romány. Oba romány sú príkladom žánru Bildungsroman prostredníctvom znakov identifikovaných na základe literárnej, komparatívnej a kontextovej analýzy, čo nielen potvrdzuje ich miesto v rámci žánru, ale zároveň dokazuje adaptabilitu Bildungsromanu v rôznych sociokultúrnych a historických kontextoch. Táto pretrvávajúca schopnosť umožňuje tomuto žánru rezonovať s čitateľmi v priebehu času a objasňuje univerzálnu snahu o sebaopoznanie.

Kľúčové slová: Bildungsroman, *Kto chytá v žite*, *Trináť mesiacov*, sebaopoznávanie, dospelosť

ABSTRACT

ŠTEFANOVIČOVÁ, Ema: *Features of Bildungsroman in novels The Catcher in the Rye and Black Swan Green*. - University of Economics Bratislava. Faculty of Applied Languages; Department of Intercultural Communication. - Thesis Supervisor: PaedDr. Eva Stradiotová, PhD. - Bratislava: FAJ EU, 2024, 77 p.

The master thesis deals with Bildungsroman, a genre traditionally focused on the psychological and moral development of a young protagonist entering the world of adults and searching for a way to cope with the challenges he encounters. The aim of the master thesis was to comprehensively explore the Bildungsroman genre in literature and, specifically, analyse its manifestation in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and David Mitchell's *Black Swan Green*. The individual chapters describe the genre, the controversy surrounding it, its distinguishing features, briefly describe the authors and their work and then delve into the specific novels. Both novels exemplify the Bildungsroman genre through features identified on the basis of literary, comparative, and contextual analysis, which not only confirms their place within the genre but also demonstrates the Bildungsroman's adaptability across socio-cultural and historical contexts. This enduring power allows the genre to resonate with readers throughout time, illuminating the universal quest for self-discovery.

Key words: Bildungsroman, The Catcher in the Rye, Black Swan Green, self-discovery, adulthood

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INTRODUCTION

The universal struggles of adolescence - self-discovery, disillusionment, and identity formation - have captivated authors for centuries. This thesis delves into this theme through the lens of the Bildungsroman, a genre traditionally focused on the psychological and moral development of a young protagonist. However, the term "Bildungsroman" itself has undergone significant evolution since its emergence in the 1820s, lacking a universally agreed-upon definition. The aim of this thesis is to comprehensively explore the Bildungsroman genre in literature and, specifically, analyse its manifestation in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and David Mitchell's *Black Swan Green*.

While separated by time and setting, both novels utilise key features of the Bildungsroman genre to portray the experiences of their teenage protagonists, Holden Caulfield and Jason Taylor. Holden, a cynical and disillusioned teenager expelled from boarding school, embarks on a journey through New York City, struggling with alienation and the hypocrisy of the adult world. Jason, a thirteen-year-old boy living in a small English village, navigates the challenges of bullying, family dynamics, and his own artistic aspirations.

This thesis delves into the ways these novels employ classic Bildungsroman elements to depict the growth and self-discovery of their protagonists and to what extent they make use of themes typical for a Bildungsroman genre. After comprehensively explaining the Bildungsroman genre and its elements, the thesis will further explore the extent to which these themes resonate with the Bildungsroman genre, particularly within the context of the American and British Bildungsroman traditions. This work will also briefly introduce the authors and the context of their writing, as the Bildungsroman genre tends to contain autobiographical elements. Then the chapters will focus solely on the chosen novels of Salinger and Mitchell. It will be examined how Holden and Jason confront disillusionment, develop their sense of identity, and navigate the complexities of relationships. Furthermore, the thesis explores how the narrative structures of these novels, including Holden's stream-of-consciousness narration and the fragmented episodic structure of *Black Swan Green*, contribute to the portrayal of their protagonists' journeys. Finally, the thesis explores how both protagonists mature, what their experiences on the Bildungsroman journey have brought them and if their feelings of alienation and disillusionment have been resolved.

By comparatively analysing these contrasting Bildungsroman narratives, the thesis also explores to what extent these journeys of self-discovery resolve, or perhaps refine, the protagonists' feelings of alienation and disillusionment. This analysis will primarily rely on literary analysis and the identification of Bildungsroman elements to assess them. Finally, the thesis will incorporate comparative and contextual analysis to consider how the socio-cultural and historical contexts influence the manifestation of these elements in each novel.

1. INTRODUCING THE BILDUNGSROMAN GENRE

The examination of the origins and history of the Bildungsroman genre reveals a wide range of theories regarding its inception and nature. Golban's book on the history of the Bildungsroman (2017) underscores the extensive debate surrounding various aspects of the genre. This includes discussions about whether it should be considered a literary genre, subgenre, type, species, or subspecies, as well as its tradition, main thematic and narrative features, existence beyond German literature, the period of its birth and peak flourishing, and questions about its potential decline or continuity, with considerations about the period of its extinction (Golban, 2018). Even today, scholars remain divided on the recognition of Bildungsroman as a distinct genre. The genre's German name consists of "Bildung," meaning education and "Roman," meaning novel in translation (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2024), add an additional layer to the debate. Understanding the historical context may provide insights into why some scholars refuse to acknowledge the existence of this genre. The German origin of the term marks the beginning of its history, rooted in the concept of education within a novel.

1.1. Bildungsroman as a concept

The term "Bildungsroman" finds its roots in the concept of "Bildung," referring to the formation and education of oneself. "Bildung" translates to "forming," "becoming," or "emergence" (Golban, 2017), and this notion embodies the sense of self-development fostered by lived experiences.

The first occurrence of the word does not initially pertain to the literary genre but rather to a broader philosophical and cultural concept. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, German thinkers regarded "Bildung" as a central concept in ethical and aesthetic thought. This concept is primarily understood as a process of development occurring at the individual, cultural, and sometimes even global levels. It involves the realisation and harmonious interrelation of diverse inner capacities, powers, and tendencies. The idea of Bildung as a developmental process laid the groundwork for the later emergence of Bildungsroman as a literary genre (Herdt, 2021). In the contemporary German-speaking world, the term "Bildung" has evolved to become synonymous with education and no longer carries a specific philosophical meaning. However, it continues to be closely associated with the goals of liberal arts education (Herdt, 2021). Despite its shift in meaning, the notion of Bildung can still be discerned in novels known as Bildungsromans.

Just like in the German language nowadays, the English translation of the term is “education,” according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*. In the literary context of novels, it is often understood as personal progress and life transformations. A broader interpretation of the German word "Bildung" encompasses education, culture, personal formation and character, emotional and moral development, and maturation. This complex interpretation conveys the richness of the term in the context of Bildungsromans (Nordic Bildung, 2024). The concept of education is here defined as the knowledge gained through Bildung, which is a combination of academic, practical, and almost impossible-to-transfer knowledge that comes from life experience, particularly any challenges and pushbacks. It encompasses emotional and moral development, emotional depth, and upbringing. These explanations provide insight into what the Bildungsroman literary genre is all about. It focuses on one individual and how he/she came to be who and what he/she is, as well as the various experiences he/she has had in his/her quest for a better life (Upadhyay, 2021). Education plays such a significant role that Bildungsroman has become known as the novel of education and the novel of apprenticeship, among other synonyms such as the novel of youth, the novel of initiation, the coming-of-age novel, and the life-novel (Golban, 2018, p. 8).

1.2. German Bildungsroman

Despite its German name, there is little agreement on how closely the genre is tied to German literature. Some critics equate the Bildungsroman with German national identity, even going so far as to say that it is distinctively German, implying that it cannot and never has existed outside German literature. Looking at novels in this genre from this perspective basically implies that the novels provide a thorough look into the German psyche, and a hero as a personality represents everything that makes a person German. In this context, none of the novels examined in this work can be designated Bildungsroman because they were not written by German writers; therefore, different points of view and theories were investigated to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the literary universe of Bildungsroman.

According to Golban, the birth of Bildungsroman was a complex process influenced by picaresque narrative, the eighteenth-century English novel, romanticism, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, and realism (Golban, 2017). The majority of scholars and literary experts credit Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as the "founder" of Bildungsroman with his work *Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre* (1821), which is considered a forerunner for this literary form. With this novel, the genre stepped over German borders and gained a chance to thrive

in Victorian-era English literature among realists (Golban, 2018). Further investigation revealed that Goethe's novel was inspired by Christoph Martin Wieland's *The History of Agathon* (1767) and Friedrich von Blanckenburg's *Versuch Über den Roman* (1774) - loosely translated as *Essay on the Novel* - in which Blanckenburg, influenced by Wieland's story, wrote his theoretical point of view on such writing. He marks *Agathon* as the coming of age of the novel form (Galens, 2002). Compared to the traditional novel genre, this one takes a deep dive inside the character, revealing the complex inner self of humans, which will be one of the key elements of Bildungsroman in all subsequent works and theories mentioned in this work. What distinguishes *Agathon* from all the previous works is the hero, his prosaic unusualness, and his constant change, to the point where he cannot be placed in a box and studied in a narrow way. The narrative progresses chronologically, and Agathon's development reflects this.

This new take on the character also brought about the significance of the environment in the hero's existence and evolution. In discovering his place in society and achieving the so-called "happy ending" that all novels had previously promised, *Agathon* and *Wilhelm Meister* both present an irony to the expected happy finish, with things resolved as they should be. Bildungsroman likes to play with the set premise so that even though the ending is predictable, the path to it captivates the reader. Nothing is promised in a Bildungsroman, and it is not always evident whether the hero will achieve his or her happy ending. These characteristics are comparable to those of Bildungsroman, although during the time these novels were produced, we cannot really talk about Bildungsroman as such because the term did not become known until after Goethe's novel was published. Only in the 1820s did the term Bildungsroman, as such, appear. More specifically, Karl Morgenstern introduced the word in his lectures, and it has stuck ever since. Morgenstern, a German, was profoundly affected by the Enlightenment or Age of Reason, as it is commonly referred to, emphasises reason and rationality, and works from this age seek to educate their audience with the goal of conveying a moral lesson of some type. As a result, Morgenstern utilised the word Bildungsroman while speaking on the self-actualization that individuals experience as they navigate the journey from childhood to young adulthood in order to educate the reader on inner self discoveries. (Mimisawhney, 2020). Morgenstern's lectures and the Age of Enlightenment influence Bildungsroman as a "novel of education," where the protagonist's development comes from his education and his journey is completed thanks to the education he gained throughout the story.

1.3. Expansion of the Bildungsroman

Given that Bildungsroman is not a solely German genre, its global expansion occurred a few centuries after the “prototype” work, *Wilhelm Meister Lehrjahre*, although this novel played an important role in it. Focusing on English literature and the Victorian era, where Bildungsroman flourished the most, Thomas Carlyle was the first to bring Goethe's novel to English audiences. He released its translation in 1824 under the title *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. His own beliefs, influenced by Goethe, were compiled in his only finished work of fiction, *Sartor Resartus*, which emphasised the importance of meaningful work or action for personal development. Despite criticism that his work oversimplified Goethe's principles, his impact led to a wave of English Bildungsroman in the 1830s and 1840s (Salmon, 2019).

Many Victorian authors adopted the style of the new type of novel, which allowed them to discuss their characters' complicated interior worlds. Defined by the Industrial Revolution, the rise of the middle class, and a flourishing literary scene, the Victorian Era marked a distinct period within the 19th century. According to Franco Moretti, the 19th-century European Bildungsroman can be split into two distinct periods. The first half (1789-1848) reflects a more optimistic outlook, where characters navigate a "balance between the constraints of modern socialisation and its benefits." However, the mood shifts dramatically in the second half, with a "gloomy downward trajectory" emerging from the mid-century onwards (Salmon, 2019, p. 71). We can see this reflected in the coming-of-age novels of that period. Early works tended to be optimistic, portraying characters who successfully forge their identities. Later works, however, became more pessimistic, reflecting themes of disillusionment and alienation. This shift foreshadows the focus on these themes in modern coming-of-age stories as well (Salmon, 2019). What appealed to Victorian writers, and particularly realists, about the genre was the process of character development and formation in relation to society, which provided a great example of an individual's experience playing out in the social background, which happened to be the main topic of the Victorian years - social struggles of class, inequality, and values.

The place the Bildungsroman gained to flourish in the English Victorian period, many argue, is proof of how Bildungsroman cannot be owed solely to Germans and Goethe, and its rise is more of a complex process that did not stop there in the nineteenth century but continued and paved its way through the first half of the twentieth century, the postmodern world, and continues to reveal itself in a new and unique way in the present (Golban, 2018).

That is precisely one of the reasons why it is so difficult to discover a universal definition of the genre; as a result of its scarcity, authors have all created their own versions over time. When viewing the rise of Bildungsroman as a process, it is easy to trace its characteristics and inspirations in texts from before its birth.

1.4. Definition of the Bildungsroman genre

Defining the genre means taking into consideration its primary concept, which is "Bildung." All interpretations of "Bildung" involve the concept of growth, whether it be psychological or moral. The core theme of the genre revolves around a protagonist's journey of discovery—uncovering aspects of themselves and the world around them. While the core of the Bildungsroman remains self-discovery, its portrayal adapts to reflect modern realities. The German concept of "Bildung," central to the genre and exemplified by Entwicklungsroman ("novel of development"), has sparked debate within literary circles regarding its interpretation.

In this context, development is specifically defined as the protagonist's transition from youth to adulthood. This does not necessarily require the entire process to occur within the novel. Instead, it may depict a key moment in their lives highlighted by transformative changes, demonstrating how these experiences contribute to the character's development, even if their adult life is not explicitly shown.

Keeping the concept of "Bildung" in mind, the main focus of all Bildungsromans is the individual in the process of becoming, growth, and development, whose essence is the principle of identity formation (Golban, 2017). As Iversen writes, "in an historical perspective, the bildungsroman is among the earliest novel types to give expression to the individualised personality and voice of the protagonist. Older narrative forms tended to express more "eternal truths" and use characters as examples of social values such as proper conduct and godliness, while the bildungsroman foregrounds and values the Individual" (Iversen, 2009, p. 138).

To find a comprehensive definition to be used for further analysis of the Bildungsromans chosen for this work, several dictionaries of the English language that contain the term Bildungsroman were examined, as they are considered relevant sources for the definition of terms established by language experts. *The Cambridge Dictionary* offers a comprehensive definition of Bildungsroman, explaining it as "a story, especially in the form of a novel [...] that is about events and experiences in the life of the main character as they

grow up and become adults” (2024). This essentially describes and generalises the Bildungsroman as we know it today. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the first actual source of the term "Bildungsroman" in English, appearing there for the first time in 1910 (Golban, 2018), explains Bildungsroman as "a class of novel that depicts and explores the manner in which the protagonist develops morally and psychologically” (2024). This dictionary also mentions other variations of the Bildungsroman: a novel of upbringing focused on training and formal education, differentiating from the classical Bildungsroman in the way that its hero is educated by an educational institution rather than by his or her social environment or his/her experiences - Erziehungsroman, a novel of [character] development and general growth - Entwicklungsroman, and a novel with a narrative of the growth of its protagonist into the vocation of an artist - Künstlerroman (Upadhyay, 2021). It is important to note that while terms like "coming-of-age novel," "novel of development," or "novel of education" are often used synonymously with Bildungsroman, they evolved over time and acquired distinct qualities that qualify them as various sorts of Bildungsromans and therefore they offer a less nuanced understanding. Critics and scholars argue that these terms are better suited to describe subgenres within the broader category of the Bildungsroman (Upadhyay, 2021). However, in English literature, these sorts tend to blend together, making it difficult to tell which is which in the literature.

Encyclopaedia Britannica also further defines the genre as typically concluding on a good note, although it also contains elements of resignation and nostalgia. As it was already mentioned before, especially since the twentieth century, instead of leading the hero to a happy ending, novels frequently conclude in resignation, without a resolution, or even with the protagonist's death. Scholars frequently engage in discussions on a related question: to what extent does the novel need to be positive in order to be classified as a Bildungsroman?

In some coming-of-age stories, especially those written since the Victorian era, the hero goes through various challenges and learns to overcome them. This journey often leads to a happy ending, where the hero finds their place in the world, achieves success in their career, or gets married. In short, these stories show how characters triumph over life's difficulties and achieve a sense of fulfilment, resulting in a “happy ending.” However, in the case of modern Bildungsromans, the heroes do not always have a happy ending, and the resolution of their story can leave readers bittersweet; resignation and death resolve a story as well, although not in the way that readers expect or wish. Modern Bildungsromans may not shy away from presenting negative self-realizations or leaving the narrative unresolved, emphasising the transformative experiences themselves rather than a predetermined, positive

outcome. This shift underscores the genre's capacity to explore the multifaceted nature of human development, acknowledging the possibility of growth without a guaranteed "happily ever after" (Golban, 2018). Furthermore, this emphasis on the journey aligns with the concept of the Bildungsroman as a "novel of formation." Unlike traditional coming-of-age narratives with a definitive ending, these works acknowledge that the young protagonists' lives continue beyond the final page, and they do not necessarily have to reach adulthood as such. Their realisations, major or minor, may not lead to immediate positive or negative outcomes, reflecting the ongoing nature of personal development. This focus on the process of formation, rather than a fixed destination, resonates with the realities of young adulthood, making these contemporary Bildungsromans more realistic and relevant.

The main subject of Bildungsroman, according to another terminology source, *Glossary of Literary Terms* (2024), is "the development of the protagonist's mind and character as they progress from childhood through various experiences—and often through a spiritual crisis—to maturity, which usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world" (Abrams, Harpham, 2009, p. 229).

The protagonist's identity creation is central to all the novels classified as Bildungsromans. The term "novel of [identity] formation" is defined as "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 between childhood and early maturity" (Golban, 2018, p. 18). Formation is viewed as a process of spiritual, psychological, or moral development, rather than a physical one, that leads to personality formation. This process allows a protagonist to develop an identity, which is especially crucial when he or she transitions from childhood to adulthood. The realisation of one's identity comes through "the realisation 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 interhuman 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" (Golban 2018, p. 18).

1.5. Main thematic and narrative features

To look for Bildungsroman features in the novels chosen for this work, it is critical to establish a consistent definition of the Bildungsroman genre that applies to both discussed

works, classifying them as Bildungsromans and establishing a set of core qualities that can be used to methodically analyse the numerous features of these literary works. By establishing a clear definition and identifying key characteristics shared by both novels, a systematic approach to analysing their various aspects can be created.

To identify the defining characteristics of a Bildungsroman and examine the two provided works effectively, it is necessary to research the genre's typical features. Notably, Wilhelm Dilthey's definition, outlined in his influential work *Experience and Poetry* (1906), serves as a crucial starting point for the analysis:

“They all portray a young man of their time: how he enters life in a happy state of naiveté 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”
(quoted in Swales 98).

The "young man" in question is the Bildungsroman's protagonist, who matures during the story and represents the historical age in which he lives. This, however, does not identify him as a type but rather as a well-rounded and dynamic character who is yearning to escape his situation, so he sets out on a journey. This young protagonist embarks on a journey not necessarily in the literal sense but rather as a symbolic representation of their growth and departure from childhood. This metaphorical journey, drawing inspiration from the picaresque tradition, remains a hallmark feature of the Bildungsroman even in contemporary literature. Picaresque novels feature an unreliable narrator, the "pícaro" or antihero, introduced through episodic first-person adventures. This personal touch allows readers to engage with the protagonist's perspective and social observations. Notably, both Bildungsroman and picaresque novels share the concept of a wandering protagonist, which is not always literal. While drawing inspiration from picaresque tradition, Bildungsroman journeys delve deeper, often focusing on the protagonist's psychological growth or, in specific cases like Victorian novels, their social rise.

1.6. Narrator shaping the Bildungsroman hero

While the protagonist plays a central role in any story, the Bildungsroman genre adds another layer of complexity: the relationship between the protagonist and the narrator.

Though protagonists often take on the narrator role themselves, the genre allows for significant variation in both the importance and style of this narrative function. In the foundational work, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, the narrator adopts a third-person omniscient perspective, granting access to the protagonist's thoughts and feelings. However, this narrator is not entirely objective, revealing his evolving stance from initial irony to growing respect for Wilhelm's character (McKay 1990). This contrasts distinctly with *The Catcher in the Rye*, a 20th-century Bildungsroman classic and the novel that will be analysed in greater detail in the empirical part of this thesis. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, the protagonist serves as the narrator, offering unfiltered access to his subjective thoughts and feelings. This subjectivity often renders him unreliable, showcasing the potential drawbacks of a first-person perspective in Bildungsroman. Nevertheless, it allows readers unparalleled intimacy with the character's internal struggles and growth. The choice between first and third-person narration presents a trade-off. While a first-person narrator offers a deeply personal perspective, an omniscient narrator allows for a broader exploration of the surrounding world and other characters. Both approaches, however, share a commonality: they can be recounted from a more mature perspective. This "cognitive advantage" allows the narrator, regardless of person, to view the protagonist with a sense of ironic distance, highlighting the character's growth and development. Iversen (2009) identifies the dual perspective of the protagonist and their social context as a hallmark of the Bildungsroman genre.

Building on this concept, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* and its third-person narrator's initial irony towards Wilhelm gradually evolve into respect as the protagonist matures. Similarly, Holden Caulfield's self-aware comments in *The Catcher in the Rye* highlight the contrast between his more mature, narrating voice and his teenage self's experiences. While his personal growth within the short timeframe may be debatable, he undeniably possesses a distinct perspective. The temporal distance between his narration and the events themselves certainly allows for reflection and a shift in perspective. Through his commentary, Holden offers a dual perspective, blending the immediacy of his emotional experiences with the slightly more mature voice of someone looking back.

The structure of the Bildungsroman genre then inherently lends itself to autobiographical elements. Compton Mackenzie, author of the Bildungsroman called *Sinister Street*, has expressed that he aimed to capture not a complete life story but rather "the prologue of a life," as critic Buckley writes in *Season of Youth* (Buckley, 1975, p. 18). The essence of writing a narrative about one's development from childhood to adulthood involves treating the child as a significant entity in the story, acknowledging the child's

psychology seriously, and drawing inspiration from the author's own childhood experiences, a place they are most familiar with (Buckley, 1975). According to Buckley (1975, p. 27), the Bildungsroman is considered "the most successful of autobiographical forms." However, there is a crucial element that distinguishes Bildungsroman from the biography genre: its focus on ordinary, everyday life. The genre captivates readers by investigating recognisable aspects of life, and it places a special focus on finding regular middle-class people appealing, as Iversen points out. This distinction adds a relatable and accessible dimension to the Bildungsroman narrative.

1.7. The key characteristics

Iversen's *Change and Continuity* (2009) reveals a genre defined by its focus on the protagonist's transformative journey. This journey, both literal and metaphorical, encapsulates the individual's search for identity, purpose, and a place within the social fabric. Iversen (2009) defines the journey as the core theme of coming-of-age novels - protagonist's psychological and moral transformation from an immature youth into a mature adult. However, these terms, as Iversen (2009) clarifies, are not solely based on physical age but rather represent their mental state.

This transformation could not, however, happen without the protagonist's education, both formal and experiential. The protagonist's journey is often marked by continuous learning as they grapple with new experiences, societal expectations, and their evolving understanding of the world. These experiences are marked by different relationships with other people, with the world or with the environment the protagonist stays in.

The setting itself becomes more than mere background; it plays an active role, influencing the protagonist's observations and reactions and shaping their understanding of the world. Through first-person narratives, we gain a deeper insight into the protagonist's emotional growth, witnessing the complexities of coming-of-age - the struggle to conceal true feelings, the discovery of new ones, and the navigation of various forms of love.

Love, in its various forms (romantic, familial, and platonic), becomes a significant element in this journey and exploration, further shaping the protagonist's emotional landscape. Beyond the individual experience, the Bildungsroman delves into the realm of "universal truths," exploring shared human experiences and lessons that transcend cultural, temporal, and individual boundaries. As the protagonist matures, they embark on a personal quest to discover these "truths," which can vary significantly depending on the individual

and the historical context. Victorian-era "truths" often centred on achieving middle-class stability, marriage, and settling down. However, some writers, like James Joyce, in his Bildungsroman novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, challenged these notions, highlighting the artist's struggle and potential rejection of such societal norms.

While on this discovery journey, we can find and identify a certain "tension/conflict/discrepancy between the inner and outer worlds" (Iversen, 2009, p. 65). This refers to the individual's dynamic with their surrounding community, society, or the world at large. This tension can manifest as a clash between unrealistic aspirations and the constraints of reality, particularly within social contexts. For instance, individuals from a specific class or group might harbour desires for a lifestyle unattainable within their social boundaries (Iversen, 2009).

This tension is then, however, usually resolved with the theme that "false idealism gives way to acceptance of reality" (Iversen, 2009, p. 65). This signifies a pivotal point in the narrative where the protagonist, who initially challenged the established reality, eventually reaches a point of acceptance regarding the world around them. This shift can be seen as a resolution that aligns with readers' expectations of a Bildungsroman narrative.

Additionally, death and grief, as part of life experiences, emerge as prevalent themes, with Iversen even designating "learning through pain and loss" as a distinct theme (Iversen, 2009, p. 65). Death carries particular weight, especially in British novels where orphaned protagonists were once more common (a trend less prevalent in modern works). Regardless of era, death's role as an inevitable aspect of life plays a crucial role in the protagonist's development. The question of accepting and confronting death becomes another layer of the psychological challenges protagonists face on their journeys.

Understanding these important traits, as outlined by Iversen, allows us to appreciate the Bildungsroman genre more fully, recognising its ability to express the complexities of human growth and the search for meaning in a world full of challenges and opportunities.

In an effort to establish criteria for the quintessential coming-of-age novel, Iversen also created the Bildungsroman Index (BRI). Iversen's framework recognises the centrality of coming-of-age in the Bildungsroman, as stated in the publication by Gale Group, *Literary Movements for Students* (2009). She chose to examine four specific texts, denoting them as the "Four Classics": *Wilhelm Meister*, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*, both by Charles Dickens. Each of these analysed works was assigned a predetermined number of points based on the evaluation of the 96 features outlined in the Bildungsroman index (Iversen, 2009). Iversen organised the BRI features into

sections based on the protagonist, place, and other factors. However, for this study, the BRI presents several challenges. Firstly, the genre's lack of a single, universally accepted definition makes the BRI's criteria potentially subjective and exclusionary. Additionally, the Bildungsroman has continuously evolved and incorporated new characteristics over time, making confining it within a rigid framework problematic. Lastly, insisting on certain features as mandatory can be overly restrictive, overlooking the genre's inherent flexibility and adaptability.

Therefore, instead of relying solely on the BRI score for categorization, this study will prioritise identifying and analysing key characteristics commonly associated with the Bildungsroman genre. This broader approach acknowledges the genre's fluidity and allows for a more nuanced understanding of the novels under examination. Of particular interest are the two sections focusing on plot and structure, examining themes and motifs. In the plot and structure section, Iversen suggests that the novel should be chronological, but the inclusion of shorter flashbacks, flash-forwards, and various disruptions of chronology does not disqualify the work from being a coming-of-age story. This is a crucial point to bear in mind, as the novels to be analysed in this study feature flashbacks that play a significant role in the protagonist's narrative and comprise a substantial portion of the overall story.

2. THE ENGLISH BILDUNGSROMAN

This chapter explores the English-language Bildungsroman and how the genre arrived in Victorian England, achieved immense popularity, and subsequently spread across (not just) the English-speaking world.

2.1. The British Bildungsroman

Thomas Carlyle's translation of Goethe's novel into English marked the introduction of the concept of self-cultivation into English literature, essentially laying the groundwork for the Bildungsroman. While this is true, the Bildungsroman did not immediately gain widespread popularity following Carlyle's translation. It was not until 1930 that the genre received focused attention in English literature with the publication of the first book on English Bildungsroman by Susanne Howe, titled *Wilhelm Meister and His English Kinsmen*. In her work, Howe defines the genre using the term "apprentice," a term that originated in Carlyle's translation and played a significant role in shaping the understanding of Bildungsroman in English literature:

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

There is a prevalent viewpoint attributing the creation of the "English Bildungsroman" to Jane Austen and her novel *Emma*. In this novel, Austen's main character, Emma, experiences a significant personal transformation and self-discovery. Through her well-intentioned but misguided matchmaking endeavours, Emma becomes increasingly aware of the consequences of her actions. Denise Kohn (1995) goes so far as to call *Emma* a novel of education, claiming that it teaches readers how to deconstruct the dominant notions of "ladyhood" promoted by the writers of Austen's time. This perspective underscores the educational and transformative elements within Austen's portrayal of Emma's character development.

While the notion of Jane Austen's *Emma* being considered an "English Bildungsroman" is popular, it does not fully align with Howe's apprentice theory, or the broader definitions of Bildungsroman discussed so far. While *Emma* undergoes a degree of growth and self-discovery, the profound transformation and struggles typically associated with the Bildungsroman genre are not as pronounced in Austen's work. Despite this, Austen's contribution, alongside other works, serves as evidence that Bildungsroman is a genre not clearly defined.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is, however, more than often cited as a quintessential English Bildungsroman depicting Jane's journey from an abusive childhood as an orphan to womanhood, and notably, it is narrated by the protagonist - a feature more common in modern Bildungsromans. This narrative perspective allows for a precise portrayal of the hero's transformation through her eyes, emphasising the theme of self-actualization.

Great Expectations by Charles Dickens is another Victorian classic often classified as a Bildungsroman. The novel delves into themes of identity, social class, and morality. The protagonist, Pip, undergoes a journey from a young boy with aspirations to a mature individual with a deeper understanding of life. A similar narrative structure is observed in Dickens' *David Copperfield*, where both protagonists of Dickens' novels are orphans seeking a better life, becoming self-aware during their journeys.

These novels collectively outline a typical Bildungsroman plot: a child grows up in a constraining environment, often from the middle class, faces an uncertain future, contends with antagonistic family dynamics, and embarks on a journey to make their own way in the world. Real-life experiences during this journey serve as the true education for the hero, leading to self-realisation. The resolution of the hero's journey matters less than the change of heart or moment of insight that occurs. A definitive happy ending is not guaranteed, and some Bildungsromans may leave readers speculating or even feature the death of the hero.

2.2. Principal elements of the British Bildungsroman

Buckley (1974) identifies principal elements of Bildungsromans, of which at least six are commonly present in these novels: childhood, conflict of generations, provinciality, larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation, and a working philosophy. This framework explains why certain works, which at first glance at the plot might be considered Bildungsromans, such as *Emma*, may not be considered typical Bildungsromans, as they may lack several of these essential elements.

Jerome Buckley, in *Season of Youth* (1974), also had an interesting point of view on the English Bildungsroman, as he identified it as a type of "Künstlerroman," as many of the English Bildungsroman protagonists emerge as artists of sorts. For instance, *David Copperfield* becomes a prose writer, and more recently, Jason Taylor from *Black Swan Green* deals hugely with his artistic part of becoming a poet.

2.3. The American Bildungsroman

While the discussion of the development of the English Bildungsroman has primarily focused on British authors, it is crucial to recognise its manifestation in a broader context. Each genre acquires distinctive characteristics influenced by the cultural, historical, and societal contexts of individual countries, resulting in a unique interpretation of the genre. This acknowledgement underscores the importance of considering the American "version" of Bildungsroman.

In American Bildungsroman, the picaresque tradition appears even stronger and more apparent than in British Bildungsroman, with literal journeys that the heroes undertake. An exemplary illustration is Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye*, who embarks on a journey through New York, although brief. Another American classic, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, follows a similar structure as Huck travels down the Mississippi River to escape his abusive father. Both of these protagonists undertake journeys to unfamiliar places, engaging in experiences they have not encountered before. Even in Holden's case, where the journey is within New York, his hometown, the novelty lies in him being alone, without anyone knowing he was expelled from school, and trying out unfamiliar activities. These American Bildungsromans emphasise the significance of literal journeys in the protagonists' development.

In British Bildungsromans, the focus is often on a protagonist's movement from youth to maturity, finding their place in society, and typically achieving some form of resolution, like becoming a lady, a gentleman, or a respected figure. In contrast, American novels of this sort frequently express pessimism, disillusionment, anger, and resistance to the traditional American story of progress and success. Franco Moretti's (1987) definition of a classical Bildungsroman, where youth passes into maturity and comes to a stop there, implies a certain resolution or epiphany, which is not a common feature in American works. In American Bildungsromans, there is a strong refusal of things representing the end of youth, such as marriage and employment—elements that British Bildungsroman

protagonists might see as rewards or resolutions they have been waiting for. Sarah Graham, in her essay on American Bildungsroman (2019), discovers the pessimism in the novels and highlights this intriguing feature—that American novelists have frequently employed the Bildungsroman more than any other genre to expose the nation's shortcomings. According to Graham (2019), protagonists in American Bildungsromans often perceive little in the adult world to encourage optimism about the future. Works such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Catcher in the Rye* criticise issues like the morality of slavery and the phoniness and hypocrisy of post-war American society. American novels like Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee serve a similar purpose but deviate from the usual features of the genre, as the latter, as it was already explained, lacks several Bildungsroman elements. These works depict a protagonist's growth and change but with a focus on different aspects.

Both British and American versions of Bildungsroman, however, share a strong presence of nostalgia, with protagonists often looking into the past and adults attempting to revisit their childhood. Rather than maturing, many young protagonists would prefer to return to their earlier lives, seeking to reconnect with significant aspects they lost as they matured (Graham, 2019, p. 122). This shared theme of nostalgia highlights a commonality between the two versions of the genre.

3. JEROME DAVID SALINGER AND AMERICAN POSTWAR LITERATURE

Despite having a limited body of published work, Salinger left an undeniable mark on the literary landscape, earning him a place in contemporary school curricula as one of the most influential American authors of the post-war period.

The years following World War II (1945-1970) were a fruitful time in American literature, but real life was marked by widespread protest and disappointment. Despite the economic prosperity that followed the war, which provided sufficient chances for Americans to begin new lives, there were hidden and uncomfortable facts beneath the surface of wealth (Cusatis, 2010). The Cold War, the looming threat of communism, segregation, and the fight for women's rights were major themes. The men who had been through war struggled with sentiments of alienation and disillusionment, unable to escape the overwhelming desire for a better society. Many authors, often drawing from their own experiences, utilised the medium of writing to articulate the precise sentiments and hypocrisy behind the notion of a "better America." This theme may resonate as familiar, particularly in the case of Holden Caulfield, Salinger's most renowned character, who embodies a sense of disillusionment. Other writers of this era, such as Norman Mailer, Joseph Heller, and Vonnegut, having served in the war, prominently featured its horrors as central themes in their works and addressed the war's impact by satirising its absurdity and exploring psychological trauma. For these authors, the attention extended beyond the honours connected with fighting for one's country, delving into the harsh realities and problems brought about by war.

Nevertheless, amidst the prevailing sense of disillusionment and scepticism in postwar literature, the Beat movement (1950s) emerged as a highly influential and, perhaps, the most impactful literary movement of the time, trying to fight off the feelings of disillusionment in a slightly different way. Figures like Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and others shared a common rejection of what they perceived as a conformist, mainstream, materialistic, and hypocritical establishment. Seeking liberation, many turned to Eastern religion, experimented with drug use, and found inspiration in jazz music. Characterised by an intuitive and spontaneous approach, the writing of the Beat movement stood in contrast to the more intellectual and restricted styles of the era. These writers' works were defined by their honesty and sense of urgency, indicating an urge for authentic expression and a break from societal norms (Cusatis, 2010). Concurrently, the confessional poetry movement emerged in the late 1950s, featuring deeply personal works

on love, loss, and mental illness by poets like Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell (Tandon, 2021).

Salinger, having to serve in the war himself, channelled his own emotions into the character of Holden, not directly mentioning the war as such but expressing resentment towards the perceived insincerity of the adult American world. Salinger was raised in New York City (just like his character Holden was) to a Jewish father and Irish mother, holding the position of the second child in the family. At the age of 21, in 1940, Salinger published a story titled *The Young Folks*, showcasing his ability to use ordinary personal interactions and dialogue to delve into deeper questions (Salinger.org, n.d.). However, his trajectory was soon interrupted by his draft into the war. It is believed that Salinger's aversion to the military world and his sense of alienation from contemporary society took root during his time in the war, influences that he later incorporated into the character of Holden as well (Miller, 1965). Despite the challenges of wartime, he continued to publish stories in various magazines, predominantly in *The New Yorker* (Miller, 1965). This period turned out to be the most productive phase of his publishing career.

In 1951, Salinger achieved literary success with the publication of his novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*; however, describing his career as taking off might not be the most accurate depiction of what ensued. Salinger, known for his extreme privacy, maintained a reserved attitude even when promotional efforts for his books were necessary. Revealing this way his own feelings of alienation from the world, he refrained from giving interviews, insisted that his photographs not appear on the covers of his books, and refused to grant rights for dramatizing *The Catcher in the Rye*. In spite of that, a teenage boy named Holden and his three-day journey through New York won the hearts of many.

The novel explores themes of alienation, teenage angst, and the search for authenticity in a world that Holden perceives as fake and phony. Throughout the narrative, Holden expresses a desire to protect the innocence of children, imagining himself as the "catcher in the rye" who prevents them from falling off a cliff into the difficulties and constraints of adulthood. The novel has maintained immense popularity, never going out of print and selling millions of copies worldwide. It has been translated into over thirty languages and is consistently recognised in lists of the best novels (Graham, 2007).

Following the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye*, his only full-length novel, Salinger released *Nine Stories*, a collection that compiled previously published stories. From 1940 to 1953, he contributed a total of thirty stories to various publications. Salinger then kept a low profile, a characteristic that extended to both his private life and now also to his

literary output. He moved in the background to New Hampshire, where he persisted until his death in 2010.

Despite his quiet period, he did publish two small books, *Franny and Zooey* in 1961 and *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters; and Seymour: An Introduction* in 1963, both comprising stories previously published in *The New Yorker*.

During this period, many of Salinger's stories revolved around young men who, despite their adolescent and naive nature, often experienced a transformative journey towards moral awareness. This theme shadowed characters like Holden Caulfield, Seymour Glass, and Buddy. However, Salinger also depicted a varied range of complex young heroines in his works. Some, like Muriel in *A Perfect Day for Bananafish*, carried a certain shallowness and rejection, while others, such as Sybil from the same story and Esmé from *For Esmé — with Love and Squalor*, embodied hope in innocence. Similar to the male characters, these female figures are not strictly good or bad; rather, they possess the complexity that Salinger uses to delve into his own reflections on the world's phoniness. Though the true motives behind Salinger's portrayal of these characters remain unknown, it seems he drew psychological inspiration from his experiences with war, religion, and women to articulate his concerns about adulthood and the artificial aspects surrounding him. The depictions of these women reflect Salinger's complex and unsettled feelings towards the feminine. (Sanfilippo, 2016).

The prevailing theme across Salinger's body of work is the exact sense of alienation, which can lead to resolutions and contentment but also to bitterness or even death. The sources of this alienation are diverse, including the evident aftermath of war, societal decay, and personal struggles and failed relationships (Miller, 1965). Notably, Salinger's short stories form interconnected threads, with recurring characters making appearances across different publications. His in-depth exploration of the Glass family, a fictional family consisting of bright and unhappy adolescents along with troubled adults, stands out as a particularly intriguing aspect of his work.

4. DAVID MITCHELL AS AN AUTHOR

David Mitchell, although from a different era than Salinger, draws a striking parallel between his novel *Black Swan Green* and Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*. In this work, Mitchell infuses his own life experiences into the character of Jason Taylor, situated in a fictional village in Worcestershire, England, during the early 1980s. The narrative follows Jason's coming-of-age journey, marked by struggles with stammering, insecurities, peer relationships, and family dynamics.

Born in 1969, Mitchell himself experienced growing up with a stammer in a Worcestershire village. He recognises the profound impact his stammer has had on shaping him as a writer. He sees his stammering as a long-term ally, heightening his sensitivity to word choice and compelling him to discover alternative ways to express himself (Knepper, Hopf, 2019).

Mitchell's postmodern narratives are rich with interconnected tales and multiple narrative paths. His novels promise readers a fusion of voices and stories, spanning genres like noir thriller, spiritual autobiography, bildungsroman, travelogue, science fiction, and survival narrative. A contemporary writer, he nonetheless resists the postmodern label critics have attached to his work. He views his work not as experimental genre manipulation but rather as a dedicated commitment to storytelling as an immersive and polyglot medium (O'Donnell, 2015). The perceived experimentation lies in his seamless integration of diverse genres and stylistic elements.

Mitchell's novels feature a diverse array of discursive elements, encompassing letters, diaries, notes, nested stories, poems, songs, dreams, jokes, and sketches. His work is often associated with cosmopolitanism, emphasising connections between locations, characters, and spatiotemporal zones on a global scale. Characters in Mitchell's narratives embark on rhizomatic journeys, exploring alternative communities and impermanent futures, revealing hidden aspects of existence and challenging observers' perspectives. The cosmopolitan style is strengthened by what Patrick O'Donnell calls the "appeal of the trivial," illustrated in *Black Swan Green* through lengthy lists of brand names, showing characters' involvement with consumer society (O'Donnell, 2015).

Mitchell creates his own literary universe, where characters transcend individual novels and reappear in various works. This echoes Salinger's approach to exploring the members of the Glass family across his short stories. In *Black Swan Green*, we meet the protagonist's (Jason Taylor) cousin Hugo Lamb as this young idol in Jason's eyes. We meet

him later in his life as a Cambridge University student in *The Bone Clocks*. Mitchell, however, does not only stop at one family but interconnects his whole fictional world, creating a singular story, timeline, and universe, often referred to as the "Übernovel." The terminology for this universe has evolved, incorporating terms like "macronovel," "Überbook," and most recently, "biblioverse." Describing this expansive literary landscape, Mitchell uses metaphors such as a "twenty-first-century house of fiction," a continually growing structure with new extensions added over time. Another metaphor likens it to LEGO building blocks, where novellas serve as interconnected components forming larger narrative structures (Knepper, Hopf, 2019).

David Mitchell's fictional universe originated with *Ghostwritten* in 1999 and has since expanded across various novels, libretti, short stories, a novella, and digital fiction. This expansive world delves into the profound history of planetary life and globalisation and envisions a future shaped by capitalist crises, environmental destruction, post-apocalyptic struggles, and exile from Earth. Notable works encapsulating these themes include *number9dream* (2001) and *Cloud Atlas* (2004). However, Mitchell surprised readers by shifting to more intimate works, such as the Bildungsroman *Black Swan Green*, which offers a closer focus on both his life and loosely draws from his personal experiences. Beyond novels, Mitchell has also ventured into various artistic forms, writing libretti for operas like *Wake* (2010) and *Sunken Garden* (2013). He collaborated with the Wachowski siblings on the film adaptation of *Cloud Atlas* (2012) and contributed to writing Season Two of their Netflix series, *Sense8* (2016). Mitchell's involvement extends to translation, where he translated two memoirs by a Japanese boy with autism, *The Reason I Jump* (2013) and *Fall Down Seven Times, Get up Eight* (2017). His experimentation with storytelling even reached Twitter, where he published a story titled *The Right Sort* in 2014. Mitchell's influence is also felt in the art world, inspiring exhibitions by visual artists like Kai and Sunny. He contributed dialogue to *Before the Dawn* (2014), the final instalment of Kate Bush's famous movie trilogy.

5. THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and David Mitchell's *Black Swan Green* both use the Bildungsroman form to explore the complexities of adolescence. These novels feature young male protagonists who serve as narrators on journeys of self-discovery, yet a closer look reveals distinct paths and challenges faced by each character.

Holden Caulfield, the disillusioned protagonist of *The Catcher*, wages war against the perceived "phoniness" of the adult world. His quest is to preserve innocence, a yearning for a simpler time before the harsh realities of life set in. Holden rebels against societal norms, searching for a world of genuine connection amidst the hypocrisy he despises.

The analysis of the Bildungsroman features in this novel will be conducted based on the characteristics presented and explained in the theoretical part of this work. It will focus on the protagonist-narrators of each story, examining their journeys of self-discovery, delving into the specific quests they undertake, the underlying "simple truths" they yearn for, and how the settings of their stories influence their experiences. The analysis will primarily rely on literary analysis and the identification of Bildungsroman elements to assess them. Both novels were closely read beforehand with the attention focused on the narrative themes that reflect Bildungsroman characteristics. Apart from the literary analysis crucial to help identify Bildungsroman features, the comparative analysis will be used to compare Bildungsroman features identified in both novels and with the help of contextual analysis it will be considered how the socio-cultural and historical contexts influence the manifestation of these elements in each novel.

Central to this analysis will be Iversen's (2009) concept of the "conflict between the inner and outer worlds," which manifests as the internal struggles faced by each protagonist. It will be crucial to explore whether these conflicts reach a resolution, and if so, whether it involves accepting reality and letting go of their idealised versions of the world. In essence, this analysis will explore how these young men navigate the complexities of growing up, ultimately revealing the universal challenges faced on the path to maturity.

5.1. Holden Caulfield: A Self-Aware Hypocrite on a Journey of Self-Discovery

Holden Caulfield, the 16-year-old protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye*, a disenchanted and troubled teenager, recounts his experiences over a few days in New York City, where he engages in a series of encounters with various people after being expelled from prep school and taking a few days alone before coming home to his parents. He wanders

around New York for a few days, dealing with pretty much everything teenagers tend to deal with: love, sex, death, the meaning of life, existential and quite practical loneliness, big dreams and ideals, contempt for his parents' generation, and, indeed, the whole world. He is characterised by his pervasive negativity. He dislikes nearly everything, from people and society to school and movies. Holden consistently doubts people's authenticity. He is sceptical of others' motives, including the teachers and students at his school, Pencey Prep. His cynical attitude is evident in his reluctance to engage in social activities that he perceives as superficial. In his hatred of the world, he often finds himself lonely and with the feeling of being misunderstood. During the three days in New York, he sees companionship and understanding but is often unsuccessful. The variety of characters he introduces throughout the retelling of his days in New York each bring out different memories for him, which he intertwines the story with. However, his central grievance lies with the "phoniness" of those around him. What truly frustrates Holden is the prevalent dishonesty of individuals who pretend to be something they are not, motivated by a desire to impress or gain approval and fit into the world. This perspective can be viewed as a sign of maturity – Holden recognises the hollowness of social climbing and superficial relationships. However, his reactions, cynicism, and negativity paint him as a grumpy kid lashing out at the world.

The question of whether Holden's response is justified has fuelled debate for years. Some see his disillusionment as a valid reaction to a world rife with hypocrisy. They argue that his pain and anger stem from a genuine questioning of societal norms, a natural part of growing up. Others view him as a whiny and entitled character. They argue that his inability to navigate the complexities of adulthood and his constant negativity betray a privileged upbringing rather than a perceptive critique. The one thing this debate perfectly exemplifies is that Holden is the perfect Bildungsroman hero - he struggles with societal norms and expectations, questions authorities, and is followed by disillusionment.

While Holden Caulfield's 16 years may allow for a certain amount of immaturity, his problems carry undeniable weight within the context of his personal journey towards adulthood. As he approaches the start of this new phase, even seemingly trivial issues hold significant meaning for him. This creates a fascinating complexity in his character: he simultaneously resists certain aspects of growing up, clinging to the familiarity and perceived freedom of childhood, yet engages in behaviours that project an image of maturity beyond his age. That makes him sort of stuck between youth and adulthood, preventing him from engaging in the world of phoniness, hypocrisy, and superficiality. To give an example of his paradoxical behaviour, Holden claims to despise movies and the Lunts, a famous

acting couple (Salinger, 1994, p. 137). Yet, he is attending movies and even taking Sally to a play starring the Lunts (Salinger, 1994, p. 125). These seemingly inconsistent actions highlight the underlying reasons for his participation. He might be indulging in activities he deems "phony" simply out of boredom or a desperate attempt to connect with someone, like impressing Sally, - *"told you she'd go mad when she heard it was for the Lunts"* (Salinger, 1994, p. 112). During the meetup with Sally, Holden presents the readers with this paradox and his own point of view on it. At the theatre with Sally, after the first act, they join the crowd for a cigarette break. Here, Holden describes the scene with sarcasm, himself being the one spending the break the same way:

"At the end of the first act we went out with all the other jerks for a cigarette. What a deal that was. You never saw so many phonies in all your life, everybody smoking their ears off and talking about the play so that everybody could hear and know how sharp they were" (Salinger, 1994, p. 114).

As both protagonist and narrator of *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden presents a unique challenge. He readily admits to being *"the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life"* (Salinger, 1994, p. 14), raising doubts about the absolute truthfulness of his narration. This unreliability forces readers to question his sincerity and grapple with the extent to which he withholds information. Holden selectively shares his experiences, leaving readers to interpret his actions and interactions with others to fill the gaps. Edwards, in his journal article, refers to Holden as an ironic narrator in this sense: he doesn't understand (or know) himself, but he unwittingly lets the reader know what he is like (Edwards, 1977). His voice, a unique blend of 1950s slang - *"what my lousy childhood was like"* (Salinger, 1994, p.1)/ *"what a swell guy he was"* (Salinger, 1994, p.14) - profanity, and unflinching honesty, offers a window into the troubled soul of a teenager grappling with loss, disillusionment, and the complexities of growing up. While Holden strives to portray himself in a specific way, his narrative choices reveal more than he intends. His focus on "interesting" situations and his unfiltered use of slang and swear words paint a vivid picture of a teenager's world. However, this raw honesty became a source of controversy upon the novel's release. In the conservative 1950s, Holden's profanity, his exploration of teenage rebellion (including underage drinking, smoking, and prostitution), and his critique of societal norms were seen as shocking and inappropriate. Salinger's decision to let Holden speak for himself, flaws and

all, creates a character who feels authentic and relatable, even across generations (Time, 2008).

Due to the novel's first-person narration, his language becomes a central element. Language, and thus speech itself, functions as a motif; in works such as this, where the narrative is pure subjectivity, it has an even greater and more powerful position. Holden's use of language suits his image and reputation as an angsty adolescent boy. He even admits to his strained vocabulary himself in the conversation with his teacher, Mr. Spencer:

"I also say "Boy!" quite a lot. Partly because I have a lousy vocabulary and partly because I act quite young for my age sometimes. I was sixteen then, and I'm seventeen now, and sometimes I act like I'm about thirteen" (Salinger, 1994, p. 8).

Here also arises the mentioned self-awareness.

Like Holden, the other boys at Pencey swear and use slang frequently, suggesting that Holden also may be "dumbing down" his speech to fit in with his peers - a characteristic that is very obvious in the other novel, *Black Swan Green*, that will be discussed in later chapters.

There is also a frequent appearance of "anyways" in Holden's speech throughout the story that points towards a retrospective narration. He's telling his experiences from the mental institution, which he hints at at the start of the novel with: *"I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy"* (Salinger, 1994, p.1) and then at the end, where he mentions *"one psychoanalyst guy they have here"* (Salinger, 1994, p. 192).

As he recounts his three days of wandering New York City alone, he often wanders off. He diverges from the main story much like one might in casual conversation. This informality is further emphasised by his use of "anyways" as a bridge to steer himself back on track after a digression. This stream-of-consciousness style reflects the natural flow of thought, jumping from topic to topic. Holden's reliance on "anyways" also contributes to his portrayal as an unreliable narrator. The informality of his language subtly suggests subjectivity and potential embellishments in his recollections.

5.2. The Contradictions of Holden's Identity

The struggle with self-identity is a defining feature of the Bildungsroman genre. There are two contrasting approaches to this struggle to be considered. In Goethe's *Wilhelm*

Meister's Apprenticeship, the protagonist initially seeks escape from his bourgeois background. Wilhelm craves a life filled with meaning and fulfilment and the romanticised world of theatre, which he sees as a path to freedom. However, as his journey unfolds, Wilhelm begins to appreciate the value of his upbringing, recognising the lessons learned from his family and heritage. This self-discovery leads him to understand his roots as an integral part of who he is, shaping him in profound ways.

Holden Caulfield also struggles with defining himself in relation to his upbringing and societal expectations. However, his struggle manifests as rebellion. He despises the "phoniness" and pretentiousness he associates with his own privileged background. This disdain leads him to avoid anything that reinforces his social status, a strategy that ultimately fosters alienation. In essence, Wilhelm embraces a path of reconciliation with his social context, while Holden embarks on a path of complete rejection. Both approaches highlight the complexities of self-discovery within the Bildungsroman framework. These contrasting narratives demonstrate the multifaceted nature of self-identity within the Bildungsroman genre. They also prove how the historical context of the novels hugely impacts the stories - *The Catcher in the Rye* is set in the post-WWII era, where people shift towards questioning traditional values. *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, on the other hand, is set during the German Enlightenment, which emphasised reason and social responsibility. These contexts are also reflected in the actual social setting within the novel, which plays a big role in shaping a character in a Bildungsroman. It goes beyond the immediate surroundings; it includes a character's background, where they spend time, and even where they're trying to escape from.

In Holden's case, even though he never directly mentions it, the story hints that he comes from an upper-class background. The only information about his father - that he is a lawyer, and according to Holden's description, lawyers "*make a lot of dough and play golf and play bridge and buy cars and drink Martinis and look like a hot-shot*" (Salinger, 1994, p. 155), which gives us a clue of what his father does. Additionally, Holden attends expensive boarding schools, implying his family has the means to afford them. This is a great example of the author cleverly revealing Holden's background without explicitly stating it - Holden decides not to tell the readers when his sister Phoebe suggests he become a lawyer like their dad. Holden's dismissive response allows the reader to deduce his father's profession and wealthy lifestyle.

Holden's relationship with material possessions is a fascinating paradox. He mentions expensive items like a camel's-hair coat and fur-lined gloves with a seeming

nonchalance, using their loss only to explain his current discomfort. This could be interpreted as an attempt to downplay his wealth and avoid appearing "phony," a major flaw he despises in others. However, the very act of casually mentioning such expensive items inadvertently reveals his privileged background. This disconnect creates a hidden superiority complex. Holden believes his disdain for the "phony" world elevates him above others. However, his struggle to appear uninterested in wealth backfires spectacularly. This can be seen, for instance, when he offers money to the nuns, a seemingly kind gesture. Yet he undermines it by comparing their meals, making his act feel more like misplaced pity than genuine compassion:

“All the two of them were eating for breakfast was toast and coffee. That depressed me. I hate it if I'm eating bacon and eggs or something and somebody else is only eating toast and coffee” (Salinger, 1994, p. 99).

Despite this attempt at humility, his superiority complex, as evidenced earlier in the chapter by the story about his roommate Dick Slagle, remains apparent. Holden hides his expensive suitcases because he knows that they are an outward display of wealth in front of Dick's seemingly cheaper ones, only to later find out Dick was bringing them out anyways so people would think they were his own. These situations expose Holden's confusion about his own identity. He despises phoniness, yet his attempts to appear unmaterialistic backfire, revealing a hidden desire for superiority. This internal struggle is a key aspect of Holden's Bildungsroman journey, as he grapples with who he truly is and what truly matters. Holden's experience with suitcases reveals a deeper truth about his journey of self-discovery. He initially claims disliking the way expensive luggage creates judgements:

“The thing is, it's really hard to be roommates with people if your suitcases are much better than theirs--if yours are really good ones and theirs aren't” (Salinger, 1994, p.98).

Holden Caulfield's initial critique of materialism in *The Catcher in the Rye* could expose a deeper social commentary. He expresses disdain for judging individuals based solely on external possessions, such as expensive luggage. This insight goes beyond the practical function of suitcases, becoming a symbol of ingrained societal prejudices. Holden views high-quality luggage as a marker of social class, a status symbol many aspire to attain.

He even expresses his dislike of the term "bourgeois" used to describe his own nicer suitcases (Salinger, 1994). This initial stance establishes Holden's supposed rejection of superficiality.

However, Holden contradicts himself. Despite hating these judgements, he exhibits the same prejudice when he sees the nuns' "*very inexpensive-looking suitcases*" (Salinger, 1994, p. 97). This triggers a rant, showcasing his own bias towards those with less material wealth:

"It isn't important, I know, but I hate it when somebody has cheap suitcases. It sounds terrible to say it, but I can even get to hate somebody, just looking at them, if they have cheap suitcases with them" (Salinger, 1994, p. 97).

5.3. Holden's Bildungsroman journey of experience

Holden's journey begins with his expulsion from Pencey Prep, a symbol of the "phony" educational system he rejects. Fearing loneliness yet unable to maintain connections, he seeks company in New York. However, his interactions and experiences, though often unpleasant, become his true education, exposing him to the complexities of life beyond the artificial world of Pencey Prep. *The Catcher in the Rye* offers a unique perspective on education within the Bildungsroman genre. Traditionally, the concept of apprenticeship involves a protagonist learning a trade or skill under a mentor's guidance. However, Holden's "apprenticeship" focuses more on self-discovery and navigating the complexities of the adult world. This type of apprenticeship is also present, for example, in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, whose journey down the Mississippi River exposes him to the harsh realities of slavery, violence, and societal hypocrisy, so he learns primarily through these firsthand experiences.

While *The Catcher in the Rye* narrative offers no clear answer about whether Holden's three-day journey results in actual learning, it suggests a form of growth and change. Despite the novel's events taking place after his expulsion from yet another school, the final chapter hints at him starting afresh at a new institution. This, in a "classic Holden fashion," comes without any promises of academic success. Nevertheless, his willingness to re-enter the educational system suggests a potential shift in his perspective, although, as it will be discussed further, it could also mean a resignation and submission to the system.

The apprenticeship through experiences appears mainly because of Holden's rejection of "phoniness," which he extends to the traditional education system. He describes Pencey Prep as a school you have probably seen the ads about:

"They advertise in about a thousand magazines, always showing some hotshot guy on a horse jumping over a fence. Like as if all you ever did at Pencey was play polo all the time. I never even once saw a horse anywhere near the place." (Salinger, 1994, p. 1, 2)

Pencey Prep is, for Holden, a pretentious place that creates a false image, and despite its promise of "*molding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men*" (Salinger, 1994, p. 2), according to Holden, there is almost no one around there who would be splendid and clear thinking. Despite his distaste for the school and education in general, Holden displays a genuine desire for knowledge and a desire for a more meaningful education. He values experiences outside the classroom, finding inspiration in books, museums, and even conversations with strangers. Notably, his visit to his former history teacher, Mr. Spencer, reveals a past appreciation for a particular subject, even if he ultimately failed the class. The little belief he carries for education, however, fades away after the encounter with Mr. Spencer. Finding his once-respected teacher frail and forgetful because of his illness shows Holden the inevitable decay of age and makes him question the reliability of authority figures. This disillusionment feeds distrust in the educational system and an aversion to facing uncomfortable truths. His defensive dismissal of Mr. Spencer's concerns for his future exemplifies this. Despite Mr. Spencer's efforts to make Holden care for his future, Holden deflects them with an excuse to leave.

Holden's quest, however, is not connected to school as such. It is to avoid coming home after he has been expelled (or, rather, is going to be in a few days). He spends three days in New York, his home city, and although he visits places all known and familiar to him - movies, bars, parks, even secretly his own home – they all take on new meaning within the context of his self-discovery journey.

Central Park, a place mentioned several times in the story, for example, embodies the fading innocence of childhood. Holden remembers it as a playground, a place he frequented like his younger sister Phoebe does now. However, a drunken visit reveals his inability to find the familiar duck pond, which he ascribes to him being drunk but it symbolises the loss of childhood he craves:

“I’ve lived in New York all my life, and I know Central Park like the back of my hand, because I used to roller-skate there all the time and ride my bike when I was a kid, but I had the most terrific trouble finding that lagoon that night. I knew right where it was--it was right near Central Park South and all--but I still couldn’t find it.” (Salinger, 1994, p.139)

This lost time and the changing landscape of the park mirror his own fear of growing up.

Holden's desire for things to stay as they are is further highlighted by his nostalgic description of a museum he once visited with his school. He cherishes the museum's unchanging exhibits, where everything *"always stayed right where it was"* (Salinger, 1994, p. 109). This static environment reflects his yearning for a life untouched by the passage of time, a longing for eternal childhood:

“The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody’d move. You could go there a hundred thousand times, and that Eskimo would still be just finished catching those two fish, the birds would still be on their way south, the deers would still be drinking out of that water hole, with their pretty antlers and their pretty, skinny legs, and that squaw with the naked bosom would still be weaving that same blanket. Nobody’d be different” (Salinger, 1994, p.109).

The way things in museums stay the same stands in strong contrast to the relentless flow of time and the constant change, which Holden deeply fears. And he underlines this fear by describing how even an ordinary visit to a museum, a place seemingly designed to resist change, actually highlights its inevitability:

“The only thing that would be different would be you. Not that you’d be so much older or anything. It wouldn’t be that, exactly. You’d just be different, that’s all. You’d have an overcoat on this time. Or the kid that was your partner in line the last time had got scarlet fever and you’d have a new partner. Or you’d have a substitute taking the class, instead of Miss Aigletinger. Or you’d heard your mother and father having a terrific fight in the bathroom. Or you’d just passed by one of those puddles in the

street with gasoline rainbows in them. I mean you'd be different in some way--I can't explain what I mean. And even if I could, I'm not sure I'd feel like it" (Salinger, 1994, p. 109).

These tiny ways of how life keeps changing, like a new coat, a different classmate, or witnessing a parental fight, seem trivial details, but they show how life is always moving forward. In essence, Holden fears the transformative power of experience. He associates change with a loss of innocence and a step closer to the "phony" world of adulthood that he despises. The museum, with its unchanging exhibits, becomes a symbol of a frozen childhood—a world untouched by the complexities of growing up.

5.4. Holden's "phony" world

Since coming-of-age is a defining feature of Bildungsromans, it was explored how Holden views adults and the adult world he is about to step into. Given his resistance to adulthood, his connection with children will be examined as well, as it also significantly ties to the novel's title. Overhearing a child sing a familiar tune from his youth, with the repeated lyrics *"If a body catch a body coming through the rye"* (Salinger, 1994, p. 104), offers one of the rare times in the novel where Holden feels *"not so depressed any more"* (Salinger, 1994, p. 104). Later in the novel, during his secret visit home, the song resurfaces in Holden's conversation with Phoebe. When she asks what he likes, the song becomes a key moment. Phoebe reveals he misremembered the lyrics, singing "catch" instead of "meet." Ironically, this mistake becomes a window into his desire:

"Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around--nobody big, I mean--except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff--I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy" (Salinger, 1994, p. 156).

The rye field, with its imagined cliff, becomes a powerful symbol for Holden's fear of adulthood. He sees the transition from childhood to adulthood as a fall, a threat from which children need protection. Holden aspires to be their guardian, a "catcher in the rye" who saves them from this inevitable fall. This desire manifests throughout his journey as he tries to shield those he encounters from the phoniness and disillusionment he associates with adulthood. For instance, he erases profanity from the wall of Phoebe's school to shield children from seeing it:

"I thought how Phoebe and all the other little kids would see it, and how they'd wonder what the hell it meant, and then finally some dirty kid would tell them--all cockeyed, naturally--what it meant, and how they'd all think about it and maybe even worry about it for a couple of days" (Salinger, 1994, p. 181).

Holden goes to great lengths to prevent those he encounters from metaphorically falling off the cliff in his envisioned scenario. His longing to preserve childhood innocence mirrors Wilhelm Meister's romanticised view of the theatre in Goethe's novel. Just as Wilhelm idealises the actors and actresses, believing them to possess a higher level of passion and authenticity, Holden idealises childhood as a world where children are yet undamaged by the "phony" adult world.

5.5. Holden's relationships

Despite his pervasive cynicism, Holden exhibits strong feelings for his siblings, particularly Phoebe and his deceased brother Allie. These relationships stand in contrast to his general disdain for most people, whom he labels "phony," "stupid," or worse.

The conversation with Phoebe from the previously mentioned secret visit home is an important turning point in Holden Caulfield's journey in *The Catcher in the Rye*. While Holden initially idealises her innocence, described as *"a little kid so pretty and smart"* (Salinger, 1994, p. 60), she also confronts him with uncomfortable truths. Unlike Mr. Spencer's questions about Holden's future at the novel's beginning, which Holden deflects, Phoebe's questions about what he likes and would like to do get to him. Phoebe embodies a positive influence Holden desperately needs. Her childlike rationality stands in contrast to his growing disillusionment. By challenging his cynicism and forcing him to confront his own thoughts, Phoebe also serves as a crucial catalyst in Holden's Bildungsroman journey.

Holden's protectiveness towards Phoebe eventually drives him to choose to abandon his plan of leaving home. When he informs her about this plan of his, and after she shows up ready to leave with him, he decides to stay at home. Driven by a mix of protectiveness and selflessness, this act hints at the character's capacity for significant growth.

Holden's longing for innocence extends beyond Phoebe and manifests in his relationships with his deceased brother Allie as well. Allie represents a permanent state of childhood, untainted by the disillusionment Holden experiences. Unlike Phoebe, who challenges him, Allie represents a fixed ideal – a perfect younger brother forever frozen in time. Holden clings to Allie's memory, finding solace in his idealised innocence, especially when he gets “*very depressed*” (Salinger, 1994, p. 89).

“Then all of a sudden, something very spooky started happening. Every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I'd never get to the other side of the street. I thought I'd just go down, down, down, and nobody'd ever see me again. Boy, did it scare me. You can't imagine. I started sweating like a bastard--my whole shirt and underwear and everything. Then I started doing something else. Every time I'd get to the end of a block I'd make believe I was talking to my brother Allie. I'd say to him, "Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Please, Allie." And then when I'd reach the other side of the street without disappearing, I'd thank him.” (Salinger, 1994, p. 178)

This passage shows the depths of Holden's depression. The repetitive prayer to Allie highlights the urgency of his need and his reliance on a lost piece of his childhood for comfort. Holden's connection to Allie is also revealed during a conversation with Phoebe. When she looks for something, he actually enjoys, Holden's first answer is simply, “*I like Allie.*” (Salinger, 1994, p. 154)

Holden's relationship with his other brother, D.B., resembles more his hatred of the “phony” world. It stems from a perceived loss of authenticity, and his brother D.B.'s transition from a genuine writer to a Hollywood “*prostitute*” (Salinger, 1994, p. 1), symbolises exactly that, the selling out of one's passions for commercial success. Despite the sarcastic notes directed towards D.B., he seems to be sort of Holden's confidant because Holden acknowledges that the story, he is going to tell the readers is what he told his brother as well:

“I’ll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy. I mean that’s all I told D.B. about, and he’s my brother and all” (Salinger, 1994, p. 1).

He does, however, hate Hollywood, where D.B. lives now, and just generally dislikes movies. Actors are the embodiment of phoniness for him: bad actors fail to convince, while good actors become self-conscious of their craft, both resulting in a lack of genuineness:

“They never act like people. They just think they do. Some of the good ones do, in a very slight way, but not in a way that’s fun to watch. And if any actor’s really good, you can always tell he knows he’s good, and that spoils it” (Salinger, 1994, p.105).

This obsession with authenticity creates yet another paradox in Holden's character. He longs for solitude, building a “bubble” to shield himself from the inauthenticity he perceives everywhere. However, his actions contradict this desire. He actively seeks out company, calling Jane and Sally and visiting home just to talk to Phoebe. This inconsistency highlights another element of Holden's bildungsroman journey: his struggle to reconcile his yearning for connection with his disillusionment with the adult world. Despite his words, Holden seems to crave genuine connection, a need that remains unmet amidst his self-imposed isolation.

Jane Gallagher serves as a unique figure in Holden Caulfield's world. Despite lacking a physical relationship, Holden describes her with a fondness that suggests a deep, idealised connection. Jane Gallagher is present in the story only through the lens of Holden Caulfield's memories. This is triggered by his roommate, Stradlater, taking her on a date. Stradlater's refusal to discuss the date enrages Holden, leading him to a physical confrontation (a losing battle, given how Stradlater is much stronger than Holden). This violent reaction exposes the fragility of the pedestal upon which Holden places Jane. Even without evidence, he clings to the belief that sweet *“old Jane”* (Salinger, 1994, p. 28) is an innocent childhood memory and refuses to believe she could ever be intimate with someone like Stradlater, whom Holden considers phony. The fight becomes a symbolic defence of this idealised version of Jane, a desperate attempt to preserve a fantasy that is long gone (if it ever existed), just like childhood is. This incident highlights the complex nature of Jane's role in Holden's Bildungsroman journey. She represents pure love, a connection untainted by the phoniness

he associates with adulthood. However, this idealisation makes her unattainable. Throughout the novel, Holden avoids opportunities to interact with Jane, even though he constantly thinks about calling her, further emphasising the distance between his idealised image and the reality of what Jane could really be like now.

In contrast to Jane stands Sally Hayes, who represents a different type of love for Holden. He doesn't hold the same idealised image of her, but she offers a sense of familiarity and availability. She's there for him – answering late-night calls, going on dates, and readily expressing affection. However, their connection remains superficial on both sides. Despite labelling Sally the "*queen of the phonies*" (Salinger, 1994, p. 105), Holden finds himself drawn to her during moments of loneliness. This contradiction highlights his emotional confusion. He craves connection yet remains cynical about the possibility of genuine intimacy. In the throes of these conflicting desires, he declares his love and proposes marriage, momentarily believing his own words (even though he later acknowledges his mistake). Neither of them truly means declarations of love only seeking comfort in the moment, rather than genuine emotional depth:

"I told her I loved her and all. It was a lie, of course, but the thing is, I meant it when I said it. I'm crazy. I swear to God I am.

"Oh, darling, I love you too," she said. Then, right in the same damn breath, she said, "Promise me you'll let your hair grow" (Salinger, 1994, p.113).

This behaviour underscores Holden's emotional immaturity. He confuses fleeting comfort with genuine connection and resorts to impulsive declarations when faced with loneliness. Sally's availability provides temporary solace, but it fails to address the deeper yearning for meaningful relationships that Holden struggles with throughout the novel. This tendency to idealise is a hallmark of the Bildungsroman genre. Similar to Wilhelm Meister in Goethe's novel, Holden's idealisation clouds his judgement. Wilhelm falls for a woman named Marianne based on her superficial beauty, overlooking her emotional instability.

Holden Caulfield's journey in *The Catcher in the Rye* is marked by a desperate search for connection so when even his seemingly dependable companion, Sally, proves unavailable, he seeks solace in an unlikely source: a prostitute named Sunny. This encounter, however, becomes a revelation of Holden's true desires. Confronted with the reality of physical intimacy (Holden is a virgin), he panics and disengages. This moment shatters the illusion – Holden doesn't crave sex; he craves emotional connection. His request to simply

talk with her highlights this need. This encounter could serve as a turning point in Holden's journey. He confronts the limitations of his attempts to escape loneliness through superficial means. While the realisation doesn't necessarily lead to immediate solutions, it signifies a shift in his understanding of his own needs.

Holden's relationship with the female characters shows his problems with intimacy and his own insecurities. He describes himself as still a virgin but not because of his own fault but because of external factors like *“something always happens. For instance, if you're at a girl's house, her parents always come home at the wrong time--or you're afraid they will. Or if you're in the back seat of somebody's car, there's always somebody's date in the front seat--some girl, I mean--that always wants to know what's going on all over the whole goddam car. I mean some girl in front keeps turning around to see what the hell's going on. Anyway, something always happens”* (Salinger, 1994, p. 83). This is a classic deflection tactic, revealing a deeper fear and insecurity he carries within himself.

Another one of Holden's relationships that shapes his character is his relationship with his parents. Their presence is primarily felt through their absence. Their fleeting mentions, usually by other characters, underscore Holden's emotional distance from his parents. However, there are moments that reveal Holden's hidden feelings. His fear of dying from pneumonia and the impact it would have on his mother and sister, Phoebe, exposes a genuine concern. This concern echoes the pain the family endured after Allie's death, suggesting that Holden, despite his detachment, cares deeply for his family:

“Anyway, I kept worrying that I was getting pneumonia, with all those hunks of ice in my hair, and that I was going to die. I felt sorry as hell for my mother and father. Especially my mother, because she still isn't over my brother Allie yet” (Salinger, 1994, p. 139).

However, Holden defends the lack of mentions of his parents at the very start of the novel when he claims that he is *“not going into it”* (Salinger, 1994, p. 1), giving two reasons for that: first, it bores him, and second, his parents are *“quite touchy about anything like that”* (Salinger, 1994, p. 1). Therefore, the question of Holden Caulfield's relationship with his parents remains unclear. While it's tempting to dismiss his silence as simply a phase of teenage rebellion – a time when parental figures often lose their importance – there are hints that suggest a deeper issue. It is hard to determine whether Holden's silence about his parents is a symptom of a deeper disconnect or simply a teenager distancing himself from his family

during this rebellious phase. While he craves guidance and support, the very people who should provide it – his parents – remain curiously absent from his narrative.

5.6. The burden of death in Holden's journey

The theme of death casts a long shadow over Holden Caulfield's Bildungsroman journey in *The Catcher in the Rye*. While accepting mortality is a crucial step towards adulthood, Holden remains fixated on the past, particularly the death of his younger brother, Allie. This loss shatters his innocence and fuels his disillusionment with the world. Holden's violent reaction to the death of his brother Allie exemplifies his unresolved grief and his inability to move forward emotionally:

“I slept in the garage the night he died, and I broke all the goddam windows with my fist, just for the hell of it. I even tried to break all the windows on the station wagon we had that summer, but my hand was already broken and everything by that time, and I couldn't do it. It was a very stupid thing to do, I'll admit, but I hardly didn't even know I was doing it, and you didn't know Allie” (Salinger, 1994, p.34).

According to Iversen's description of Bildungsroman and its central themes and motifs, which were mentioned in the theoretical part of this thesis, the question of accepting and confronting death becomes another layer of the psychological challenges protagonists face on their journeys. Holden's journey is nowhere near ending since the accepting death part has not happened yet, as Holden still seems to hold on to his brother in a lot of situations.

This fixation on death extends beyond Allie. His curiosity about funerals or his own suicidal thoughts - *“What I really felt like, though, was committing suicide. I felt like jumping out the window. I probably would've done it, too, if I'd been sure somebody'd cover me up as soon as I landed. I didn't want a bunch of stupid rubbernecks looking at me when I was all gory”* (Salinger, 1994, p. 94) - all point towards a deeper fear of mortality. He himself did not attend Allie's funeral because he was still at the hospital from the window incident but when he imagines his own demise, the picture is filled with disgust – not at the act itself, but at the hypocrisy of his phony relatives attending. This aversion highlights his disillusionment with the adult world, where even death becomes a performance:

“I started picturing millions of jerks coming to my funeral and all. My grandfather from Detroit, that keeps calling out the numbers of the streets when you ride on a goddam bus with him, and my aunts--I have about fifty aunts--and all my lousy cousins. What a mob'd be there. They all came when Allie died, the whole goddam stupid bunch of them” (Salinger, 1994, p. 139).

Another layer of death enters Holden's world with the suicide of his classmate, James Castle who killed himself because other boys bullied him. Castle's death is a strong memory for Holden because Castle was wearing Holden's sweater at the time. Seeing Castle dead while wearing the sweater intensifies his sense of loss and raises questions about responsibility. However, from this unfortunate situation emerges a glimmer of hope in the form of Mr. Antolini. Unlike everyone else, Mr. Antolini takes it upon himself and approaches Castle's body with respect. This act of compassion challenges Holden's cynical view of adults.

These encounters with death heighten his anxiety and reinforce his belief that innocence is inevitably lost in the "phony" adult world.

5.7. The resolution of Holden's coming-of-age journey

The ending of *The Catcher in the Rye* presents a complex and debatable picture of Holden Caulfield's fate. While on the surface, his admittance to a mental institution suggests he's finally receiving help, a closer look reveals unresolved issues and lingering confusion. Literary critic Edwards (1977) argues that Holden's apparent apathy might not be progress but resignation. His unclear response to D.B.'s questions - *“I didn't know what the hell to say. If you want to know the truth, I don't know what I think about it”* (Salinger, 1994, p. 192) - and his statement about missing "everybody" hints at this. Holden seems emotionally stuck, neither interested in dissecting the past nor truly planning for the future. However, a more optimistic interpretation is also possible. Holden's admittance to the institution could be the first step towards healing. His emotional vulnerability when he says he misses everyone might indicate a willingness to connect, a crucial aspect of overcoming his isolation.

Ultimately, the question of whether Holden's ending represents hope or resignation remains open to debate. J.D. Salinger leaves readers with a character suspended in a state of uncertainty. He could be on the path to recovery, or he could have simply resigned himself

to the system he claims to despise. This ambiguity aligns perfectly with the Bildungsroman genre, where a protagonist's path is often fraught with uncertainty, offering the potential for both growth and stagnation.

But without taking Holden's hospitalisation into consideration, the actual resolution might lie somewhere else. Holden's quest for an "ideal world" fuels his desire to escape. Initially, he proposes running away to a ranch in the West to Sally and it feels like a search for something genuine (escaping to create a perfect life away from the phony New York). However, when he shares this plan with Phoebe, it takes on a desperate tone, a potential escape from his crippling depression.

This internal conflict is evident in his actions. He seeks out Mr. Antolini, the closest thing to a non-phony adult he knows, the one that didn't shy away from the dead body of James Castle, hoping for guidance and perhaps discouragement from leaving. The act of calling him reveals a desire for help, as does his strange wish for his parents to catch him sneaking out of the apartment—a subconscious yearning to be "caught," a metaphor for needing intervention. Mr. Antolini could be seen as Holden's last refuge, the "catcher" he secretly needs.

Despite Mr. Antolini's seemingly valuable advice, which Holden initially appears to take to heart, their encounter takes a turn when Holden wakes to find Mr. Antolini patting his head. This gesture, that might have or might not have been misinterpreted by Holden as a sexual advance, shatters his carefully constructed ideal of Mr. Antolini as a "non-phony" adult. The possibility of learning or finding solace from the conversation disappears. While a part of him later wonders if he misjudged the situation, the damage is done - *"I wondered if just maybe I was wrong about thinking he was making a flitty pass at me"* (Salinger, 1994, p. 175). He remains isolated, his search for a genuine connection spoiled yet again. However, the fact that he is even questioning his interpretation suggests a bit of self-awareness, and although it's not enough to overcome his immediate reaction, it hints a bit at the resolution that comes afterwards through a surprising twist – Holden becomes the "catcher" caught by another.

This situation was already mentioned in this work in relation to what Holden's sister Phoebe means to him and how he was able to overcome his desire for her needs. Now, another perspective on the situation is offered. When Holden meets Phoebe, who is ready to run away with him, he sees a reflection of his own negativity creeping into her innocent world. The play she excitedly described, the food she hasn't eaten – these details trigger a realisation. He worries that his cynicism is reflecting on her and that her pure spirit is

damaged—the very essence he desperately wants to protect. This horrifying vision compels him to abandon his escape plan. And so, paradoxically, he is saved through saving; the catcher is caught by the person he most wants to catch. This moment of connection is further emphasised by the overwhelming happiness Holden experiences watching Phoebe on the carousel:

“I felt so damn happy all of sudden, the way old Phoebe kept going around and around. I was damn near bawling, I felt so damn happy, if you want to know the truth. I don't know why. It was just that she looked so damn nice, the way she kept going around and around, in her blue coat and all” (Salinger, 1994, p. 191).

The simple joy in this scene, so rare throughout the novel, underscores the significance of his bond with Phoebe. Holden is, of course, by no means completely healed; his crippling cynicism likely lingers, as evidenced by his eventual breakdown but we have proof of the genuineness of the catcher image. And so, the journey becomes the realisation that there are things far greater than his hatred for the world and his determination to escape it.

6. BLACK SWAN GREEN

6.1. Diary of A Year in the Life of a Thirteen-Year-Old

David Mitchell's protagonist in *Black Swan Green*, Jason Taylor, is a fresh take on the angst-ridden teenager. Unlike Holden Caulfield of *The Catcher in the Rye*, Jason is a much younger and more vulnerable thirteen-year-old boy. In 1980s Worcestershire, a small village far removed from the New York City of Holden's story, Jason grapples with similar challenges of adolescence.

Black Swan Green unfolds over a year, each chapter capturing a month in Jason's life and acting as a self-contained story, starting in January 1982, and concluding a year later. The plot lacks a linear flow, chapters often end abruptly without clear resolutions, and characters may vanish only to reappear later, seemingly at random. But there are elements, other than Jason's formation, that tie it together. For example, in the first story, Jason breaks an expensive watch he inherited from his grandfather; it's not until much later in the book that we learn that he's been searching for a replacement.

However, this fragmented approach, rather than focusing on a traditional plot with neat resolutions, highlights the most impactful moments in Jason's life, which are what are important in Jason's Bildungsroman journey. Readers experience his year as a series of transformative events, mirroring the messy, unpredictable nature of adolescence. The lack of closure reflects how life rarely offers clear-cut endings. Like the reader, Jason must connect the dots himself, piecing together meaning from his experiences. Furthermore, by constantly introducing new stories, the structure reinforces the idea that life is a continuous journey. Just as we process past experiences, new ones come rushing in.

Black Swan Green reads like a teenager's diary come to life. Jason, the sole narrator, tells the story the way a young boy might record his thoughts and experiences in a diary. The stories themselves, often starting abruptly and ending unresolved, echo the unfinished thoughts and fleeting impressions that fill a teenager's mind. Further reinforcing this diary-like quality is Jason's language. His narration is filled with slang (epic, ace, etc.) and swear words common among teenagers. He even throws in brand names of the era (Monster Munch, Cadbury's Roses, Alfa Romeo, etc.) and references to popular songs ('Songbird' by Fleetwood Mac), grounding the story in a specific time and place, just like a diary entry might. These elements combine to create a powerful sense of being inside Jason's head, experiencing the world with his unfiltered young boy perspective. It's a Bildungsroman

through the lens of a messy, unedited diary, capturing Jason's growth and self-discovery in all their raw glory. There are, however, moments where his expression seems a touch too mature. Take the line: "*The mass and density of her words are bending space and time. A brick of loneliness is reaching terminal velocity inside me*" (Mitchell, 2014, p. 210). These sentences stand out against his usual colloquialisms. This inconsistency can be a sign of Jason's artistic sensibilities. As someone who writes poems, he is experimenting with expressing emotions in a more profound way, trying to embellish and heighten his feelings with more powerful vocabulary and imagery, even if it feels slightly unnatural for his age.

Jason's narration is also intertwined with the explanations of words he cannot say because of his stammer. The "Hangman" is present very often on numerous occasions and in conversations:

*'I don't—' (Hangman seized 'know' so I had to abort the sentence, spazzishly.)
'What's it to you? The room felt stuffy.'* (Hangman let 'stuffy' go unchallenged.)"
(Mitchell, 2014, p.43).

Jason, despite being a much gentler and more optimistic version of Holden Caulfield, carries some of his sarcasm and humour. Since he has a group of boys who bully him, he has a lot of resentment built towards them, even though he wants to become one of them. He often makes sarcastic remarks towards people, never saying them out loud but telling them to the reader:

'You do know,' Kelly jumped in, 'why Ross Wilcox's mum left?'
She realized her son was pure evil? 'Why?' (Mitchell, 2014, p.318).

6.2. Jason's inner battles

Jason embodies the classic Bildungsroman hero experiencing alienation, loneliness, and a heightened awareness of his outsider status. But in contrast to Holden Caulfield's self-imposed exile from a world he sees as phony, Jason's yearning for connection is very apparent and stems from the fact that it was never his choice to not fit in with the rest. His stammer and shy personality make him a target for bullies, creating a barrier between him and his peers.

Though at thirteen, adulthood might seem far away, these are Jason's formative years – a crucial stepping stone before fully entering the adult world, so Mitchell offers a unique coming-of-age story through Jason's eyes.

Unlike Holden in *The Catcher in the Rye*, who desperately tries to cling to childhood innocence, Jason seems to accept the inevitability of growing up, although with a touch of anxiety. While both boys share a critical eye towards the adult world, Jason's approach is gentler. He doesn't necessarily reject adulthood; he craves acceptance from his classmates, a world Holden would likely scoff at as phony, and perceives adulthood as a time where he would be free of these intents to fit in. The novel shows the brutal hierarchy of a small-town school, where fitting in requires initiation rituals and smoking, drinking. Moral dilemmas constantly arise – the desire to be "cool" clashes with a sense of right and wrong, which proves to be Jason's most important struggle throughout the novel. But for Jason, fitting in with these boys represents a path of least resistance, a way to navigate the complexities of childhood. He wishes for a sense of belonging, a world free from bullies and judgement that, from his point of view, adulthood provides.

Throughout the year, Jason's view is impacted by events like his parents' divorce and his father's public humiliation, which transform his romanticised notion of adulthood. These experiences nudge Jason's perspective closer to Holden Caulfield's disillusionment. While Jason still yearns for the independence adulthood promises, he gains a deeper appreciation for the complexities of adulthood and the sacrifices it often demands.

However, Jason's biggest enemy may be himself. He struggles with a debilitating stammer, a personal demon he calls "Hangman" that steals his voice at the most inappropriate moments. This internal conflict adds an autobiographical layer, which is not unknown to Bildungsromans, reflecting Mitchell's own experiences with a stammer. He has found a way to adapt to it, creating alter egos like "Hangman," the embodiment of his speech impediment that takes hold in stressful situations, like reading aloud in class.

This idealised figure acts as a guiding light. It embodies the confident, wiser version of Jason he aspires to be. "Unborn Twin" judges his decisions, nudging him towards the "right" path and encouraging self-improvement. In stark contrast, "Maggot" represents Jason's insecurities and negativity. It reflects the negativity he encounters – the taunts, prejudices, and general behaviour he experiences from classmates. This voice constantly criticises his choices, fuels self-doubt, and even uses vulgar language, mirroring the negativity he faces from bullies. It paints a picture as if "Unborn Twin" was the angel sitting

on Jason's shoulder whispering encouragement while "Maggot" was the devil on the opposite shoulder mocking and criticising.

“Go home, *urged the nervy Maggot in me*. What if he's a ghost?

My Unborn Twin can't stand Maggot. What if he is a ghost?” (Mitchell, 2014, p.20).

Here is a representation of the internal conflict - one voice urges caution and fear, trying to evoke cowardice in Jason that can be later mocked, while the other seeks to overcome it. The relationship between these two alter egos is, as expected, near antagonistic and these exchanges paint a vivid picture of Jason's internal struggles, a constant battle between his aspirations and insecurities:

“Once a Maggot, *mocked Unborn Twin*, always a Maggot” (Mitchell, 2014, p. 267).

Jason's alter egos offer a unique window into his transformation throughout the year. Initially, Hangman exerts powerful control over Jason's life, dictating the words he can and cannot speak. We learn that Jason had learned to adapt with strategies to avoid the stammer:

“The only way to outfox Hangman is to think one sentence ahead, and if you see a stammer-word coming up, alter your sentence so you won't need to use it. Of course, you have to do this without the person you're talking to catching on. Reading dictionaries like I do helps you do these ducks and dives, but you have to remember who you're talking to” (Mitchell, 2014, p. 31, 32).

While Jason's strategy to anticipate and avoid difficult words offers some relief, it's not a permanent solution. He's essentially learning to work around Hangman, not truly conquering his stammer. The novel leaves the ultimate resolution of his speech impediment for the last chapter, which lies in self-discovery and confronting the deeper reasons behind his speech impediment. Initially, he blames his speech impediment for his social isolation and distress. However, as the novel progresses, he experiences a crucial self-discovery. While talking to the same lady who treated his ankle a year ago, he realises that the stammer itself isn't the root cause of his alienation. It's the negative reactions and expectations of others that worsen his anxieties and self-consciousness:

“I hadn’t stammered once, the whole time I’d been talking to Mrs Gretton. S’pose it isn’t Hangman who causes it? S’pose it’s the other person? The other person’s expectations. S’pose that’s why I can read aloud in an empty room, perfectly, or to a horse, or a dog, or myself? (Or Mrs Gretton, who might’ve been listening to a voice but I’m pretty sure it wasn’t mine.) [...] S’pose what triggers the stammer’s the stress of hearing that fuse going ssssssss? S’pose you could make that fuse infinitely long, so that the dynamite’d never go off? How?

By honestly not caring how long the other person’ll have to wait for me. [...] Sitting in Mrs Gretton’s yellow room it seemed so obvious. If I can reach this state of not caring, Hangman’ll remove his finger from my lips.” (Mitchell, 2014, p. 365).

Beyond the internal struggles personified by "Hangman," "Maggot," and "Unborn Twin," Jason possesses another alter ego – Eliot Bolivar. This figure, unlike the others, embodies the truest sense of an alter ego – an alternate identity. Under this pseudonym, Jason expresses himself through poetry. Eliot Bolivar's emergence strengthens the Bildungsroman aspects of *Black Swan Green*, particularly its connection to the Künstlerroman subgenre. This subgenre focuses on the development of an artist. For Jason, poetry becomes a significant outlet for processing his experiences and emotions. The act of creating under a pseudonym adds another layer of meaning. It suggests a separation between Jason's everyday self and his artistic self. Perhaps Eliot Bolivar represents Jason's aspirations and his desire to create and find beauty in the world around him. This artistic outlet serves as a powerful tool for his growth and self-discovery, solidifying the Bildungsroman elements of the novel.

6.3. Jason’s Quest for Belonging

Thirteen-year-old Jason navigates a world where social labels hold immense power. When describing writing poetry, he terms it “*sort of...gay*” (Mitchell, 2014, p. 194). This term, back then, was commonly used as a synonym for something uncool or undesirable. While such language wouldn't be acceptable today – a reflection of evolving social awareness – it captures the atmosphere of 1980s England, where homosexuality was still largely misunderstood and stigmatised. Jason likely uses "gay" because of this broader cultural context, not fully grasping its true meaning. His limited vocabulary further

contributes to this misunderstanding. "Gay" becomes a generic term for anything he dislikes, reflecting his age and lack of maturity.

'I don't have a girlfriend.'

Quick as a chess-clock thumper, she said, 'You prefer boys?'

I still can't believe she said that. (Yes I can.) 'I'm normal!'

Her drumming fingers on the pile of parish magazines said, Normal? (Mitchell, 2014, p. 195).

Jason's limited understanding of the world is playfully challenged by Madame Crommelynck, a pivotal mentor in his life. When Jason dismisses poetry as something "*creeps and poofers do*" (Mitchell, 2014, p. 194), she pushes him to examine his prejudices. Using his own logic against him, she asks:

'So you are one of these "creeps"?'

'No.'

'Then you are a "poof-ter", whatever one is?'

'No!'

'Then your logic is eluding me' (Mitchell, 2014, p.194).

This exchange highlights a significant difference between Jason and Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye*. Unlike Holden's rebellious rejection of adulthood, Jason longs to fit in. He expresses this frustration to Madame Crommelynck, stating, *'I'm a kid. I'm thirteen. You said it's a miserable age, being thirteen, and you're right. If you don't fit in, they make your life a misery'* (Mitchell, 2014, p. 194). These words capture the vulnerability and social anxieties that often accompany adolescence. This doesn't necessarily translate to a yearning for adulthood. He yearns for something more immediate – belonging. He craves acceptance among peers, a desire that fuels his journey of self-discovery.

Jason sees the popular kids at school – those who bully, smoke, swear, and embody everything he deems "wrong" – as the epitome of what it means to fit in. Here lies a fascinating contradiction. While he disapproves of their behaviour at times, it also represents a version of himself that might gain acceptance.

This internal conflict mirrors Holden Caulfield's experience in *The Catcher in the Rye*, where his dramatic portrayal may have been perceived as exaggerated but ultimately

captured the essence of teenage angst. Similarly, Jason's perception of his peers, while coloured by his insecurities and desire to belong, paints a realistic picture of adolescent social dynamics.

The popularity is an important issue in the novel, considering the protagonist is a 13-years teen who wants to be a part of something. Early in the novel he is actively trying to infiltrate the ranks of the "cool kids." This pursuit isn't driven by a genuine desire to be one of them; it's a desperate hope to escape their bullying and humiliation. For Jason, becoming part of this group represents a gateway to a more fulfilling existence. He imagines gaining self-confidence, forging friendships, and perhaps even experiencing a budding romance.

This passage highlights a common perception among young adolescents. Jason equates self-identity with belonging. He believes that by associating with the popular crowd, he'll gain a sense of who he is. Being part of something seemingly "great" fuels his hope for acceptance and belonging.

Jason's yearning for belonging is evident in all of the *Black Swan Green*, but the chapter *Spooks* intensifies this theme. The title refers to a secretive group of popular kids that represents an inner circle that holds power within Jason's social circle. Jason himself acknowledges that "By the time you're thirteen, gangs're babyish, like dens or Lego. But *Spooks* is more a secret society" (Mitchell, 2014, p. 158) formed years ago so to become one of them is a privilege. An opportunity arises when Jason pulls a prank on a neighbour, inadvertently gaining a moment of popularity and the chance to join the Spooks. However, first he has to fulfil the task of getting unnoticed through six back gardens in under fifteen minutes. The *Spooks* challenge becomes a catalyst for Jason's self-discovery. Initially, he sees gaining entry as the key to happiness but after he successfully finishes the task, gaining him a place among the popular boys, they all hear Dean Moran fall. The thrill of accomplishment clashes with a sense of compassion. He feels the urge to check on Dean, a choice that contradicts the image of a "true Spooks" member. Of course, doing the right thing and doing what a true "Spook" would do rarely mean the same thing. As he grapples with this internal conflict, he might begin to question the values the Spooks represent.

While Dean Moran might not be Jason's chosen companion, their shared unpopularity has forged a bond. The narrative suggests that Dean might even be slightly less popular than Jason, but he receives an invitation to join the Spooks alongside Jason. So, when he is not successful in completing the challenge and therefore establishing his position as the outsider, it means that someone as cool as the Spook should not give a second thought about him. Jason's internal struggle reveals a critical aspect of his character – his strong sense

of empathy. He prioritises his concern for Dean over the allure of popularity. This moment goes beyond simply showing kindness to an unpopular peer. Jason ponders whether Dean would do the same for him, a reflection of his inherent trust in others. By choosing compassion over coolness, Jason throws away his chance to join the Spooks. This pivotal moment serves as a turning point in the novel. It highlights the values that Jason holds dear and sets him on a path of self-discovery that prioritises genuine connections over superficial popularity. A Bildungsroman is about a protagonist's growth and development as they navigate the complexities of adolescence. Here, Jason's decision marks a significant step in his journey. He prioritises his moral compass and genuine connection over the superficial validation of the "cool kids." Jason might not gain the acceptance he craves initially, but he gains something far more valuable – a deeper understanding of himself and the importance of following his moral compass.

6.4. The setting and mentors of Jason's Bildungsroman journey

In a Bildungsroman, the protagonist's growth is tied to their environment. For Jason Taylor, this environment is entirely contained within the small village of Black Swan Green, England. The very title emphasises the centrality of this setting to his coming-of-age story.

While the narrative doesn't explicitly address broader political or social issues of the time, like the Falklands War, there are subtle mentions of the climate of 1980s Britain, but as Jason is the one narrating the story, everything he tells is only from his perspective, and due to his age, he may not fully grasp the impact of these issues, but they nonetheless influence his experiences. Traces of class divisions, religious practices, and even nationalistic sentiments are woven into the background. When being asked by Madame Crommelynck whether the war had influenced one of his poems, he shrugged it off with:

'The Falklands was on while I was writing the poem,' I answered. 'The war just sort of seeped in' (Mitchell, 2014, p.184).

The "class war" plays out in the schoolyard hierarchy, with popular children holding power over marginalised groups like Jason and his friends. Similarly, the clash between "centre" and "margin" manifests through the tension between residents and minority communities.

A feature of the Bildungsroman is the protagonist's departure from their familiar environment. While *Black Swan Green* seemingly confines Jason Taylor to his village, a closer look reveals a different kind of journey. Despite the lack of literal travel, Jason, a resourceful and imaginative boy, finds adventure within the village boundaries. His wit and rich inner world transform the ordinary into the extraordinary. A mundane stroll with his friend Dean becomes an "adventurous" exploration. This metaphorical departure from the familiar is a testament to Jason's growth. Like a traditional Bildungsroman hero, he is venturing beyond his childhood world. He explores his own imagination, pushing the boundaries of the known and finding meaning in the everyday. While the physical setting remains constant, Jason's journey is no less transformative.

The place where he grew up, the place that he once perceived as a magical one, especially in the first chapters (the forest full of ghosts, witches, shadows, etc.), gradually loses its supernatural and fantastic aspects. This shift in perception reflects Jason's maturing perspective. Jason's false idealism - his own imagination - clashes with reality when he decides to visit an old lady who had helped him treat his broken ankle at the beginning of the novel. Jason, through his narration, paints a picture of mystery surrounding the "haunted house" and the old lady who treated his ankle. However, the final visit to the house shatters this romanticised image. Jason encounters the woman's son-in-law, from whom he learns that the old lady, possibly due to a stroke, has become somewhat disoriented, which would explain her locking Jason in her house as an accident. He also reveals that the forest that Jason had always described as a huge mystical and magical place with its supposed lake of drowned boys and gipsy encampments with scary dogs and the "haunted house" where the woman lives is actually just a few acres large:

'But...I thought this place was...miles from anywhere.'

'Here? Nah! Just between Pig Lane and the quarry. Where the gypsies camp in the autumn. This whole wood's only a few acres, y'know. Two or three footy pitches, tops. Hardly Amazonia. Hardly Sherwood Forest' (Mitchell, 2014, p. 364).

On the other hand, Jason's departure from home signifies a pursuit of his artistic self. He writes poems and publishes them in a parish magazine, but he does not share this passion of his with anyone. Only when Madame Crommelynck, an old lady living in the vicarage, expresses interest in his writing does he begin the journey towards his artistic self. Her recognition ignites a spark in Jason, pushing him further on his artistic path. Madame

Crommelynck embodies the quintessential Bildungsroman figure of the mentor. Similar to how Wilhelm Meister encounters various characters who shape his development in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, a foundational Bildungsroman, Jason finds guidance in Madame Crommelynck.

She acts as a teacher within an apprenticeship structure, which is a key feature of the genre. Just like Felix, the passionate and unconventional artist in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Madame Crommelynck challenges Jason's perspectives and imparts valuable knowledge. Her advice on writing, discussions about other artists and music, and even her life experiences resonate with Felix's role. Both characters serve as catalysts for their respective protagonists, encouraging them to embrace their individuality and pursue their artistic passions despite societal pressures:

“You, you must write. If you still fear to publish in your name, is better not to publish. But poetry is more resilient than you think.” (Mitchell, 2014, p. 197)

The enigmatic woman serves a pivotal role in Jason's artistic awakening. Yet, just as abruptly as she entered his life, she vanished, shrouded in mystery. The news of her extradition to Germany, along with her husband, leaves Jason with more questions than answers. This unexpected departure throws Jason's newfound self-confidence into question. The very foundation of his artistic exploration – the lessons and encouragement instilled by this mentor – is now shadowed by doubt:

“The Crommelyncks will be in German police cells, right now. A stammering thirteen-year-old kid in deathliest England’ll be the last thing on Mrs Crommelynck’s mind. The solarium’s gone. My poems are crap. How could they not be? I’m thirteen. What do I know about Beauty and Truth? Better bury Eliot Bolivar than let him carry on churning out shite. Me? Learn French? What was I Thinking?” (Mitchell, 2014, p. 210).

Despite the uncertainty around her departure, her impact on Jason's journey is undeniable. Her presence fostered his artistic voice.

Other than Madame Crommelynck, Jason encounters various influential characters that, despite their brief presence, influence Jason’s journey. In Cheltenham, where his mom works at a gallery, Jason embarks on a quest to replace his broken grandfather's watch (a

secret mission since January). Inside an antique shop, he encounters Rosamund, the shopkeeper. While she initially tries to help him find a replacement, when they discover that the cost of a new watch would be a lot higher than Jason could ever afford, she encourages him to consider the bigger picture. She prompts him to think about the duration of his parents' potential anger if he confesses about the broken watch. This simple question exposes the absurdity of his months-long quest to find a replacement, driven by the fear of admitting his mistake. Rosamund's brief interaction serves as a reminder that mentorship doesn't always require a long-term relationship. In this instance, she acts as a catalyst, prompting Jason to confront his actions and consider the consequences. Like Madame Crommelynck, she acts as a mirror, reflecting Jason's immaturity. Her interactions reveal the childishness behind his perspectives, evident in his response to the simple question about his parents:

'It's a watch you broke! Not a future. Not a life. Not a backbone.'

'You don't know my parents.' I sounded sulky.

'The question here is, "Do you?"'

'Of course I do. We live in the same house' (Mitchell, 2014, p. 240, 241).

This mirrors how Madame Crommelynck challenged Jason's views on writing and the world. And so, when Jason admits to the broken watch towards the end of the novel, unlike the dramatic confrontation Jason might have imagined, the moment is anticlimactic. His father, mirroring Rosamund's reaction, doesn't make a big deal out of it:

'Ah, it doesn't matter.' (But grown-ups often say exactly that exactly when it matters most.) 'It was only a watch. Nobody got hurt, not like that poor Ross Wilcox lad. Nobody died. Be more careful with fragile things in the future, that's all. Is there anything left of the watch?'

'Only the strap and the casing, really.'

'Hang on to those. Some craftsmen might be able to graft parts of another Seamaster into Granddad's. You never know. When you're running thousand-acre nature reserves in the Loire Valley' (Mitchell, 2014, p. 351).

6.5. The ever presence of death in a young boy's life

Jason, similarly to Holden Caulfield, ponders his own mortality and has a curiosity about death in general. While Bildungsroman narratives typically focus on growth and development, death remains an inevitable part of life, a concept these young protagonists grapple within their own ways.

Jason's fascination manifests in his visits to graveyards, seeking out stories of the departed. He mentions a local legend about how people are buried facing west for Judgement Day, allowing the deceased to "*claw their way up*" towards the "*Throne of Jesus*" (Mitchell, 2014, p.164). With a child's playful imagination, he places this throne in Aberystwyth, a town in Wales, taking a local legend and using it to imagine the afterlife in a way that makes sense to him as a child.

This curiosity extends beyond burial traditions. Jason wonders what happens to a body when you drown it, particularly captivated by the tragic tale of boys lost in the forest lake. His fascination even fuels an imagined conversation with one of those drowned boys.

It was already mentioned that the presence of the Falklands War is felt in the novel only marginally for most of the time but there is a passage where it materialises greatly over Jason's life. When the news about "local legend" Tom Yew's death in the war breaks out, the tragic loss of a man still very young takes away the fantasy of war, projecting the reality of mortality into life.

"Tom Yew's death killed the thrill of the war. There was no way to get his body back to Worcestershire so he's been buried out there, on those rocky islands still being fought over. Nothing's got back to normal yet. Make-believe grief is fun. But when someone really dies, there's just this horrible draggingness. Wars go on for months, or years" (Mitchell, 2014, p. 140).

The situation becomes even more heartbreaking when Jason learns that Debby Crombie is pregnant with Tom Yew's child:

*'So Debby Crombie's baby's dad's dead, even before it's born?' [...]
These jokes the world plays, they're not funny at all* (Mitchell, 2014, p. 260).

6.6. The role of Jason's family and love interests in Jason's Bildungsroman journey

While Holden Caulfield's parents were absent for most of the story, Jason's parents in *Black Swan Green* play a more prominent role. Their physical presence and the tense atmosphere within the household are undeniable, even if Jason, due to his age, may not fully comprehend the reasons behind it.

While not traditional mentors in the way Madame Crommelynck or Rosamund are, Jason's parents contribute to his development - their strained relationship, foreshadowed by the tense atmosphere, culminates in the revelation of their divorce at the end of the novel. Witnessing this conflict exposes Jason to the complexities of adult relationships and the challenges of family life.

Jason's father is distant and emotionally unavailable; he prioritises work over family. His interactions with Jason's mother relegate her to the role of a housewife. His interactions with Jason are strained and awkward, highlighting the lack of connection between them. This distant figure becomes the catalyst for shattering Jason's idealised version of adults. The business trip they take together turns into a series of unfortunate events. Jason witnesses his father's humiliation at work, the missed movie night, and his drunken state back at the hotel.

Finally, it is the emotionally awkward revelation of the impending divorce that truly sets this disillusionment. Even this momentous news is delivered in a way that underscores the distance between Jason and his father:

'Sometimes...' The awkwardness after his 'sometimes' grew, and grew, and grew.
'Sometimes, you can love two people in different ways at the same time' (Mitchell, 2014, p.352).

In contrast to his emotionally distant father, Jason's mother emerges as a caring and supportive figure. She actively tries to hold the family together despite the challenges they face. Recognising the difficulties his stammer creates, she encourages him to attend speech therapy. Their bond is emphasised as the family fractures. The quote from the novel, *'The horriblemest part was, being friendly to Dad makes me feel disloyal to Mum. However much they say 'We both still love you' you do have to choose,'* (Mitchell, 2014, p. 358) highlights Jason's struggle with divided loyalty.

However, Jason's mother isn't merely a passive bystander. The novel hints at her own transformation. As Jason observes, she evolves into a successful working woman, hinting at her own journey of growth and resilience.

With Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*, we saw his siblings being idolised and playing a huge role in his life, but Jason's relationship with his sister Julia is far more complex, with Julia resorting to calling him a "Thing" during family dinners (Mitchell, 2014).

However, the narrative records a path of transformation for both siblings. As the family struggles with challenges, Julia's protectiveness towards Jason intensifies. This shift can be attributed to both the worsening situation at home and her impending departure for school in Edinburgh.

Julia's transformation underscores the impact of their shared experiences. Witnessing the family's issues and facing her own separation from her family (although temporary) compels her to step up and offer support to Jason.

Like most Bildungsroman heroes, Jason craves social connection. It's not just about fitting in but escaping the isolating feeling of being an outsider. This yearning can create a tendency to idealise others – a desire for someone who understands—similar to Holden Caulfield's idolization of his brothers Allie and Jane Gallagher. One such idealised figure for Jason is his older cousin, Hugo Lamb. In Jason's eyes, Hugo embodies everything he aspires to be. The text makes it clear that Jason admires Hugo immensely.

Hugo, in a sort of patronising way, acts as a self-proclaimed mentor on Jason's adolescent journey. When he offers Jason a cigarette and Jason declines, Hugo sees it as his "duty" (80) to prevent his cousin from getting stuck. This highlights the power dynamic within their relationship:

“This “not today” attitude of yours is a cancer. Cancer of the character. It stunts your growth. Other kids sense your not-todayness, and despise you for it. “Not-today” is why those plebs in the Black Swan make you nervous. “Not today” – I would bet – is at the root of that speech defect of yours.’ (A shame-bomb blew my head off.) “Not today” condemns you to be the lapdog of authority, any bully, any shitehawk. They sense you won’t stand up to them. Not today, not ever” (Mitchell, 2014, p. 81).

Hugo's offer of a cigarette and his subsequent tirade might appear like a misguided attempt to lead Jason astray. However, his words carry a deeper meaning. While the method is undeniably harsh, Hugo's underlying message is about overcoming fear and embracing challenges. He believes that personal growth requires courage, self-assertion, and a willingness to step outside one's comfort zone.

'I was you myself, Jace, once. Just the same. Always afraid. But there's another reason why you must smoke this cigarette. Not because it's the first step to becoming someone your turkey-shagging schoolmates will respect instead of exploit. Not because a young blood with a mature cigarette is a better proposition to the ladies than a boy with a sherbert dip. It's this. Come here. I'll whisper. [...] 'If you don't kill "not today", Hugo did a horror-movie trailer voice, 'One day you'll wake up, look in the mirror and see Brian and Uncle Michael!'" (Mitchell, 2014, p. 81, 82).

Despite finding some truth in Hugo's words - *"This was so appallingly true I could only try to smile"* (Mitchell, 2014, p. 81) - and Jason viewing Hugo as a more experienced mentor, Hugo's own impulsiveness and questionable methods reveal his own immaturity. After all, he is only two years older than Jason.

Jason's desire to connect with people, of course, extends to the opposite sex as well. For most of the novel, Jason's platonic love for Dawn Madden is mentioned. She is this tough girl, according to his description, *"a boy gone wrong in some experiment"* (Mitchell, 2014, p.4) but Jason always thinks about her:

"Dawn Madden's got cruel eyes like a Chinese empress and sometimes one glimpse at school makes me think about her all day" (Mitchell, 2014, p. 8).

She represents sort of the unreachable ideal for Jason, because not only does he not really know how to talk to girls, but Dawn hangs out with the exact boys that bully Jason and he sees the gaps between them quite clearly. According to his words:

"There're gaps between me and Dawn Madden. Kingfisher Meadows's the poshest estate in Black Swan Green, most kids reckon. Her stepfather's farmhouse is the opposite of posh. I'm in 2KM, the top class at school. She's in 2LP, second from bottom. These gaps aren't easy to ignore. There are rules.

Then there's sexual intercourse. You don't do it in biology till the third year. [...] I've never even kissed anyone" (Mitchell, 2014, p. 108).

Compared to other Bildungsroman heroes like the openly flirtatious Holden Caulfield navigating early sexual experiences or the romantically involved Wilhelm Meister, Jason's journey explores love and sexuality from a refreshingly innocent perspective. He still remains unfazed by the allure of the physical. This is evident in his reaction to the movie Superman:

"Clark Kent gives up his powers just to have sexual intercourse with Lois Lane in a glittery bed. Who'd make such a stupid swap? If you could fly? Deflect nuclear missiles into space? Turn back time by spinning the planet in reverse? Sexual intercourse can't be that good" (Mitchell, 2014, p. 20).

Jason's innocent perspective on intimacy remains largely unchanged throughout the novel. Even when three girls flirt with him, his subsequent contemplation leads him to a simple conclusion: *"I'm not sure if I really want to have sex and I definitely don't want babies"* (Mitchell, 2014, p. 217, 218). These musings reveal his age and his focus on more immediate concerns, highlighting the contrast between him and other Bildungsroman protagonists who might delve deeper into romantic exploration.

Despite his innocence and shyness, he still has a few interactions with girls, even the unreachable ones like Dawn, which he then idealises, wrapped up in the excitement that she has talked to him at all. In the chapter Bridlepath, Jason embarks on a quest, following a public bridle path set on finding out where it ends. This chapter echoes the picaresque tradition, a literary style known for its episodic adventures, which heavily influenced the Bildungsroman genre. And so, throughout his trek, Jason meets various characters and finds himself in peculiar situations. One such encounter is with Dawn Madden, who is making fun of him the whole time, making him act like a dog and threatening him. Despite her teasing, Jason cherishes this interaction, treasuring the brief exchange with her:

"I was still thinking about Dawn Madden. I didn't understand. She must sort of fancy me. She wouldn't've given her only Danish pastry to just any kid who happened along. And I sure as hell fancied Dawn Madden" (Mitchell, 2014, p. 107).

Blinded by his emotions, Jason fixates on her one act of kindness, oblivious to the humiliation. He even carves their names into a tree, a naive testament to his affection. However, she ends up with Ross Wilcox, one of Jason's bullies. As reality sets in, Jason's infatuation fades. This disillusionment paves the way for another girl to capture his attention, ultimately leading to his first kiss. Holly Deblin, the new girl in school, first appears towards the end of the novel but immediately impacts Jason's journey with words of encouragement:

'You're not a maggot. Don't let dickheads decide what you are' (Mitchell, 2014, p. 267).

6.7. The making and unmaking of Jason's world

Like all Bildungsroman heroes, Jason's year is full of learning, experience, and self-discovery. This culminates in a new, more mature perspective on life. Unlike traditional Bildungsroman endings, where heroes get their "happy ending," like Wilhelm Meister in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, who finds fulfilment and purpose in his work in the theatre, Jason's journey concludes with a sense of open-endedness. This reflects a trend in contemporary Bildungsroman narrative; already seen in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Jason's story doesn't culminate in a happily-ever-after, but rather a new beginning. Despite the absence of a definitive resolution, Jason shares a key trait with other Bildungsroman protagonists: he emerges from his experiences wiser and more self-assured. This newfound maturity equips him to confront the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead on his ongoing journey through life.

Black Swan Green, then, suggests that life is not a story with a clear ending but rather a continuous process of growth, learning, and self-discovery. While the year has brought Jason a multitude of experiences, shaping him in various ways, the final lines hint that this is just the beginning:

No bloody way am I crying! I'll be fourteen in a few days.

'It'll be all right,' Julia's gentleness makes it worse, 'in the end, Jace.'

'It doesn't feel very all right.'

'That's because it's not the end' (Mitchell, 2014, p. 371).

Much like Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* and Wilhelm Meister in Goethe's novel, Jason's journey in *Black Swan Green* doesn't reach a single, specific event of resolution. Instead, the Bildungsroman tradition emphasises personal growth and self-awareness as markers of progress. Jason's transformation throughout the year mirrors this tradition. His key discoveries reshape his perspective on adulthood. He begins to see his parents' lives as equally complex as his own, slowly getting rid of the idealisation of adulthood. He confronts his bullies, experiences his first kiss, and even gathers the courage to confess about the broken watch. It seems like a perfect happy ending for Jason; however, the last chapter shocks the reader with the news of his parents getting divorced. These significant milestones in his path to adolescence are, then, overshadowed by the presence of his parents' divorce, which concludes the story for us readers. His father moves in with his mistress and her baby, Jason, moves to Cheltenham with his mom, Julia, to Edinburgh for school. Jason's parents' relationship was troubled all throughout the novel and the hint at the buildup to the divorce can be sensed right from the book's opening, where Jason decides to take a call from his father's study. The person calling, however, never speaks, and all that can be heard is a child's cry. Only in the last chapter do we get to discover that it was actually his father's secretary and mistress in one - the reason his parents are getting divorced, and Jason is moving away from *Black Swan Green*. So the novel's story unfolds the divorce in and the gradual unravelling of his family unit becomes a very defining aspect of Jason's year, but despite him knowing something is wrong, he is yet to understand the gravity of his parents' situation until the very end, when his father, in a mutually confessing kind of conversation (Jason finally admits to the broken grandfather's watch), shares with Jason that he and Jason's mom are getting divorced. The seemingly happy ending being cut short by Jason's parents' divorce underscores the relentless nature of adolescence. There's no permanent resolution, just a constant process of navigating new challenges, which, to Jason, does not make sense:

“The world won't leave things be. It's always injecting endings into beginnings. Leaves tweezer themselves from these weeping willows. Leaves fall into the lake and dissolve into slime. Where's the sense in that? Mum and Dad fell in love, had Julia, had me. They fall out of love, Julia moves off to Edinburgh, Mum to Cheltenham and Dad to Oxford with Cynthia. The world never stops unmaking what the world never stops making” (Mitchell, 2014, p. 360).

Jason's reflection mirrors his own year of growth. His family dynamic has shifted dramatically with his parents' separation, friendships have been tested, and new experiences have challenged his perspective. This quote signifies his acceptance, although he is hesitant, as he still does not understand the meaning of it all. This passage serves as a powerful closing for *Black Swan Green* and is part of Jason's resolution of his Bildungsroman journey. It encapsulates the novel's exploration of adolescence and the dawning realisation that life is a continuous journey filled with both beginnings and inevitable endings. Thrown into the messy complexities of the adult world, Jason realises that life isn't always fair or logical. However, his newfound maturity and perspective allow him to face this truth head-on as he now realises this:

"But who says the world has to make sense?" (Mitchell, 2014, p. 360).

The second to last chapter, "Disco," throws the reader into the most anticipated result of Jason's newly gained maturity. Jason, known for shying away from confrontation, destroys the expensive calculator of Neal Brose, the school's golden boy. This sudden rebellion takes on even greater significance when we learn the reason behind it. Neal, admired by students and teachers alike, has been secretly extorting money from the less popular kids. Fuelled by a mix of rage and a desire for justice, Jason takes a risk. He knows destroying the calculator will get him in trouble, but he also sees it as the only way to expose Neal. Despite the initial fear of being labelled a "snitch," Jason is surprised by the wave of respect he receives from his classmates. Their support validates his actions, proving that standing up for what's right, even if it means getting in trouble, can earn you respect and therefore moral action can be rewarded.

This resolution also reinforces several key features of a Bildungsroman. Jason's act of defiance against Neal signifies a turning point in his development (growth and maturity). He overcomes his fear (loss of innocence) and prioritises justice over self-preservation. Through his actions, he gains a clearer understanding of his own moral compass (self-discovery).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to comprehensively explore the Bildungsroman genre in literature and, specifically, analyse its manifestation in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and David Mitchell's *Black Swan Green*. This thesis also explored the enduring appeal of the Bildungsroman genre in capturing the universal struggles of adolescence: self-discovery, disillusionment, and identity formation.

Due to the ongoing debate surrounding the precise definition of the Bildungsroman genre, this research began with a comprehensive review of existing scholarly interpretations. Key recurring elements were then identified and employed in the empirical analysis, which focused on uncovering the genre's manifestation in two specific novels. By comparatively examining these novels, the study explored how the core elements of the Bildungsroman – namely, the psychological and moral development of a young protagonist – are expressed in contrasting ways. Holden Caulfield's cynical journey through New York City exemplifies the American tradition of disillusionment with societal hypocrisy. Jason Taylor's experiences in a small English village, meanwhile, highlight the British focus on navigating personal challenges and artistic aspirations.

Having defined the key characteristics of the Bildungsroman genre, the analysis proceeded by employing various methods to identify these features within the novels. This investigation utilised literary analysis, identification of Bildungsroman elements, comparative elements, and contextual analysis to consider the novels' broader meaning. This analysis delved into the protagonists' journeys towards maturity and the challenges they face. It went beyond just examining Jason and Holden themselves, but also considered the narration style (as both narrate their own stories), the settings where their journeys unfold, and the relationships they form. Utilizing Iversen's concept of the "conflict between the inner and outer worlds," which manifests in the internal struggles of each protagonist, the analysis explored whether this conflict ever finds resolution. In simpler terms, it investigated if Jason and Holden ultimately accept reality over their idealized versions of the world, which they do to some extent, showcasing their newly acquired maturity.

Both novels utilised classic elements to depict growth and self-discovery, but they diverged in narrative structure and the extent to which the protagonists' disillusionment is resolved. Holden's stream-of-consciousness narration reflected his internal struggle with not just the world around him but with himself, while the fragmented episodes in *Black Swan Green* mirrored Jason's divided sense of self. Ultimately, both Holden and Jason experience

some degree of maturation, but despite their eventual acceptance of reality and the challenges that adulthood brings, their journeys leave them with lingering questions about their place in the world.

While various theories exist regarding the Bildungsroman genre, a unifying theme emerges: the protagonist's transformative journey of growth, maturation, and self-discovery. This central concept undeniably shapes the narratives of both novels examined in this work. In conclusion, although these novels share characteristics that mark them as Bildungsromans, they also demonstrate the genre's adaptability. The stories evolve within distinct sociocultural and historical contexts, showcasing the genre's ability to resonate across time. Despite their open-ended conclusions, Holden and Jason's journeys through disillusionment pave the way for a deeper understanding of themselves and the world. This exemplifies the enduring power of the Bildungsroman: to illuminate the universal path towards self-discovery.

RESUMÉ

Univerzálne boje dospievania – hľadanie seba samého, dezilúzia a formovanie identity – fascinovali autorov už celé storočia. Táto práca sa zaoberala touto témou prostredníctvom žánru Bildungsroman, ktorý sa tradične zameriava na psychologický a morálny vývoj mladého protagonistu. Termín "Bildungsroman" však od svojho vzniku v 1820. rokoch prešiel výrazným vývojom a chýba mu všeobecne uznávaná definícia. Cieľom tejto práce je komplexne preskúmať žáner Bildungsroman v literatúre a konkrétne analyzovať jeho prejavy v dielach J. D. Salingera *Kto chytá v žite* a Davida Mitchella *Trináť mesiacov*.

Hoci sú oba romány oddelené časom a prostredím, využívajú rovnaké kľúčové prvky Bildungsromanu na zobrazenie skúseností svojich dospievajúcich hrdinov, Holdena Caulfielda a Jasona Taylora. Holden, cynický a rozčarovaný tínedžer vylúčený z internátnej školy, sa vydáva na cestu po New Yorku a bojuje s odcudzením a pokrytectvom dospelého sveta. Jason, trinásťročný chlapec žijúci v malej anglickej dedine, sa prebíja cez šikanu, rodinné vzťahy a svoje vlastné umelecké ambície.

Práca sa zameriavala na spôsoby, akými tieto romány využívajú klasické prvky Bildungsromanu na zobrazenie rastu a sebazoznania ich protagonistov a do akej miery sa opierajú o typické témy tohto žánru v americkej a britskej tradícii Bildungsromanu. Po úvodnom komplexnom vysvetlení žánru Bildungsroman a jeho prvkov, kde bolo ponúknutých hneď niekoľko pohľadov na žáner sa práca ďalej zaoberala tým, do akej miery tieto prvky rezonujú s daným žánrom, najmä v kontexte americkej a britskej tradície Bildungsromanu. Práca rozoberá aj samotný koncept „Bildung“, od ktorého sa žáner utvoril a opisuje to, ako sa odráža v prvkoch Bildungsromanu. Žáner je hlboko zakorenený v nemeckej literatúre, preto bolo viac než potrebné sa pozrieť aj na to, čo tento žáner znamená v kontexte nemeckej literatúry.

Pri prezentovaní kľúčových znakov Bildungsromanu sa predstavili témy, ktoré, ako sa ukázalo v neskorších kapitolách, boli prítomné v oboch románoch. Hlavnou témou Bildungsromanu je pútavá cesta protagonistu za hľadaním identity, zmyslu a miesta v spleťostiach života a táto cesta, doslovná aj metaforická, sa stáva katalyzátorom transformácie z neskúseného mladíka na zrelého dospelého. Vzdelanie, formálne aj neformálne, je ďalšou z hlavných tém a hrá kľúčovú úlohu v tomto procese premeny. Protagonista sa nepretržite učí, konfrontuje s novými skúsenosťami, spoločenskými očakávaniami a neustále sa meniacim chápaním sveta. Tieto skúsenosti sú formované rôznymi vzťahmi, s ľuďmi, so svetom okolo neho a s prostredím, v ktorom sa nachádza.

Prostredie sa stáva aktívnym účastníkom príbehu, ovplyvňuje vnímanie a reakcie protagonistu a utvára jeho perspektívu. Láska, vo všetkých jej prejavoch - romantickej, rodinnej i platonickej - dotvára emocionálnu krajinu protagonistu. Bildungsroman sa však nezaobrá len individuálnymi prežívaním, ale ponára sa i do hĺbky "univerzálnych právd", skúmajúc spoločné ľudské skúsenosti a ponaučenia, ktoré presahujú kultúrne, časové a individuálne hranice. S dozrievaním sa protagonista vydáva na osobnú výpravu za objavením týchto "právd", ktoré sa líšia v závislosti od jeho individuality a historického kontextu. Cesta hrdinu je poznačená aj napätím medzi vnútorným a vonkajším svetom, konfliktom medzi idealistickými predstavami a realitou. Toto napätie sa často vyrieši prijatím reality a opustením falošného idealizmu. Rozuzlenie príbehu však nemusí vždy priniesť šťastný koniec, môže sa jednať aj o rezignáciu, stratu nádeje, ba i smrť. Smrť a smútok sa objavujú ako súčasť životných skúseností a otázka prijatia smrti a konfrontácie s ňou sa stáva ďalšou vrstvou psychologických výziev, ktorým protagonistu na svojich cestách čelia.

Ďalšie kapitoly stručne predstavili autorov obidvoch románov a kontext ich tvorby, pretože žáner Bildungsroman má tendenciu obsahovať autobiografické prvky a preto bolo dôležité si autorov do istej hĺbky predstaviť. V rámci autobiografických prvkov, ktoré žáner nesie práca obsahovala aj podkapitulu venovanú rozprávačom, ktorý zohrávajú v Bildungsromanoch dôležitú úlohu, či už sú v prvej osobe alebo tretej jednotného čísla. Nasledujúce kapitoly sa zamerali výhradne na vybrané romány Salingera a Mitchella. Bolo preskúmané, ako sa Holden a Jason vyrovnávajú s dezilúziou, rozvíjajú svoj pocit identity a navigujú vzťahy. Kapitola o Holdenovi Caulfieldovi z románu *Kto chytá v žite* sa zamerala na jeho rozporuplnú identitu, cestu za skúsenosťami, "falošný" svet okolo neho, jeho vzťahy, ťarchu smrti a rozuzlenie jeho dospievania. V kontraste s ním sa kapitola o Jasonovi sústredila na jeho vnútorné boje a hľadanie miesta medzi rovesníkmi, sprostredkované formou denníka. Predstavila jeho mentorov a prostredie malej anglickej dediny, kde Jason vyrastá. Podobne ako u Holdena, aj tu sa autor venuje téme smrti v živote mladého chlapca, úlohe jeho rodiny a lások, a jeho dozrievajúcim poznatkom o svete, ktorý sa neustále mení a formuje.

Ďalej analýza (literárna, komparatívna a kontextová), ktorá bola použitá na identifikovanie prvkov Bildungsromanu v dielach, preskúmala, ako naratívne štruktúry týchto románov, vrátane Holdenovovho prúdu vedomia a fragmentovanej epizodickej štruktúry románu *Trináť mesiacov*, prispievajú k zobrazeniu ciest ich protagonistov.

Porovnávacou analýzou týchto kontrastných Bildungsromanových rozprávání práca tiež ukazuje, do akej miery tieto cesty sebazoznania riešia alebo možno zjemňujú pocity odcudzenia a dezilúzie protagonistov.

Ako už bolo spomenuté, empirická časť tejto práce sa primárne spoliehala na literárnu analýzu a identifikáciu prvkov Bildungsromanu na ich posúdenie. Použité však boli aj komparatívna a kontextová analýza, na zváženie vplyvu sociokultúrnych a historických súvislostí na prejavovanie týchto prvkov v každom románe.

Táto práca dospela k záveru, že hoci existujú rôzne teórie týkajúce sa žánru Bildungsroman, vynára sa zjednocujúca téma: transformačná cesta protagonistu k rastu, dospievaniu a sebazoznaniu. Tento centrálny koncept nepochybne ovplyvňuje aj rozprávania oboch románov skúmaných v tejto práci.

Na záver možno konštatovať, že hoci tieto romány majú spoločné znaky, ktoré ich označujú ako Bildungsromany, zároveň dokazujú adaptabilitu tohto žánru. Príbehy sa vyvíjajú v odlišných sociokultúrnych a historických kontextoch, čo poukazuje na schopnosť tohto žánru rezonovať naprieč časom. Napriek otvoreným záverom Holdenova a Jasonova cesta skrz dezilúziu dláždi cestu k hlbšiemu pochopeniu seba samého a sveta. To je príkladom pretrvávajúcej sily Bildungsromanu: osvetliť univerzálnu cestu k sebazoznaniu.

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