



Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of American Culture and Literature

**QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN  
BILDUNGSROMAN: SUE MONK KIDD'S *THE SECRET LIFE OF  
BEES*, ALICE SEBOLD'S *THE LOVELY BONES*, AND JONATHAN  
SAFRAN FOER'S *EXTREMELY LOUD&INCREDIBLY CLOSE***

Ali İlyâ

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2014

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## KABUL VE ONAY

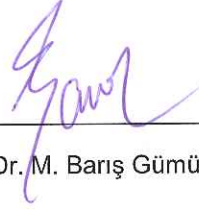
Ali İlya tarafından hazırlanan "Quest for Identity in the Contemporary American Bildungsroman: Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud&Incredibly Close*" başlıklı bu çalışma, 23 Haziran 2014 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından yüksek lisans tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.



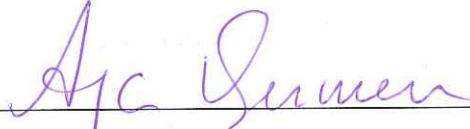
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23.06.2014

Ali İlyas

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## ÖZET

İLYA, Ali. *Çağdaş Amerikan Oluşum Romanında Kimlik Arayışı: Sue Monk Kidd'in The Secret Life of Bees, Alice Sebold'un The Lovely Bones, ve Jonathan Safran Foer'in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close Başlıklı Romanları*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2014.

Bu tez 18. yüzyılda Almanya'da doğan oluşum romanının tarihsel süreçteki yolculuğunda evrenselleşerek nasıl geliştiğini, farklı kuramcılar tarafından getirilen yer yer birbiriyle örtüşen, yer yer de çelişen tanımların çağdaş eserler içerisinde nasıl yankı bulduğunu ve süregelen tartışmaların odağında yer alan ırk, cinsiyet, din, aile gibi kavramların oluşum romanı türü içerisinde nasıl ele alındığını incelemiştir. Çalışma kapsamında 21. yüzyıl Amerikan edebiyatındaki oluşum romanı örnekleri arasında öne çıkan üç eser -Sue Monk Kidd'in *The Secret Life of Bees*, Alice Sebold'un *The Lovely Bones* ve Jonathan Safran Foer'in *Extremely Loud&Incredibly Close* başlıklı romanları- ana karakterin gelişim süreci bağlamında ve oluşum romanı kavramının genel ve yenilikçi özellikleri temelinde çözümlenmiştir. Kayıpların ve kötü deneyimlerin gölgesinde özyıkım ve hayata tutunma arasında gidip gelen, "yeniyetme" olarak nitelendirilebilecek karakterlerin var oldukları toplum içerisinde bireyselleşme ve yetişkin kimliği kazanma süreçleri ele alınmıştır.

Çalışmaya konu olan üç çağdaş eser oluşum romanı türünün geleneksel özelliklerini yansıtmaktan çok daha öteye giderek bu türe yeni boyutlar kazandırmıştır. Sebold, nihai bir son olan ölümü karakter için yeni bir başlangıç noktası olarak sunarken; Kidd, bir yerli Amerikalı karakterin, siyahi Amerikalılar'ın arasında azınlık olarak gelişimini tasvir etmiş; Foer ise ABD için bir dönüm noktası olan 11 Eylül'ü ana karakterin bireysel gelişim hikayesinin odak noktasına yerleştirerek 21. yüzyıl'ın çerçevesinde bir olgunlaşma romanı örneği sunmuştur. Bu üç eserin oluşum romanı bağlamında incelenmesi ana karakterlerin gelişim yolculuğunu betimlemekten bir adım öteye giderek ilgili türün tarihsel süreçteki yolculuğunda kat ettiği mesafeyi ortaya koymuştur.

### **Anahtar Sözcükler**

Oluşum romanı, karakter oluşumu, kimlik arayışı, bütünsel gelişim, çağdaş Amerikan romanı, Sue Monk Kidd (*The Secret life of Bees*), Alice Sebold (*The Lovely Bones*), Jonathan Safran Foer (*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*).

## ABSTRACT

İL YA, Ali. *Quest for Identity in the Contemporary American Bildungsroman: Sue Monk Kidd's The Secret Life of Bees, Alice Sebold's The Lovely Bones, and Jonathan Safran Foer's Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, M.A. Thesis, Ankara, 2014.

This thesis analyzes how the *bildungsroman* as a genre born in the 18th century in Germany, has evolved and become universalized throughout the historical journey it has undertaken, how partly overlapping but at times contradictory definitions proposed by different critics have echoed in the contemporary pieces, and how some controversial concepts including race, gender, religion, family have been dealt with in the context of the *bildungsroman*. Three prominent examples of the contemporary American *bildungsroman*, namely Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* are analyzed in terms of the developmental process of their protagonists, and with reference to their representations of traditional and novel qualities of the *bildungsroman*. The individuation and maturation processes of the young apprentices alternating between self-destruction and self-preservation under the shadow of losses and agonizing experiences are examined. Within that scope, the *bildungsroman* as a deeply-rooted genre is viewed through the lens of the twenty-first century, and how contemporary qualities are embedded into the traditional structure is analyzed.

Three contemporary pieces that are subject to exploration go much further than representing the traditional qualities of the *bildungsroman* as they bring in several novel features. While Sebold employs death as a new beginning for the protagonist, Kidd redefines the idea of being a member of minority and narrates the development of a white American girl among black people. Foer, on the other hand, places a milestone in the history of the United States, the 9/11, at the center of the individual developmental process of his *bildungsroman* hero. An analysis of these three works within the scope of the *bildungsroman* not only describes the maturation processes of the central characters, but it also reveals the vast distance the *bildungsroman* has covered in its historical journey.

### Key Words

*Bildungsroman*, character development, quest for identity, contemporary American novel, Sue Monk Kidd (*The Secret life of Bees*), Alice Sebold (*The Lovely Bones*), Jonathan Safran Foer (*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*).

## TABLE of CONTENTS

KABUL VE ONAY .....	i
BİLDİRİM .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
ÖZET .....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vi
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER I: A FAITH-HEALER IN A BEEHIVE .....	26
CHAPTER II: COMING-OF-AGE OF AN IN-BETWEEN PHOENIX .....	45
CHAPTER III: GOING THE DISTANCE IN HEAVY BOOTS .....	66
CONCLUSION .....	89
WORKS CITED .....	94
ÖZGEÇMİŞ .....	104



## INTRODUCTION

Among the major contributions of German literature to the literary tradition, the *bildungsroman* as a genre rooted in the eighteenth century has remained contentious since its emergence. A wide range of debates about the issues regarding the definition of the term, the prototypical work/s, meaning of the constituent German words “bild/ung” and “roman,” alternative translations of the term into English, other relevant genres along with their similarities and differences, the position of marginalized groups like people of color, or women could possibly be enumerated as the focus of attention. Numerous factors play a role in defining such a disputed territory; local or era-specific characteristics,<sup>1</sup> distinct viewpoints of critics with different origins,<sup>2</sup> change in defining philosophies, and relativity of truth,<sup>3</sup> just to name a few. Thus, for an appreciation of the genre and a detailed analysis of the contemporary pieces within that scope, an extended literature review is required.

The present thesis initially draws the framework in the Introduction and offers a thorough discussion of the related issues regarding the genre. In the light of the preliminary remarks presented here, it analyzes three contemporary American novels in separate chapters; Sue Monk Kidd’s *The Secret life of Bees* (2002), Alice Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones* (2002), and Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud&Incredibly Close* (2005). Though they are categorized under the same genre,

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<sup>1</sup> As it is further discussed in the following paragraphs, one of the most frequently cited definitions of the *bildungsroman* suggested by Jerome Buckley in *Season of Youth* (1974) has received criticism due to the fact that it’s based on the Victorian values, and it “instructs the middle class that [is] finding a proper vocation” (Feng 4).

<sup>2</sup> Gunilla Theander Kester, for instance, in *Writing the Subject: Bildung and the African American Text* (1995) challenges the classical definition of the German term and lays emphasis on the necessity of a new definition as the existing one “comes with a historical baggage of associations to positivism, white male superiority, and a sense of the self as a unified entity (7). Other than Kester, many critics including Morgenstern, Dilthey, Feng, Buckley propose a definition of the term since they find the others inadequate or misleading.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Ashley Gohlman, in *Starting Over: The Task of the Protagonist in the Contemporary Bildungsroman* (1990) considers Zolkowski’s use of the term “misleading” as “he is actually speaking of the late nineteenth century ‘traditional’ German Bildungsroman” (6) and complains it requires “a fixed system of values” that does not exist in a time of multiple realities.

they significantly differ from one another in terms of their way of approaching the development of the character. Hence, they represent the varieties of the *bildungsroman*. Furthermore, as contemporary examples of the *bildungsroman*, the novels both represent the traditional qualities of the deeply-rooted genre and revivify it through the novelties they introduce.

### **DEFINITIONS OF THE CONSTITUENT WORD, *BILDUNG***

*Bildung*, a German term that basically means formation or education, has been defined and interpreted by scholars throughout its history. The root of the German word is *Bild* which means image, “which in its derivative forms is the idea of a new creative ‘formative process’ (*bilden* = to form, to create; *Bildnis*, *Bild* = a picture; *Vorbild* = a role model)” (Siljander, Kivela, and Sutinen 3). Originally used by scholastics with a religious connotation, *bildung* refers to a human being’s rebuilding himself considering God as the absolute model “through self examination and meditation” as “man was created in God’s image but through the Fall became deformed” (Gohlman, *Starting Over* 17). According to another critic, its first use is in Pietist teachings, “where it referred to God’s active transformation of the passive Christian” (Boes 275). In time, it has been released from religious context and redefined by various scholars.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *Truth and Method* notes the distinction between the usual content and the new idea. The former concept comprises “external appearance (the shape of the limbs, the well-formed figure) and in general ... the shapes created by nature (e.g. a mountain formation – *Gebirgsbildung*)” (9). As distinct from the traditional description, the modern view perceives *bildung* as a creative process that requires an individual to develop his natural talent and the present conditions of his environment. The ideas of advancement and consummation are at the center of the latter view. Among the first theorists that are associated with the definition of the word, Kant believes in the significance of education or cultivation for individuation. Thus, Gadamer reports, “among duties to oneself [Kant] mentions not letting one’s talents rust, but without using the word

*Bildung*” (10). Johann Gottfried Herder, another influential critic, considers *bildung* as an aggregate of experiences that constitutes a coherent self. In the words of a scholar, according to Herder, *bildung* “refers to the products not of God’s handiwork, but of an impersonal generic force that -tempered by geographical and climatic parameters that result in ‘national’ variations- drives human beings towards ever higher cultural achievements” (Boes 275).

Influenced by Herder, Alexander von Humboldt similarly perceives *bildung* as “a spiritual and aesthetic education” (Boes 275). He distinguishes the two words that are closely related; *kultur* and *bildung*. The former is concerned with self-development or gathering information while *bildung* refers to a character constructed through an internalization and appreciation of what one gathers, therefore it is considered to be “higher and inward” (Gadamer 10). *Bildung* unlike *kultur* embraces the result of the cultivation process rather than the stages themselves. A piece of information or experience that takes place in the formation of the character preserves its form in *bildung*, or more precisely “to some extent everything that is received is absorbed” (Gadamer 11). However, in *kultur* it loses its function and serves the ultimate end. An individual, as a member of a particular society, uses all the experiences, pieces of information, and all the other items as catalysts that form the whole character. The ingredients remain as they are; they belong to the individual himself, and become a part of the personality. He gains a better recognition of himself and maintains social progress as a whole man. Another name offering a definition of *bildung* is Kester. She states that “*bildung* embodies a double process of inner developing and outer enveloping” (8). Here, a harmony between an individual and society is underscored, both are held responsible for their mutual development; one looks for opportunities to sharpen his wits and become a contributing member of the society while the other promotes character development and tailors the conditions or the environment accordingly.

Goethe, as a figure believing in reciprocity like Kester, elaborates that man is not only affected by what he absorbs but he also “actively influences what he absorbs”

(Gohlman, *Starting Over* 21). In other words, nature educates man as it puts him in numerous situations in each phase of his life and provides him with a wide range of experiences. Man manipulates what he absorbs and reconstructs it from his own angle; the result as Goethe assumes is that “everything is in a constant state of change” (qtd. in Gohlman, *Starting Over* 39). Both the character and its components on an interactional ground affect each other. Likewise, Hegel’s concept of *bildung* heavily depends on seeking a wide variety of experiences for the sake of self-development. Hegel lays emphasis on the tasks of an individual in the process of cultivating himself. In Adam Bresnick’s words, Hegel defines *bildung* as “education of the spirit as it moves from the particular to the universal” (826). Hegel’s concept of *bildungsprozess*<sup>4</sup> includes a certain period of alienation that allocates time to an individual for a quest for an identity, and it “ends by overcoming negativity through the revealed positivity of a fully present self-consciousness” (Bresnick 826). Since Hegel’s top priority is to be in an active engagement in a search for truth, the classical definition of *bildung* that confines development to a mere “mechanical structure” or forming one’s character according to a certain model’s is ridiculed. He mocks the hero who “ultimately flees back into the lap of bourgeois culture accepting its goodly philistine values of personality, profession, and marriage” (Miles 981). Contrary to Hegel, François Jost considers *bildung* as “the process by which a human being becomes a replica of his mentor, and is identified with him as the exemplary model” (135). It is noticeable that close to the scholastics’ understanding of the term, Jost’s definition compels an individual to follow the same path as the mentor, and it precludes development of a peculiar identity.

Such varieties of the definition of the constituent word hint at the controversies surrounding the genre of the *bildungsroman*. In the historical journey it has embarked upon, similar to the German word, *bildung*, the characteristics of the genre have been redefined, and no consensus has been reached yet.

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<sup>4</sup> Formative or educational process.

## VARIETIES OF THE *BILDUNGSROMAN* AS AN INTERNATIONAL GENRE

As Todorov ascertains “[i]n art, every work modifies the sum of possible works, each new example alters the species” (Lambropoulos and Miller 193), and the *bildungsroman* is no exception. Almost every critic begins their analysis of the genre with a new definition of the term that hints at their rationale. Hence, it is not possible to mention all, among them only the most prominent ones are comparatively examined.

Gohlman categorizes the critics who have attempted to define the *bildungsroman* as the ones who advocate that “*bildungsroman* must be informed by clearly defined values which the protagonist must come to terms with and ultimately accept as his or her own” (ix-x), and those who are opposed to the imposition of a certain moral system on the subject, and thus to restrictions placed upon him. A third group includes the critics who are in-between.

While citing the definition of the term by Karl Morgenstern; authors including Swales, Gohlman, Redfield, and some others acknowledge that Morgenstern’s definition is the first attempt on record:

It will justly bear the name *Bildungsroman* firstly and primarily on account of its thematic material, because it portrays the *Bildung* of the hero in its beginnings and growth to a certain stage of completeness; and also secondly because it is by virtue of this portrayal that it furthers the reader’s *Bildung* to a much greater extent than any other kind of novel. (qtd. in Swales 12)

It is noteworthy that Morgenstern, beyond the bounds of conventional definitions, acknowledges the progression of the reader as s/he identifies his/her growth with the character’s and scrutinizes his/her own developmental process; and as a result s/he gains an insight into his/her disposition. Bresnick’s definition, just like Morgenstern’s, accepts the progression of the reader along with the *bildung* hero. For that reason, he asserts that “there are always two heroes to the *[b]ildungsroman*” (Bresnick 828). As the novel’s protagonist is heading to “organic maturity,” the reader out of the literary realm points some morals through the narrative; thus it “carr[ies] the pedagogical program of the novel beyond the story’s

end by allowing it to inflect his or her behavior in the so-called ‘real world’” (828). In that sense, the *bildungsroman* contributes to the development of an individual, and since he gets cultivated as a member of a certain community, he takes active roles in the development of culture. So, the *bildungsroman* achieves much more than serving the development of a fictional character.

Wilhelm Dilthey offers another highly-appraised definition of the *bildungsroman*. Pin-chia Feng assertively remarks on the significance of Dilthey’s definition when she says “the classical German definition of the genre comes from Wilhelm Dilthey” (2). He accepts *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795) as the prototypical work of the genre and constructs the definition on the qualities inherent in Goethe’s novel. He describes the novels listed under the name of the *bildungsroman* as “those which make up the school of *Wilhelm Meister*” (qtd. in Redfield 40). Dilthey remarks on the regular course of development in the life of a *bildung* subject. His definition centers on integration, linearity, and a spiral movement. It involves stages, each of which “has its own value and ... at the same time [is] the basis of a higher stage” (qtd. in Tennyson 136). Thus, they are chained to one another, and a hierarchical design prevails. A stage leads to another only when, if the character succeeds in the present one. Conflicts or clashes are required for cultivation as they are agents of the character’s promotion to the level of maturity or harmony. Then, the individual himself becomes the unifying form in harmony with the environment, and “the highest happiness of humankind is the development of the person as [such] unifying, substantial form of human existence” (qtd. in Tennyson 136). Mary Anne Ferguson mocks the pattern in Dilthey’s and other similar definitions as it is “comic; the circular journey is spiral, the ending a new beginning on a higher plane” (228). Likewise, Michael Beddow criticizes Dilthey’s definition because it considers the development of the hero as the indispensable element of the genre while it is “a means to a further aim” (2). Beddow claims that the genre concerns itself with what makes “men and women human” (285). Hence, while

Beddow prioritizes the components of the *bildungsprozess*, Dilthey's main focus is on the character's development itself.

"[N]owhere in his writings does Goethe," the author of the prototype, "define the term explicitly" (Gohlman, *Starting Over* 20). However, an analysis of his writings or comments of a number of critics on Goethe's concept of life, development or formation may reveal a tentative definition of the term. As previously stated, Goethe accepts a reciprocal relationship between human beings and nature. Human beings have been cultivated on account of their participation in nature's class sessions that necessitate continual mental and physical exercise. Each applied class brings a new piece of information along or restores the existing construction. Activated or stimulated by nature's teachings, people feel more encouraged to probe deep into their inner life and internalize what they have been taught. A human being with a fuller character struggles to influence the environment, and as a consequence, a dynamic relation exists between man and his environment: "Nothing is more characteristic, more fundamental, in Goethe than this dynamism of his Nature is everywhere alive and at work" (Thomas 176). Similar to other first generation critics, the ultimate goal is maturity or harmony, the process is only a means; "'youth must come to an end' – youth is subordinated to the idea of 'maturity;' like the story, it has meaning only in so far as it leads to a stable or 'final' identity" (Moretti, *The Way of the World* 8). A harmonious relation between nature and man is established when the character "can act according to what he thinks is right" (Thomas 193). Though Moretti interprets the destination in Goethe's definition as the construction of a "stable or final identity," Gohlman warns, "Goethe's Heraclitan view of change would exclude the possibility of final perfection or stasis" (*Starting Over* 23). So, identical to Dilthey, Goethe considers the *bildungsprozess* as "a spiral-like movement whose upward limit was unknowable" (Gohlman, *Starting Over* 22).

Susanne Howe puts forward an encapsulated summary of the earlier definitions of the German scholars aforementioned when he asserts in *Wilhelm Meister and His*

*English Kinsmen* that the *bildungsroman* is “the novel of all-round development or self-culture, of which *Wilhelm Meister* is the archetype” (6). It is noticeable that Howe regards the character’s mental, emotional, and physical development as a whole. C. Hugh Holman’s definition is also relevant as it evokes Goethe’s philosophy of life and concisely paraphrases the most notable points in the previous definitions: “A NOVEL which recounts the youth and young manhood of a sensitive PROTAGONIST who is attempting to learn the nature of the world, discover its meaning and pattern, and acquire a philosophy of life and ‘the art of living’” (39). It is Goethe who identifies life with art that requires the development of certain talents in the apprenticeship period to master the art of living that is certainly different from simply existing. Holman’s definition, in the same vein as Dilthey’s or Morgenstern’s, reinforces the active involvement of the hero in the learning process. Alternatively, Franco Moretti, in *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* condenses various definitions of the classical *bildungsroman* that echo through the eighteenth or early nineteenth century into several common characteristics; narration of the itinerary of an initially alienated character, a stability or harmony established through a compromise both with the subject himself and the society, a fresh vista gained along with a more complete self that is called mature.

Among the most cited comprehensive definitions proposed in the later periods, Jerome Buckley’s not only recapitulates the salient features of the genre that have been embedded in the classical definitions but also adds new organizing principles. He goes beyond defining the term, and enumerates almost all the common characteristics of a typical *bildungsroman*:

A child of some sensibility grows up in a country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy, antagonistic to his ambitions, and quite impervious to the new ideas he has gained from unprescribed reading. His first schooling, even if not totally inadequate, may be frustrating insofar as it may suggest opinions not available to him in his present setting. He therefore, sometimes at quite an early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home (and also the relative



innocence), to make his way independently in the city (in the English novels, usually London). There his real education begins, not only his preparation for career but also—and often more importantly—his direct experience of urban life. The latter involves at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values. By the time, he has decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. (17-18)

Notwithstanding its popularity<sup>5</sup> among the critics owing to its applicability to any example of the *bildungsroman*, Buckley's definition has drawn fire from some scholars. "Women writers and women's literature are certainly overlooked in Buckley's *Season of Youth*" (4) says Ian Wojcik-Andrews who reminds Esther Kleinbord Labovitz's reproach to the male-oriented critics: "I soon became aware of the missing female heroine from this genre" (1). Feng specifies the flaw in Buckley's definition that marks either of the love affairs the subject experiences as "exalting." It is not the case for women Feng says, and continues: "Sexuality in the female *Bildungsroman* is more often debasing and handicapping than exalting" (7). Similarly, the editors of *The Voyage In* also complain that in Buckley's definition the social facilities are supposedly available only to males (7). Martin Swales criticizes Buckley for a different reason. He laments the misleading nature of the definition as it demonstrates that "the English novel of adolescence is essentially concerned to find a certain practical accommodation between the hero and the social world around him" (34). Swales finds it oversimplified to accommodate the hero in the society and proves his arguments with an analysis of pieces that significantly diverge from Buckley's pattern. Another group of authors reject the definition's universality for the reason that it totally relies on the Victorian chronotope:<sup>6</sup> "Buckley's definition blatantly upholds the idea of the bourgeois *status quo* and

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<sup>5</sup> Almost any theoretical study that concerns itself with the definition of the term either briefly or elaborately mentions Buckley's definition; Redfield, Loss, Bresnick, Howe, Gohlman, Feng, Wojcik-Andrews, Swales, Moretti, Miles are only a few of the authors that address Buckley's definition.

<sup>6</sup> A term employed by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) to refer to the coordinates of time and space invoked by a given narrative; in other words to the 'setting,' considered as a spatio-temporal whole. (Birch, *Oxford Reference*)

supports the reproduction of existing social structures and values in relation to class, gender, and race” (Feng 5).

### **ATTEMPTS OF LOCALIZING THE GERMAN TERM**

Although many different translations and definitions have been proposed for the German term, “no particular term for the genre has gained much currency in English criticism” (Miles 991). A group of scholars call it “the novel of development” both as an English term used interchangeably and as a sub-genre that is equated by *Entwicklungsroman* in German. It narrates the maturation process of a character, but for a novel in which “the hero actively shapes himself both from within and without” (Gohlman, *Starting Over* 13), it is inadequate because development may disregard active involvement of the hero as it is mostly controlled by biological or other outer forces. For Howe, another prominent critic, the novel of development cannot be accepted as an equivalent for the German term since it “has a more general scope and does not presuppose more or less conscious attempt on the part of the hero to integrate his powers, to cultivate himself by his experience, which is essential to the *Bildungsroman*” (6).

“Novel of education,” the second most common alternative to the German term and another sub-genre called *Erziehungsroman*, has similarly been discredited as it “is explicitly (and narrowly) pedagogic in the sense that it is concerned with a certain set of values to be acquired, of lessons to be learned” (Swales 14). Thus, it confines the factors that shape the hero’s character to the prescribed teachings presented within the borders of school; however, the *bildung* hero is raised in the school of life that lays emphasis more on practice than on theory. With reference to Bakhtin, Lakshmi Bandlamudi presents a summary of the points regarding the concept of education in the *bildungsroman*:

In this type of genre, the world itself is a school and the individual is forever seeking analytical tools to comprehend lawful and logical relationships that exist in the world around him. Even if the world is forever changing, the task is to discover stable forms. Thus, this is the story of a ‘seeker’ whose consciousness progresses systematically from an ignorant state to an

‘enlightened’ state. The journey is not smooth; it is full of upheavals, self-doubt and constant experimentation with various schools of thought, which ultimately leads to ‘true’ forms of knowledge that facilitate the understanding of both the self and the world alike. (qtd. in Bandlamudi 56)

Moreover, what matters is the way the hero internalizes the acquired or the degree of that internalization rather than the contents, which are significant only when they contribute to the moral, mental, or spiritual growth of the character. More precisely, in the novel of education, “the emphasis is more on training than on organic development according to inner capacity” (Howe 24) while it is the other way around in the *bildungsroman*.

Although it is less frequently used, “artist’s novel” is another English variant, the original of which is *Künstlerroman* defined as “a tale of the orientation of an artist” (Buckley 13) or rather as “a study of the inner life, the essential temper, of the artist in his progress from early childhood through adolescence” (Buckley 14). The character is essentially an artist in the last sub-genre. Nonetheless, a sensitive, naïve, emotional hero possessing the courage to master the art of life and to construct -at times even reconstruct or deconstruct- an identity can possibly be acknowledged as an artist but as it is clear that it depends on the viewpoint and is open to discussion.

The term “coming-of-age novel” or “the novel of maturation” is also frequently used by English critics in an attempt to focus on “the psychological aspects of a novel” (Kester 8). However, the examples of this type fall short of the everlasting developmental process inherent in the *bildungsroman*. Besides the terms “coming-of-age novel” or “the novel of maturation” imply an absolute end, an age-specific process, or a sense of being over and done with, but the *bildungsprozess* has “no beginning and no end” (Kermode 133).

Among other English terms coined with an attempt to localize the German term; novel of adolescence, novel of cultivation, novel of formation, apprenticeship-pedagogical-psychological novel are in the forefront.

### **DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE *BILDUNGSROMAN***

Born in Germany towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and grown in the subsequent ages, the *bildungsroman* wins its spurs with the universality it establishes and the unique qualities it contains. In order to give a compact analysis of the common characteristics of the genre, one may return to Hegel who observes that “the knightly character of [the] heroes whose deeds fill recent novels is transformed” (qtd. in Swales 20) in the *bildungsroman* in the following manner:

They stand as individuals with their subjective goals of love, honor, ambition or with their ideals of improving the world, over against the existing order and prose of reality which from all sides places obstacles in their path. ... Especially young men are these new knights who have to make their way, and who regard it as a misfortune that there are in any shape or form such things as family, bourgeois society. ... It is their aim to punch a hole in this order of things, to change the world. ... (qtd. in Swales 20)

Buckley further specifies the social background of the hero by stating that the *bildungsroman* narrates the story of “a child of some sensibility [who] grows up in the country or in a provincial town” (17), and Howe points at the necessity of travel as another distinctive motif of a *bildung* narrative, since “no one can learn much of anything at home, going somewhere is the thing” (1). For an adolescent who is eager to actualize himself; the constraints placed upon the free imagination, scarcity of facilities that inconveniences people open to development, or prescribed rules impeding creativity make it inevitable to set off. Such an environment giving no leg to the hero to stand on impels him to desert the hometown or the order in “a flight toward maturity, toward a new life, toward a search for a new identity (or perhaps for an earlier identity)” (Bluefarb 154). It is obvious here that the escape is not merely from a place but from its all associations.

In addition to an antagonistic environment, “the family might appear as hostile to his ambitions and especially to new ideas” (Labovitz 4) as well. Family life involves a conflict between the generations and its restricting outcomes for the character. In some other cases, what induces the character to depart is not the conflict but the emotional bond that intensifies the traumatic effects of the loss of a parent.

Particularly the father figure or its absence occupies a significant place, since as W.C. Hendley states, “we often find the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* in an uneasy relationship with his father or without a father at all” (89). The hero is either tortured -physically or psychologically- by the father himself or by his absence. In many cases, the father means more than a compassionate person who is in charge of the growth of the son or daughter, but he is the embodiment of the whole set of social and cultural values. Consequently, “the loss of the father, either by death or alienation, usually symbolizes or parallels a loss of faith in the values of the hero’s home and family, and leads inevitably to a search for a substitute parent or creed” (Buckley 19). For instance, Lily’s oppressive father, in *The Secret Life of Bees*, plays a crucial role in the heroine’s decision to seek another life somewhere else. Or, the loss of Lily’s mother drags her into an increasing disillusionment with the prescribed values, and forces Lily to leave her hometown to substitute “the mother” for August as a surrogate parent and to replace the existing perception with a new philosophy of life. Similar to Lily’s figurative loss of the father, Oskar’s adventures in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* commence with his father, Thomas Schell’s actual death in the 9/11 attacks. The experiences he gains while endeavoring to demystify the uncertainties of Thomas Schell’s death pave the way for maturity that allows him to acknowledge an independent life without his father by his side. In any case, loss is a real milestone in the hero’s life as it means the lack of paternal protection in a dangerous world.

Elaine Hoffman Baruch’s emphasis on “the education of the hero who is brought to a high level of consciousness through a series of experiences” (335) underlines the role of formal education in the development of the *bildung* hero. School is the world itself for the *bildung* hero, and education is an aggregate of the lessons presented in the form of numerous sorts of experience including agonies, sufferings, wanderings, falls, and challenges. If the story is not set in a school environment, teachers are substituted for a large cast of characters the hero interacts with, since “every questing hero and heroine seeks a role model” (Labovitz 43). Thus,

throughout the journey for self-fulfillment, the hero is not alone but “there are mentors ... who try to guide the young apprentice” (Howe 3). As an innocent character, the *bildung* hero needs a more experienced character -a companion, a brother or sister figure, a parental figure, and so on- to lead and teach him. The mentor is always at the disposal of the character to supervise, to encourage, and to warn him against the dangers he may be unaware of. Various interpretations of the role of the mentor have been proposed; some identify him as “another exemplary figure” by means of whom the self has been constructed, other scholars call him “the familial perception of a model” through whom the hero acquires “the necessary cultural codes that define the social space to be inhabited” (Spadaccini and Talens 142). Scholastics consider the mentor as God that stands for the ideal model according to which man shapes his identity. Another group defines the mature form of the hero as a copy of the mentor. Despite varieties of perception, in all definitions of the *bildungsroman* the character of mentor occupies a significant place. Likewise, every experience, either with a positive or negative result, is an asset to the apprenticeship process that ends in mastery of the art of living.

In most general terms, the *bildung* hero, “a reservoir of unrealized potentiality rather than a finite sum of knowable actualities” (Swales 31), embarks on a quest for self-realization and his final aim, or in Musil’s words, “the essential character of the man, would be the inward, unrealized self” (qtd. in Swales 31). For self-realization and coherence of the character, the hero needs to acquire “the tenth identity”<sup>7</sup> that is independent of all the other social and cultural determinants and not to “take seriously what his at least nine other characters do and what happens to them” (qtd. in Swales 31).

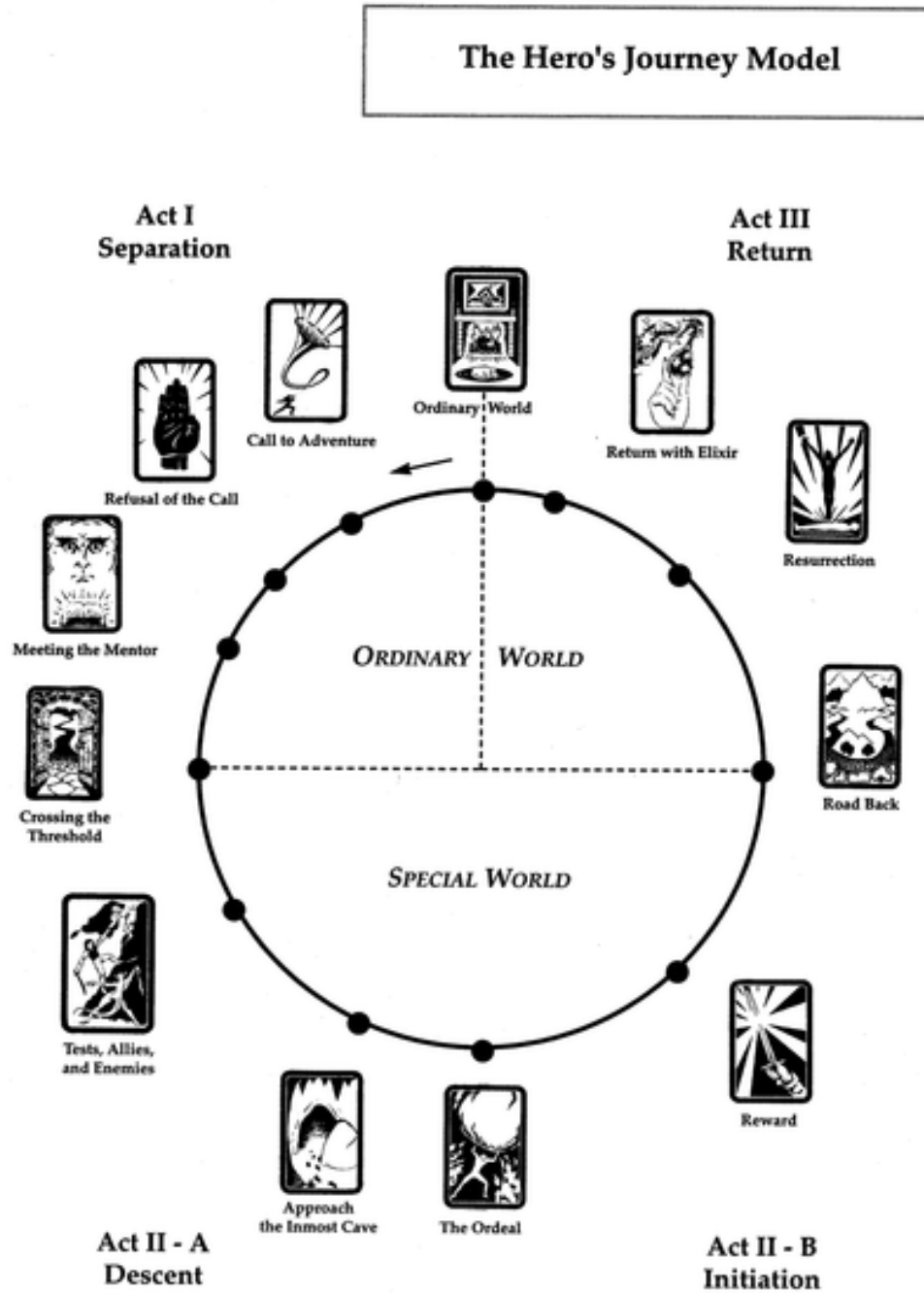
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<sup>7</sup> “In evoking the tenth character that forbids a person to take any of his identities seriously, Musil’s narrator speaks of ... subject’s negativity. Like negativity, Musil’s tenth character is an embodiment of a constitutive lack. This lack generates a need that cannot be satisfied by any social identity and that therefore must transgress and negate them all. At the heart of the Musillian subject, there is a power of distantiation and differentiation that prevents the person from investing too much in his or her identities, and which estranges reality, so that the existing social order comes to appear as just one among an infinite number of possible worlds” (Jonsson 265).

As for the setting of a *bildungsroman*, at times, particularly in the Victorian *bildungsromane*, the naïve subject finds himself in a city which is a source of both liberation and corruption. At other times in a different world, either in the very first sense as it is in Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*, the heroine of which is driven to the brink of discovery only after her death, or in a metaphorical sense, as exemplified by *The Secret Life of Bees* where the protagonist discovers the mystery of life in the realm of bees. Alternatively, within the borders of the same metropolitan through reciprocation as Oskar Schell succeeds in *Extremely Loud&Incredibly Close*. Regardless of the location, the character gains a new insight into the world, people, situations, and above all himself, into the long awaited "tenth identity."

Focusing concurrently on the surroundings and the inward character of the hero, the *bildungsroman* balances the poetic and prosaic. The genre appraises the characters, situations, memories or objects according to the impact they have on the cultivation of the *bildung* hero. The lyrical quality of the *bildungsroman* "lies in its translation of the ordinary methods of fiction -such as character and action- into imagery which derives from perceptions and memories of the protagonists" (Freedman 243). The point is not the independent existence of the characters or objects but rather their relation to the hero, their function as catalysts to form the personality. They are precious as long as they have a role in the growth of the protagonist. To put it another way, "the adventures that befall the hero and the people he meets are significant insofar as they strike an answering chord in him" (Swales 23). Because of that reason, it "runs the risk of esteeming actualities only insofar as they are validated and underwritten by the hero's inwardness" (23).

The maturation process lasting under the influence of the forces that are discussed so far is divided into three characteristic steps by Burke; apprenticeship, journeymanhood, and mastery. In another critical piece, Stuart Voytilla charts the hero's journey as the "movements of separation, descent, ordeal, and return" in the following manner:



Source: <<http://flowtv.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/voytilla-screengrab.png>>. 17 April 2014.



In both models, the hero initially an innocent young boy/girl sets off after a period of hesitation, and by virtue of the adventures and characters, s/he masters life. As a result, s/he learns how to align herself/himself with the setting s/he belongs to. Elsewhere, Kester summarizes the crucial features or steps of the classical narrative of *bildung* as follows:

(1) A protagonist grows up in a stable family unit in a specific social milieu which he is supposed to reproduce; (2) the pressure to reproduce these structures causes him to rebel against both family and society; (3) in rebelling, the subject moves away from both his family and his social circle and begins a period in his development during which he meets friends in the establishment and foes in the subculture; (4) in due time this new circumstance makes the protagonist realize the foolishness of his dreams and he opts for re-adjustment to his family's situation; (5) this in turn leads him to seek personal happiness and social success; (6) his readjustment also motivates him to continue the family and thus to reproduce the society he earlier rejected. (52-53)

Considering such stages the *bildung* hero goes through, Franco Moretti draws attention to the dualistic structure of the *bildungsroman* as he poses the crucial question: "How can the tension toward *individuality*, which is the necessary fruit of a culture of self-determination, be made to coexist with the opposing tension toward *normality*, the offspring, equally inevitable, of the mechanism of socialization?" ("The Comfort of Civilization" 115) The primary objective of the subject is specified as constructing a peculiar self; on the other hand, he is supposed to eliminate the conflict both the one within himself and that between the community and the individual, and integrate his powers into the society for a harmonious relation. Thus, reaching a compromise is identified as "the novel's most celebrated theme." (Moretti, *The Way of the World* 9) The solution is a fusion of "external compulsion" with "internal impulses," hereby called "consensus" or "legitimation." In other words, the hero accepts the legal laws, cultural values, the set of rules, and other socially constructed norms as his own; as a result, "there is no conflict between individuality and socialization, autonomy and normality, interiority and objectification" (Moretti, "The Comfort of Civilization" 116). Here lies the timeless appeal of the *bildungsroman* Moretti argues.

Whereas the classical paradigm set by Goethe implies that chaos, anarchy, and rebellion spring from within the subject while a society, from without, implants order, rules, and stability” (Kester 47), the American *bildungsromane* describe society as unfavorable and inappropriate for individual development. Therefore, unlike the heroes in Moretti’s conclusion, the American *bildung* heroes do not internalize the social values and reestablish the order. More precisely, they reject becoming a part of the arbitrary society at the expense of relinquishing the willpower they have. Instead of the so-called civilized, but in reality restrictive, society, the American *bildung* hero turns to nature, embracing mobility or freedom to develop an original identity. The prime example of such an American hero is certainly Huckleberry Finn. As a specimen of the ideal self-reliant individual of Emerson, he rejects the impositions of the white, civilized society represented by Miss Watson, declines to exchange a free soul with a socially acceptable character, and finally sets sail to adventures in the arms of nature. In that regard, he is the great man “who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude” (Emerson 23). Surely, as proved by Huck, the great man in Emerson’s lexicon is equated with the *bildung* hero or heroine of the American *bildungsroman* tradition.

#### **THE QUESTION OF THE FEMALE PRESENCE IN THE *BILDUNGSROMAN***

Charlotte Goodman remarks that “critics have begun only recently to draw distinctions between *Bildungsromane* written by men and *Bildungsromane* written by women” (28). A large majority of the critics have for long ignored the place of women in their portrayal of the *bildungsroman* but as Wojcik-Andrews clearly states “women [have] written *bildungsromane*” (5). Fuderer’s *The Female Bildungsroman in English: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism* lists the titles of numerous examples of the genre written by women, but still some critics question the possibility of development for women in a male-biased society where they are exposed to depreciation. Erikson attests “the growing and developing youths ... are primarily concerned with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared

with what they feel they are” (261). Thus, it is arguable whether women could be expected to develop an identity or to mature while they feel with tangible evidences that they are not appreciated: “[H]istorically, only the masculine experience of separation and autonomy has been awarded the stamp of maturity” (Abel et al. 11). Another literary critic rejecting the possibility of growth for females, Annis Pratt, equates “growing up female” with “growing down” (36) as she says “[e]very element of her desired world ... inevitably clashes with patriarchal norms” (29). What is more, as Beatrice Webb argues, “to reach for self-culture or self-expression placed [a woman] in the category of a potential law-breaker” (qtd. in Labovitz 4).

Yet, unlike the pessimistic critics who emphasize the unfeasibility of growth in a system ignoring women’s presence, many authors produce vivid examples of the female *bildungsroman* and such examples of the *bildungsroman* proliferate during the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of the second-wave of the feminist movement revivifying criticism on the genre as well. As an outcome of the studies of female *bildungsroman*, various definitions that integrate the missing female figure into the existing canon have been offered. Some feature the necessity of “a coherent self (although not necessarily an autonomous one)” (Abel et al. 80) while others like Frye defend that “women need to play multiple roles as part of the strategy to subvert the self imposed upon them from the outside and to move toward the development of an autonomous female identity” (Lazzaro-Weis 18). Representing the former view that has been popular among literary critics, the following extract from *The Voyage In* summarizes the major aspects of the theoretical structure of the female *bildungsroman*:

Our reformulation participates in a critical tradition by transforming a recognized historical and theoretical genre into a more flexible category whose validity lies in its usefulness as a conceptual tool. While emphasizing gender differences, our definition shares common ground with the presuppositions and generic features of the traditional Bildungsroman: belief in a coherent self (although not necessarily an autonomous one); faith in the possibility of development (although change may be frustrated, may occur at different stages and rates, and may be concealed in the narrative); insistence on a time

span in which development occurs (although the time span may exist only in memory); and emphasis on social context (even as adversary.) (14)

More radical critics refuse to modify the genre that is “measured only by the testimony of a select group of men” (O’Neale 1) and go so beyond as to coin new terms to delineate the females’ growth. Rosowski’s “the novel of awakening” depicts women’s gradual awareness of the agonizing realities; female immobility, stagnation, and impossibility of social integration. Several names including Elaine Martin “favor the novel of awakening as the female alternative to the *bildungsroman*” (Fuderer 4-5), or Waxman suggests “reifungsroman” as a sub-genre of the *bildungsroman*. Here, the protagonists constitute “new identities or reintegrate fragmented old ones [as well as] acquiring the self-confidence, self-respect, and courage to live the remainder of their lives fully, and joyously” (320). The sub-genre differentiates the classical female *bildungsroman*’s adolescent protagonist, for whom maturity is a dream impossible to come true under the male hegemony, from the biologically mature protagonist who sets out to self-fulfillment or psychological maturation through revision of the past.

With its emphasis on the development of a community rather than of an individual, Sandra Zagarell’s concept of “the narrative of community” is another term associated with the female *bildungsroman*. Calling the genre as “the narrative of community,” after which the famous article that introduces the definition is named; Zagarell observes that “the self exists ... as part of the interdependent network of the community rather than an individualistic unit” (qtd. in Groover 52). The extent to which one grows up is certainly determined not only by her capability but also by the social facilities available to her; or in many cases, one’s development cannot be considered independent of the welfare of the whole community. Within the context of gender; the narrative of community focuses on chores of women that make up of the core of their lives and identities, family life besides the wider picture of the community, true-to-life characters as the central heroines, and a non-linear development.

### **THE *BILDUNGSROMAN* FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE PEOPLE OF COLOR**

Dissatisfaction with the classical definitions of the genre is not limited to women. As the German term, the *bildungsroman* “comes with a historical baggage of associations to positivism, white male superiority, and a sense of the self as a unified entity;” some scholars claim that “the African-American narrative of *Bildung* is a different genre that must be separated from the European one” (Kester 7-8). The classical *bildung* hero grows up into an “enveloping atmosphere” or in Kester’s words “a benevolent force” as discussed earlier. Maturity is achieved through a compromise within the self and with “the Society of the Tower” in Goethe’s lexicon, but compromise with the oppressor does not seem possible for the minorities. Conversant with the European American perception of society as “arbitrary, anti-individual, unjust, and cruel;” the African-American literary canon associates it with such negative connotations. In that regard, the *bildung* hero/ines in ethnic literary pieces endeavor to develop an identity in an antagonistic environment that “ignores [its] responsibilities of ‘enveloping’” (Kester 8). Eric Blackall’s identification of the archetypal *bildung* hero as “a seeker for some whole, some community outside himself in which his individual existence will be meaningful and productive” (62) makes the disparity between the two types of heroes more apparent. For a social outcast living in a community that is not cognizant of the identity of minorities; writing, or literacy in a general sense, rises in value because it stands as a way of struggle for survival and a tie between the past, present, and the future; therefore Frederick Douglass says “once you learn to read, you will be forever free.”

The classical *bildungsroman* gives a personal account of a certain character in a relation to the environment; however, the African-American *bildung* hero’s narrative is double, the character reveals a “personal and representational identity” (Kester 6). While commenting on Toni Morrison’s Pecola as an example of the African-American fictional character, Valerie Smith says “what happens to Pecola is representative, not unique” (124). The narrative, though presented as peculiar to the hero/ine who actually symbolizes the collective soul, illuminates the hardships

and sorrows of the community s/he belongs to; thus it projects the communal history with a didactic purpose. It intends to raise an awareness of social injustice and to change the inhumane structure by providing the reader with an insight into the life of the marginalized subjects. Furthermore, because “the narrators of the African-American narrative of *Bildung* construct a subject which is at the same time textual and historical” (Kester 148), the fictional character transcends the boundaries of the literary realm, and hence “the African-American narrative of *Bildung* includes a return to the real” (Kester 148). In other words, the *bildung* hero/ine in the African-American context is more than an existence that is imprisoned in the literary world, but rather s/he is on the borderline between the real and literary. As such, the narrator, “both narrates the tale and is an agent within that tale” (Kester 30), and the classical narrator of the *bildungsroman* isolated from the *bildung* subject is substituted for one that sympathizes with the narrated.

#### **THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

Proceeding with an exploration of three contemporary examples of the American *bildungsroman*, namely *The Secret Life of Bees* (2002) by Sue Monk Kidd, *The Lovely Bones* (2002) by Alice Sebold, and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) by Jonathan Safran Foer in the light of the preliminary discussions, the present study intends to locate the pieces in question within the whole structure of the *bildungsroman*. Though the analysis is conducted within the scope of the genre theory, it accepts that “genre theory, in its most familiar abstract forms, [is] replaced by theories of individual creativity, of innovative genius, and of the movement of the individual imagination beyond the restricted and restricting forms of the past” (Williams 181). Hence, each piece is treated as a unique construction and cannot be oversimplified by overarching generalizations. Then, the main argument of the thesis is that each literary piece humbly creates its own form, and it is exclusive to the work no matter how similar it is to other examples classified under the same category. It is virtually identical to the American perception of the

relationship between the society and the individual; although they are tied to each other, a complete compromise is not possible if the original character of the person is prioritized. Therefore, while the three novels are explored in terms of their representative qualities of the *bildungsroman* tradition, each protagonist's quest for identity is regarded as unique and scrutinized firstly within the context of the individual characteristics, and then in its respective cultural milieus, geographical features, and other variables.

Considering the unique qualities of the three works, the thesis allocates a chapter to, and separately deals with each novel in chronological order. The first chapter examines Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret life of Bees* and the journey of the fourteen-year-old heroine, Lily Owens, who sets off as she is spurred on by a longing for her dead mother and her wish to escape from the oppression of a brutal father. *The Secret Life of Bees* is subject to exploration within the context of the study due mainly to its representative features of the *bildungsroman* tradition. Other than these, it is worthy of attention owing to several other features. Firstly, it revitalizes the female *bildungsroman* with a representative American coming-of-age heroine discovering the secret of life within her own resources without submitting to the restrictions of mainstream society. Secondly, it touches on the issue of ethnicity that occupies a large place in the American literary tradition but from an unconventional perspective that turns a member of the majority into a minority of her own. Thirdly, it deals with the role of religion, or of practicing faith in a divine subject in a character's cultivation. Lastly, it vividly describes the transforming power of sisterhood; thus, reinforces the arguments of the feminist movement.

The second chapter explores the marginal developmental process of fourteen-year-old Susie Salmon, the protagonist of Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*. She is raped and brutally murdered by her thirty-six-year-old neighbor, George Harvey. Even though death marks an end in her story in the mortal world, as distinct from the classical maturation stories, it forms a new beginning that brings a fresh viewpoint along. Susie, whose life is cut short in this world, wakes up after death

with raging thirst for knowledge of the world and mortals. The author's preference of first-person omniscient narration adds a new dimension to the piece as it easily establishes a conversational tone that invites the reader to sympathize with the protagonist -at the same time the narrator- to reflect on their own worldly experiences. What is more, the novel narrates the development of not only the heroine but also the people in a relation to Susie in the world over the course of time, as they have to learn how to live without a beloved. Thus, with its outstanding qualities, Sebald's novel reconstructs the genre of the *bildungsroman*, and is worth an in-depth analysis.

The last chapter traces the *bildungsprozess* of the nine-year-old protagonist of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud&Incredibly Close*. Suffering from the loss of his father, Oskar Schell strives to hold onto life through his quest for some tangible evidence to understand how Thomas Schell was killed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He uses the key that is the only palpable element associated with the investigation and scours almost all parts of New York for clues. The legacy left from his father is the main asset in the process; that is, he assembles the pieces through his admirable skill of critical thinking to reach the destination. In time, the spiritual journey outweighs the physical one and Oskar develops an identity with the help of his experiences and people he meets on the way. As anticipated from an American character, he perceives the society as antagonistic and hostile to his imagination, and so he walks alone in the middle of the crowd with his tambourine. The end does not provide Oskar with a compromise or complete disclosure of the mysteries but it proves that "the journey itself is more valuable than any destination."

"We can safely predict for [the *bildungsroman*] an even more rich and varied life than it has lived between Goethe's time and ours" (295) says Howe in 1966. Produced approximately forty years after the publication of Howe's *Wilhelm Meister and His English Kinsmen*, the three examples the thesis explores demonstrate how successfully Howe foresees the future of the genre. The unique qualities they all



present, the absorbing stories of their protagonists, the subtle questions they stimulate, and the depiction of the complex settings are among their major merits that deserve attention in an academic study. Thus, the present thesis attempts to provide a contemporary look at the successors of a universal and deeply-rooted genre.

## CHAPTER I

### A FAITH-HEALER IN A BEEHIVE

The present chapter traces the developmental stages of the heroine and the underlying factors in the process of the protagonist's maturation. It also analyzes how Sue Monk Kidd's debut novel *The Secret Life of Bees*<sup>8</sup> (2002) as a contemporary piece that addresses the issues of race, religion, the strength of females, and their role in the maturation of an individual revivifies the long-established genre of the *bildungsroman*.

*Bees*, as an example of the female *bildungsroman* published in the twenty-first century, adds a new dimension to the existing canon with its blend of mainly two controversial issues, namely gender and race. As discussed earlier, history of *bildungsroman* presents a relatively limited number of examples of the female *bildungsroman* since the characteristics of the protagonist the classical *bildungsroman* requires are considered "unfit" for a female whose potential for development has long been undervalued.<sup>9</sup> However, Kidd's novel refutes such arguments through its presentation of a female protagonist developing an independent identity. Besides, *Bees* treats another vexed question in an unusual way; a white girl's development is facilitated only when she is integrated into a group of black women. So, a member of the majority is described as minority here.

Another prominent aspect of *Bees* within the framework of the *bildungsroman* is its narrative style. "The classical *Bildungsroman* questions the individual's ability to write his or her own story" (67) says Kester.<sup>10</sup> Unlike the classical *bildungsroman*

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<sup>8</sup> The title of the novel is abbreviated as *Bees*.

<sup>9</sup> As McWilliams notes "the idea of the female *bildungsroman* is, for some critics, doubly problematic" (12). She explains that the concept is disregarded as it is thought to be a "jaded oxymoron" and states some even go so further that they deny the term. For further details see the Question of Female Presence in the Introduction.

<sup>10</sup> "The third-person voice that speaks of Wilhelm Meister neither compromises the subject nor is compromised by it. The distance between the narrating voice and the subject remains quite neutral, unaffected, and non-contagious. If the subject gets deadly ill, the narrator remains healthy. In the modern narratives of *Bildung*, however, this neutrality is abandoned" (30).

that is exemplified by *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Kidd's work is narrated through the eyes of the protagonist disrupting the separation between the narrator and the narrated. The conversational tone established by the first-person narrative style invites the reader to sympathize with Lily and to understand better the effect of the experiences on the change of the character. That is to say, one may observe the internalization of the teachings of life and witness the individuation process first-hand.

Lily, through her capability of discovering female strength among a group of black women, not only realizes the tranquil hive in her heart and matures but also draws a much-awaited picture of an integration of the black and white people in a color-blind environment. That is, Lily learns how to stand up to the challenges, actualizes herself, and proves the female potential for development. *Bees*, then "allows the protagonist to discover the beauty in life and relish in it" (Redford 89) to the contrary of common assumptions.

Set in the American South in 1964, the year of the Civil Rights Act, *Bees* narrates the coming-of-age story of the fourteen-year-old white heroine suffering from the loss of her mother and brutal acts of an unconcerned father, "who seems to care more for his dog than his daughter" (Morey 28). Furthermore, the nagging suspicion that she might have accidentally murdered her mother disturbs the young protagonist much more than the physical punishments of her father, T. Ray. Under the care of the black nursemaid and housekeeper Rosaleen, Lily strives to deal with physical and emotional torture but the last straw comes when T. Ray reacts against her accompanying the black nanny to Sylvan to register to vote where Rosaleen is taunted by three white men. Finally, Lily and her caregiver decide to head to South Carolina. Though their main purpose is to flee an antagonistic community that poses threats against their unalienable rights, Lily's ulterior motive is to inquire into the past of her deceased mother through the only clue left from Deborah, a picture of a black Madonna with the name of a place, "Tiburon, SC." The characters the two meet, the experiences they go through do not remove all

uncertainties; however, they all function as catalysts in the formation of the personality of the naïve heroine. In other words, they awaken her to the agonies of the world and teach her the strategies of coping with them and how to find solace in her own hive, and provide her with a fresh philosophy of life.

The novel opens with the female protagonist's detailed description of memories that reveal some of her characteristics; she is a sensitive, naïve, favorable, innocent, and emotional child missing her mother who passed away when Lily was four years old: "That night I lay in my bed and thought about dying and going to be with my mother in paradise" (3).<sup>11</sup> The initial impression one gets through the first-person narrative draws a parallel to the expected image of a *bildung* heroine. The main actor or actress of the *bildungsroman* is not a knightly character but an adolescent with a responsive attitude towards what is happening around him or her.<sup>12</sup> An inexperienced character open to cultivation by means of any sorts of knowledge is the ideal candidate. Here, sensitivity is the key, through which the *bildung* subject absorbs what s/he gets and converts into a building block of his/her character. In short, Lily Owens fits the description. The reader encounters an eagle-eyed observer paying attention even to such tiny details as bees' "wings shining like bits of chrome in the dark" (1), a character excited even by "the way those bees flew" (1).<sup>13</sup> Certainly, Lily's development is due to her ability to utilize anything as a catalyst, and that is the quality which differentiates a *bildung* hero from an adventurer.

Similarly, the sentimental nature of the protagonist increases the influence of the memories or experiences on her perception of life. Lily, at puberty, feels the absence of her mother and the lack of maternal care in her bones. Arguing that

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<sup>11</sup> Rosellen Brown in "Honey Child," a popular review of *Bees*, concludes through the analysis of the first lines that "we notice the attentiveness to detail of a sensitive, empathetic observer" (11).

<sup>12</sup> More precisely, the *bildungsroman* presents "ordinary people as heroes or heroines" (Wojcik-Andrews 69).

<sup>13</sup> Hebert in the same way notes that Lily "is an accurate and empathetic observer of detail" (49)

“much of *the Secret Life of Bees* revolves around the absence of Lily’s mother” (30), Harken outlines various roles of a mother in the family structure:

A mother fills many roles in the family. She is the boss and the servant. She might be the cook, the janitor, the cheerleader, the source of religion, and the disciplinarian. She might be the one who nurtures, who heals, who provides moral instruction, who encourages education. If there is no father in the household, her role could encompass those functions often ascribed to fathers: the fixer, the breadwinner, the coach. (30)

The responsibilities Harken enumerates of a mother unveil how big the hole in Lily’s life is. She is deprived of the main caretaker, and is supposed to care her own development. Without the mother, she lacks the head teacher, whose task is to teach the lessons no school offers. She is obsessed with her mother Deborah, or rather her memory, and is in constant emotional unrest. Not being able to cope with life without Deborah or endeavor to discover peace in her heart, Lily continues to look for the physical embodiment of her mother. She has “tried for a long time to conjure up an image of her” (5) and resurrected Deborah in her dreams. This imaginary retrieval of the mother echoes the *bildung* subjects whose narratives stem from “the return of the repressed mother” (Feng 21). Lily is one of those characters whose *bildungsprozess* originates from an uneasy relationship with the mother figure. What she feels is not solely a yearning for her mother but she also struggles to cope with the sense of guilt since T. Ray accuses Lily of shooting her mother when she was four. She at times imagines a voice telling her “just put it out of your head, it was an accident, you didn’t mean it” (5). But more frequently her memories cause her emotional distress and she laments: “She was all I wanted. And I took her away” (8). Thus, the death of Deborah cloaked in mystery, the physical absence of her mother, and its influence on Lily’s psychology constitute the point of departure for the *bildung* heroine while having more than one mother in a healing environment is the arrival. Lily, towards the end, accepts the members of the female community as her mothers and gives up mourning for her own mother’s absence. In other words, when the individuation process of the character

is completed, “the mother’s physical absence is no longer mourned; her spiritual presence is celebrated” (Feng 22).

The psychological turmoil Lily endures is intensified by T. Ray, a so-called father figure who ignores his responsibilities for Lily and subjects his daughter to physical and emotional torture. He often uses violence to punish Lily and asks her to kneel in a pile of Martha White dry grits. Moreover, he impedes the intellectual development of his daughter:

T. Ray refused to let me bring books out here and read, and if I smuggled one out, say, *Lost Horizon*, stuck under my shirt, somebody, like Mrs. Watson from the next farm, would see him at church and say, ‘Saw your girl in the peach stand reading up a storm. You must be proud.’ And he would half kill me. (15)

Worst of all, he shatters Lily’s image of her mother when he denies that Deborah was a caring, lovely, and sympathetic woman: “The truth is, your sorry mother ran off and left you. ... You can hate me all you want, but she’s the one who left you” (39). Fed up with T. Ray’s cruelty, Lily looks for a source of comfort that may soothe her pain, and harboring herself in dreams is the only strategy she implements to bear the constant oppression. She has “asked God repeatedly to do something about T. Ray” (3) and complains to her dead mother about “the special misery of living with T. Ray” (3).

The portrayal of T. Ray certainly suits the problematic father figure in the *bildungsroman*. As discussed earlier in the Introduction, Buckley, in *Season of Youth*, describes a father to a *bildung* hero or heroine as the main adversary to the character’s cognitive development, creativity, and imagination. He further asserts that the metaphorical death of the father through alienation divorces the subject from home and all the values or morals it represents. For instance, Lily implies that church and its teachings do not work since they cannot humanize T. Ray: “He’d gone to church for forty years and was only getting worse. It seemed like this should tell God something” (3). It suggests that religion, in which her father puts faith, too, antagonizes the protagonist. The emptiness of mainstream values

alienates the character more. Besides, “the death of authority figures such as fathers and leaders can be experienced as either liberation or loss” (1) Borneman claims, and continues to clarify, “liberation because relations to such figures constrain through the exercise of authority, loss because these relations bind through emotional ties” (1). In Lily’s case, both could be justified. It is a sort of loss because sincere compassion and care of the remaining parent may compensate for deprivation of love of the dead parent. However, T. Ray, a biological father unconcerned about Lily’s development cannot fill in the lack of the mother figure, and impels the heroine to ask for a surrogate parent. On the other hand, for the heroine it is a golden opportunity to set off and begin her apprenticeship in the art of living. In other words, Lily’s alienation from T. Ray due to the lack of an emotional tie paves the way for departure from an oppressive home to another place which will become a school without borders for her to learn lessons necessary for maturation and form an independent identity.

Having put up for almost ten years with physical and spiritual misery, the heroine takes advantage of this freedom. T. Ray’s apathy provides good reason for Lily to run away when Rosaleen is hospitalized when the white men beat her for the newly gained rights under the Civil Rights Act. At this point, “Lily discovers that the institution of local justice, the sheriff’s office, only metes out fairness to white people” (Emanuel 116). Though at first glance it seems Lily’s main purpose is to save her nanny from the threats Franklin Posey and other racists pose, she actually regards Bowden who urges “if things become unbearable ... go somewhere else” (Bluefarb 121). Her journey gives her the opportunity to meet new people who become mentors acting as teachers, to discover new places that become schools without walls, and to gain new experiences that become catalysts in the formation of her character. Lily is aware that “if we leave our father’s house, we have to make ourselves self-reliant. Otherwise we just fall into another father’s house” (qtd. in Kidd, *Dance* 8). Lily manifests her American character in her “preoccupation with flight, wandering forward into new territories,” and her decision

of deserting “the old for the hope of the new” that has been identified as a distinctive American feature (Bluefarb 7).

A picture of the Black Mary she finds among the possessions of Deborah specifies the destination. Together with Rosaleen, she departs for Tiburon though she does not “exactly have a plan” (53). She desires to lend a helping hand to Rosaleen to escape from a racist environment but what she actually looks for is someone who might have information about her deceased mother because Lily smells a rat when T. Ray blames Deborah for abandoning her daughter. T. Ray’s claim contradicts with the image of her mother she conjures up and annihilates the only consolation she has. Moreover, she has doubts that she caused the death of her mother, and she wants to find out the truth to clear her conscience through the only clue remained from Deborah. She believes that Tiburon might be the right place to start with. Thus, the driving force behind her decision, as Brower notes (81), is a mystery whether she actually had a role in her mother’s death.

What is worthy of notice in the escape of the two is “the manner by which Kidd measures Lily’s freedom against Rosaleen’s oppression in the racist society that surrounds them” (Grobman 14). The initial impression the novel creates of Lily is a naïve and immature character while Rosaleen, as a black female without a child, is introduced as a surrogate mother, the only caregiver of the white girl. Hence, Lily depends on Rosaleen to bear the difficulties raised by T. Ray in the hometown. But here, “Rosaleen must rely for survival on Lily” (Grobman 14). Were it not for the help of a white girl, in a racist environment Rosaleen would not be able to go further due to her skin color. For instance, Lily “facilitates Rosaleen’s escape from police custody” (Grobman 14). Or, when they arrive in Tiburon, initially Lily contacts August and other calendar sisters to explain their situation. Hence, all imply that the racist territory reverses the roles; the caregiver is now in need. Even Lily herself at once calls Rosaleen “some dumb nigger [she] gonna save” (53). The dependence of an adult on a fourteen-year-old girl seems absurd to some critics but it might be considered as the first step the young heroine takes in with an



important responsibility she accepts to hold. Considering Loss's arguments underlining the significance of "following the main character to the point at which he is ready to assume responsibilities for his life" (15), one may justifiably claim that Kidd's design is reasonable within the conventions of the genre of the *bildungsroman*. It hints at her development; the same character whom Mrs. Henry reproaches for "insulting [her] fine intelligence" (16) puts a plan for a flight into practice since she realizes that "she [has] to run for [her] life" (54) and begins to achieve her full potential. The plan itself triggers the *bildungsprozess*.

The resemblance of the image of the Black Mary on the jars of Black Madonna Honey to the picture left from Deborah directs the two to the bright-pink house of the Boatwright sisters in Tiburon. There, they meet the dark-skinned calendar sisters, who are quite hospitable towards Lily and Rosaleen. The warm welcome the Boatwrights offer attests the emotional bond the women with different colors establish. The first description of Lily's new territory is quite opposite from her hometown, and the quotation at the beginning of chapter four is symbolic for the female community, which will make Lily's healing possible:

Honeybees are social insects and live in colonies. Each colony is a family unit, comprising a single, egg-laying female or queen and her many sterile daughters called workers. The workers co-operate in the food-gathering, nest-building and rearing the offspring. Males are reared only at the times of year when their presence is required. (67)

The heroine has long been suffering in the hands of T. Ray and the lack of maternal compassion. The life-giving, nurturing women "expand [one's] ideas of mother beyond one who gives physical birth" (Harken 24), as each becomes a mother to Lily. Their teaching Lily about honey-making has a symbolic significance. August, the eldest of the calendar sisters, remarks that "most people don't have any idea about all the complicated life going on inside a hive. Bees have a secret life we don't know anything about" (148). The more the young heroine masters the occupation of honey making and beekeeping, the closer she gets to becoming a member of a small community of wise women. In the first

lessons she takes from August, the naïve heroine learns that “the world was really one big bee yard, and the same rules worked fine in both places” (92). Thus, Lily’s duty is to internalize the bee yard etiquette and to transfer what she learns about it to her own world. When the protagonist gets involved in the realm of bees, she wises up to the fact that “the way to find the elusive queen is by first locating her circle of attendants” (57). Lily takes her first step into the colony and all the attendants help the grief-stricken girl reveal the everlasting mother in herself. As a sign of fellowship, June and May clean Rosaleen’s physical wounds from the beating, but more importantly the sisters clean Lily’s emotional wounds, which makes her say, “the first week at August’s was a consolation, a pure relief” (82).

Although all of the three sisters serve Lily’s development, August’s role outweighs those of the others as “she is arguably the strongest character in the novel” (Harken 5). A cultivated, worldly-wise, versatile and self-sacrificing character, August fills in the previously listed roles of a mother Harken mentions. Running the household, she is the leader and the servant at the same time. She admirably supervises the other characters, leads them all to the right path. Here, Harken affirms: “Note how the other characters look to August for guidance or for approval and how she seeks ways to help each person live as fully as possible” (78). At the same time, she works hard to financially support all the inhabitants. She takes the central responsibility of producing honey and selling the jars. In that way, August also compensates for the lack of a father-figure as well and has the most crucial role in the pink community. Arguably, she is the queen bee, “the unifying source of the community” (1). She was the housekeeper to Deborah’s home when she was young, and she took care of Lily’s mother soon before her death. Now, it is Lily’s turn. She treats Lily as though she were her daughter, and educates her in all means. Firstly, August is a voracious reader; her library includes many books ranging from mythology to beekeeping so she has a lot to share with Lily to

promote her intellectual cultivation.<sup>14</sup> She does not remain the sole teacher in Lily's life and enrolls her in school to allow her to sharpen her wits. Not only mentally but also physically August supports the young heroine, buying her new clothes and other items she needs.

Above all the roles elaborated so far, August fulfills the duty of a spiritual or religious leader in *Bees*. August carries on certain rituals that are legacies of the grandparents. The calendar sisters and the other women in the community constitute a small group of worshippers called the Daughters of Mary and they are led by August. They come together around a divine statue named "Our Lady of Chains"<sup>15</sup> which symbolizes female strength and determination because "it seems to them she knew everything they suffered" (109). They call the statue so "not because she wore chains ... [but] because she broke them" (110). Originally, Mary, the Virgin Mother of Jesus is a white, submissive woman; an image that contradicts with the Lady of Chains. It is clear that some features of the blessed, divine mother are attributed to the statue but they are also transformed to a certain extent because "everybody needs a God who looks like them" (141). It is depicted as a colored, defiant woman to conform with the culture of minorities. August continues to tell the story that becomes the main source of inspiration for Lily in her quest for identity:

"And so," August said, "the people cried and danced and clapped their hands. They went one at a time and touched their hands to her chest, wanting to grab on to the solace in her heart.

They did this every Sunday in the praise house, dancing and touching her chest, and eventually they pained a red heart on her breast so the people would have a heart to touch.

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<sup>14</sup> As one may appreciate, "reading is self-empowerment, and reading produces questions and new interpretations" (Emanuel 119). That is, reading prohibited by T. Ray is among the main sources of independence as Douglass addresses.

<sup>15</sup> The story the female worshippers have narrated so many times to rebuild the confidence in their own power tells that the Lady of Chains acknowledged as the Mother of Jesus is discovered by a slave, Obadiah and his family. Their prayers to God for freedom are replied as a statue with her fist up in the air as a symbol of defiance. Since then, it has been accepted to be the symbol of freedom and strength.

Our Lady filled their hearts with fearlessness and whispered to them plans of escape. The bold ones fled, finding their way north, and those who didn't live with a raised fist in their hearts.

And if ever it grew weak, they would only have to touch her heart again." (109-110)

The Lady of Chains is the visual representation of the courage they need to survive in a corrupted world. But as Harken clarifies, it means more for the Daughters of Mary; "the object of their gratitude for the honey crop ... the central figure of their Sunday worship ... the main character during the celebration of the Feast of Assumption" (13). In other words, the Lady is metaphorically another queen bee in the female colony since "a hive without a queen was a death sentence for the bees. They would stop work and go around completely demoralized" (286). That is why, the Lady of Chains provides the motivation they seek in order to live, and becomes their major source of power through which they endure pain, and it keeps all the women together around the tie of sisterhood.

August calls Lily's attention to the Black Mary so as to help her recover from spiritual emptiness. She says, "Lily, if you ask Mary's help, she'll give it" (90). She tells Lily about the story of Beatrix, a runaway returning to her convent in disguise of another character after some wandering and suffering. Beatrix questions her sisters to see if they remember her. Then, Beatrix is surprised to find out that Mary has been "standing in for her" (91). The story encourages Lily to ask for Mary's help: "I asked her to draw a curtain around the pink house so no one would ever find us." Her soliloquy establishes that Lily begins to believe that it works: "Mary had made us a curtain of protection" (92). Once when the house is sound asleep, Lily visits Mary. She puts her hand on her heart and implores her to "fix [her], help [her] know what to do" (164). She continues praying:

Forgive me. Is my mother all right up there with God? Don't let them find us. If they find us, don't let them take me back. If they find us, keep Rosaleen from being killed. Let June love me. Let T. Ray love me. Help me stop lying. Make the world better. Take the meanness out of people's hearts. ... I live in a hive of darkness, and you are my mother, I told her. You are the mother of thousands. (164)

Starting her journey as a character with no source of consolation, Lily now at least has somebody to turn to when she gets depressed. It is visible that the heroine feels relieved when she is together with Mary as she begins to fill in the emptiness left by Deborah; as she attributes the statue the role of her mother. The previously described desperate character helplessly dreaming about her mother at night now has a source of consolation. The child complaining about T. Ray to God beyond hope at present has a maternal God in whom she puts faith. It is interesting that Lily asks the godly statue to “let T. Ray love” her since it signals a change in her attitude; she looks for T. Ray’s love instead of his complete absence. It is also notable in Lily’s words that she confirms her life in darkness. The quotation that opens chapter five supplies an insight into the theme of darkness here: “Let’s imagine for a moment that we are tiny enough to follow a bee into a hive. Usually the first thing we would have to get used to is the darkness” (82). If darkness is regarded as the natural environment of a hive and if bees are able to live content in their hive, then it is a part of life; more precisely, Lily by the help of Mary learns how to live content with agonies, how to develop strategies to overcome her problems. Emanuel affirms, “[i]n the Black Madonna, Lily finds her spiritual center, the same feeling she had gotten from her bare-breasted night vigil” (121). Lily views the Lady of Chains as the queen and “she is the mother of every bee in the hive, and they all depend on her to keep it going” (149). Thus, it seems what August tells does not fall on deaf ears: “That maybe Our Lady could act for Deborah and be like a stand-in mother for you” (287). She finds consolation in the divine statue and shows the courage to touch her heart to feel maternal compassion. Lily is awakened to the fact that the Virgin Mary “is not some magical being out there somewhere. ... She is something inside of [her]” (288).

Lily’s discovery of her own source of strength works especially when she is forced to contend with the annihilation of all her dreams regarding Deborah. She learns that Deborah married T. Ray mainly because she got pregnant with Lily. What is worse, Deborah left T. Ray’s home without Lily and went to stay with August. That

is, she abandoned Lily; which means, T. Ray's story was true. Then, Lily "felt a powerful sadness" because "everything seemed emptied out---the feelings [she] had for her, the things [she] had believed, all those stories about her [she] had lived off of like they were food and water and air" (260). She has lost the only source of consolation, the only strategy she can implement to deal with an antagonistic environment. The young heroine feels that "knowing can be a curse on a person's life" (255). She wishes she were an amnesiac and reproaches: "You think you want to know something and then once you do, all you can think about it erasing it from your mind" (249).

By reason of these revelations, however, she's getting closer to acquiring a new philosophy of life since she learns "there's nothing perfect" but "there is only life" (256). She becomes aware of the fallible nature of human beings as "every person on the face of earth makes mistakes ... we're all humans" (256). Lily clutches at the Virgin Mary, or rather the mother within herself to heal up after the worst heartbroken moment of her short life. Brower comments: "With her worst fears about Deborah confirmed, Lily looks even more desperately to Our Lady and to August to fill the motherless place within her" (86). Lily observes "how a little door in the black Mary statue would open up, just over her abdomen, and [she] would crawl inside to a hidden room" (260). She makes peace with her heart, past, identity, and all the other things that upset her. She understands what August means when she says, "remembering is everything" (228). Lily is now able to appreciate that identity is constructed through a blend of the past, present, and future. The heroine begins to comprehend that the stories August frequently narrates, the divine statue, the rituals serve the purpose of remembering. Kester interprets the narratives as a "part of a struggle to rescue the past from the past" (141). She confesses: "In a weird way I must have loved my little collection of hurts and wounds. They provided me with some real nice sympathy, with the feeling I was exceptional. I was the girl abandoned by her mother. I was the girl who kneeled on grits. What a special case I was" (278). The fresh philosophy impels

Lily to remove the blinkers she has worn for so long, and to forgive Deborah, to sympathize with T. Ray since she now knows that he suffers from the loss of his wife and acts under the influence of the traumatic effects of Deborah's death on him. She accepts she has not realized "what he'd lost or how it might've changed him" (293).

As discussed earlier; Labovitz, Jost, Howe, Hatfield, and several other critics emphasize the necessity of a mentor in the *bildungsprozess*. Furthermore as Howe argues "if experience is the thing, it must include all sorts of people and ways of living" (3). As it is clearly observed in Lily's process of finding solace in the Lady of Chains, August functions as the main contributor to the journey of the *bildung* heroine, and as the mentor guiding Lily, she provides the ingredients the heroine uses to knead the dough of her mature personality. She sets the ground for experiencing all the novelties the questing subject has not encountered before. Firstly, she offers a warm welcome as a character with a different skin color and proves that humanity is the sole unifying ground rather than race. Secondly, she introduces Lily to the Lady of Chains which becomes the central figure of faith for the questing heroine, so she substitutes the church for the Black Madonna. Thirdly, August teaches Lily how to run the business of beekeeping, the structure of which hints at the operation of the world. Together with all the other lessons, she grants her a fresh way of perceiving the world and individuals.<sup>16</sup>

Lily's own description discloses the great impact her mentor has on her:

Looking at her eyes, I could see a fire inside them. It was a hearth fire you could depend on, you could draw up to and get warm by if you were cold, or cook something on that would feed the emptiness in you. I felt like we were all adrift to the world, and all we had was the wet fire in August's eyes. But it was enough. (181)

Though it is not as great as August's role; Zach Taylor, a scholarly-gifted black boy emotionally inclined to Lily is also influential on the *bildungsprozess* of the

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<sup>16</sup> Lofflin justifiably argues that "August Boatwright moves Lily through her stages of journey towards healing and wholeness" (253).

protagonist. Buckley considers having a love affair as a part of “the direct experience of ... life” (17). In that regard, Zach plays a twofold role in Lily’s development. Firstly, their encounter breaks the prejudice they both have against people with a different skin color: “If he was shocked over me being white, I was shocked over him being handsome” (116). Her school years teach Lily the stereotyped portrayal of colored people, who are thought not to be physically attractive. Lily herself develops awareness and she “wished [she] could pen a letter to [her] school to be read at opening assembly that would tell them how wrong [they] had all been” (116). He’s not only attractive but also successful contrary to the clichéd images. Secondly, Zach proves that socially-constructed boundaries do not deter someone from achieving his or her potential. Lily responds in an astonished manner to Zach’s decision of working as a lawyer in the future: “I’ve just never heard of a Negro lawyer, that’s all. You’ve got to hear of these things before you can imagine them” (121). Zach, who is decisive enough not to be defeated, gets motivated after a period of imprisonment that is due to racial tension. He says, “nobody will believe how hard I’m gonna study this year. That jail cell is gonna make me earn grades higher than I ever got” (230-231). Zach adds one more level to Lily’s growing consciousness, who “threw [her] arms around him and leaned into his chest” (135). He tells Lily about the impossibility of a love affair between the two because of those “who would kill boys like [him] for even looking at girls like [Lily]” (135). The *bildung* heroine, thanks to her affair with Zach, not only tastes the nurturing side of love but also feels how the members of broken families feel upon the destruction of their home.

The period Lily has spent in Tiburon, and the road to her destination broaden her horizons and supply spiritual consolation. Morey asserts: “Lily Owens embarks upon a spiritual quest that carries her through the shadow of racism...” (28). She, for the first time, becomes aware of the prominence of race in human relations. She, before the journey, has witnessed the prejudice prevailing in Sylvan but she herself has not engaged so much in the racial tension. In the pink house, the



heroine gains first-hand experiences of the role of race. For example, Lily gets perplexed when she finds out that June excludes her due to her race: “This was a great revelation—not that I was white but that it seemed like June might not want me here because of my skin color. I hadn’t known this was possible—to reject people for being white” (87). The innocent, young heroine does not even notice that June’s prejudiced attitude towards Lily’s visit is a reflection of the white community’s racist acts; it is a foil for the long-lasting degradation of the black people. Throughout history, black people are tortured and considered to be social outcasts. The welcoming treatment of the Boatwright sisters contradicts with the marginalizing attitude of mainstream, and it is even worth appreciation. Later in the novel, in another scene dealing with the issue of race, Lily can decipher the underlying meaning in the question of Mr. Hazelwurst, a policeman depicted as a mouthpiece of mainstream. She says, “here is the translation” and clarifies it: “What a white girl like you is doing staying in a colored house?” (197) Lily is now able to realize that her presence as a white-girl in a group of black people is considered to be strange since it is thought that she degrades herself. The development in Lily’s view of racism is an important part of her *bildungsprozess*.

Other than the role of race, Lily is taught about geographical phenomena and better understands the operation of the world. She learns that “the moon has been a mystery” and “when she dies away, she always comes back again” (113). Even before they arrive in Tiburon, she begins to learn about the nature of life and to acquire a new perception of the world’s operation. The road itself teaches a character; and when Lily encounters the honey jars that have got “the Virgin Mary pictured as a colored woman,” (64) she notices that the mystery behind the death of Deborah has dominated her life and affected her acts: “I realized it for the first time in my life, there is nothing but mystery in the world, how it hides behind the fabric of our poor, browbeat days, shining brightly, and we don’t even know it” (63).

All of these revelations attest to the fact that the *bildung* heroine is learning on the road. Lily has disclosed many of the mysteries and got disappointed by new

discoveries but fortunately in the end she is equipped with the strategies to cope with the obstacles and realizes that “[she has to] wake up” (301). She is blessed as “[she has] more mothers than any eight girls off the street” (302). Hence, Lily becomes “the seeker” in Bakhtin’s definition; she is in a constant progress from darkness to enlightenment and she is aware “before coming [there], [her] whole life [was] nothing but a hole where [her] mother should have been...” (293). Lily grows organically through the teachings of nature, and women whose strength is derived from nature. The *bildung* heroine masters the art of living through all the experiences that are converted into catalysts, which previously existed in the dough of Lily’s personality but were not visible.

Lily’s quest does not result in integration into the civilized society. As stated in the Introduction, the American character’s return is to nature. Rather than internalizing the codes of the society, Lily remains resistant; she rejects the call of T. Ray: “I’m staying here. I’m not leaving” (296). Thus, she rejects the call of the patriarchal society, if T. Ray is considered to be a representative of the brutal society. If society is portrayed as the restricting force while the individual is as a part of nature, then the house of the Boatwright sisters is located at the very center of the natural world. August’s beekeeping creates the natural environment. They earn their life through the most natural of products, namely honey. They construct religious rituals over honey. Even the names of the sisters -May, June, August- establish a connection with the natural world, and Lily whose name refers to a white flower that symbolizes purity and virtue suits her new territory very well. Hence, Tiburon is quite an appropriate environment for a nature-loving American subject in pursuit of individuation.

The character undergoing radical changes is not solely Lily; the readers too witness their own development since the involvement of the reader through the dialogic tone of the narrative is another distinctive element of the contemporary *bildungsroman*. Karl Morgenstern defines the *bildungsroman* as a unique type that enhances the development of the reader more than any other

genre. Likewise, Bresnick refers to the reader as the second hero or heroine in the piece. Thus, the reader's maturation is valued in any type of *bildungsroman*. Along with Lily, the reader realizes the spiritual strength s/he has, or learns the strategies of coping with the traumatic effects of the loss of a beloved. Together with Lily, all learn that one "can't be a true beekeeper without getting stung" (167). That is, experience is the essence, and without working as an apprentice, one cannot be a craftsman. The reader witnesses the significance of one's perception while assessing others or situations. Lily forgives T. Ray only when she is able to appreciate that he is saddened by the loss of Deborah and his violent temper is a manifestation of his wounded psyche. More importantly, the readers along with Lily are invited to throw off the stereotypical ideas about black people. In a dialogue with Lily, a white man says "these are colored women here ... it is not natural, you shouldn't be ... well, lowering yourself" (198). Lily's journey proves the opposite; she grows in maturity as a result of her stay with the women of color. Lily both learns and teaches that coming together around common interests transcends all the extrinsic boundaries, the most notable of which is race. The reader is awakened to the feasibility of creating a color-blind environment where love and mutual consent to live together are above all. The reader is convinced that a colored woman could achieve much more than what is expected from her. August, without the help of a man, owns her own property, runs the household, administers the business of beekeeping, educates both her and others, inspires other women as the leader of a group of worshippers, and so forth. More precisely, she has the capability of outdoing the white people; therefore, success has nothing to do with skin color. Hence; the first-person narrative reinforces the tie between the reader and the heroine, it contributes to the coming-of-age of the reader.

"We find the genuine female authority within when we become the author of our own identity" (*Dance* 4) notes Sue Monk Kidd in her 1996 nonfiction work and *Bees* narrates a blossoming girl's painful soul searching story that ends in authorizing herself. Lily's journey starts with a blind adherence to the mystery

behind the death of Deborah and moves her to a new philosophy of life. It is also clear in her own words: “Before coming here, my whole life had been nothing but a hole where my mother should have been, and this hole had made me different, left me always aching for something, but never once did” (293). Though Lily does not have an exact answer to the question whether she actually shot her mother since “[one] could never know a hundred percent” (299), she learns to live content with uncertainty using inner and outer sources of strength. The protagonist’s escape contributes not only to her but also to the reader’s growing appreciation of critical issues including race, gender, religion, maternity, and maturity. All learn at the end how “to take [the] holes life gives ... and make honey” (Kidd, Interview).

## CHAPTER II

### COMING-OF-AGE OF AN IN-BETWEEN PHOENIX

“...life gives way into death, and then death turns around and gives way into life.”

from *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd

As it has been discussed in the Introduction with reference to Todorov and Williams, each literary piece within a genre has unique qualities apart from the conventions it builds upon, and the introduction of new examples to the canon constantly redefines the characteristics of a genre. Alice Sebold's highly-acclaimed debut novel *The Lovely Bones*<sup>17</sup> (2002) is a case in point that plays with the conventions of the traditional *bildungsroman*.

Firstly, it presents a female character as the protagonist and contributes to the ongoing debate about the feasibility of a female *bildung* subject. Secondly, the story unfolds in first-person, omniscient narration that has been a moot question for the critical approaches to the genre. Above all, it reverses the chronology of developmental stages since the protagonist introduces herself as an already dead character addressing the reader from heaven. More precisely; death, a common mark of the end of development, is manipulated and identified as the initiator of growth, and Sebold's work proves that maturation is not solely restricted to worldly but at the same time to heavenly presence. Born out of the ashes of a macabre moment, the protagonist's maturation story ends in a fresh start not only for the adolescent but also for everyone related to her. All the novelties the book contains demonstrate that *Bones* deserves full attention; however, other than Marie Russo's book review entitled "Girl, Interrupted" in the Washington Post, no comprehensive analysis of the novel as a coming-of-age story has been undertaken yet. Scholars like Heinze, Norman, Olson have identified the piece as a *bildungsroman* but even these scholars have not fully examined the book's coming-of-age qualities. Thus,

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<sup>17</sup> The title of the novel is abbreviated as *Bones*.

the chapter will attempt to approach *Bones* as a marginal example of the *bildungsroman*.

The blend of gruesome images with the themes of sentimentality, domesticity, and maturation in the book is complicated by an unconventional device for the genre, raising, as Norman states, the crucial question of whether “a dead girl [can] be the protagonist of a coming-of-age novel” (144).<sup>18</sup> *Bones* derives its story from the protagonist’s memory of a macabre scene that has been imprinted on the mind of all the characters in the novel. Interestingly, Sebold squeezes the appalling experience of the young character into the first scene, and so it precludes the story from furthering as gothic horror. The novel resembles a detective story in that the people left behind are looking for evidence to enlighten the murder, and “Sebold plays with the detective novel’s traditional suspense-building apparatus” (Whitney 357) because Susie in the very first chapter discloses the name of her murderer. Then, the direction of the story changes as the following twenty-three chapters are dedicated to the effects of Susie’s death both on herself as a soul-searcher in purgatory and on the people she leaves behind.<sup>19</sup> With this purpose in mind, Sebold employs violence just as a device to set the scene for the unfolding of a coming-of-age story. Due to the sudden interruption of her life, Susie and her family get stuck in an in-between state; neither of the two sides can go on living until all learn how to resurrect a missed person in their heart.

*Bones* centers on the aftermath of the murder of the protagonist on the threshold of blossoming. While returning to her suburban Pennsylvania home through the cornfield in a snowy afternoon, Susie is entrapped, raped, and murdered by her neighbor Mr. Harvey. Although she is “offstage for the entire novel, situated in the

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<sup>18</sup> “Sebold reshuffles genres that have driven much feminist literary criticism: the *bildungsroman* and questions about its capacity to narrate women’s lives, as well as the domestic novel whose sentimental leanings literary critic Leonard Cassuto suggests are deeply entwined with the American crime novel. The result is a suburban coming-of-age story that requires a ghost story to facilitate it within a murder plot” (144).

<sup>19</sup> As Cassuto remarks, the story “moves not toward the capture of the killer. ... But rather toward the efforts by Susie and her family to overcome their shared tragedy and continue their lives” (268).

afterlife, unable to break through the earth” (Tarrier 365), Susie is always concerned with worldly affairs since she “wanted to be allowed to grow up” (19). Her physical dismemberment notwithstanding, Susie keeps in touch with the mortal world and observes the people from an elevated viewpoint; that is why, due to or thanks to the grievous experience that paves the way for further new happenings and observations, both the character and all the other people suffering from the traumatizing loss gradually develop and “learn to accept” or “let go not only of the dead but of the living” (318-19). Thus, Susie transcends the blockage and matures in time and the remaining family members complete their maturation when they learn to let life move on.

*The bildungsroman* endeavors, Kester asserts, “to uphold the innocence of the subject facing a cruel, unjust world” (47). In conformity with such a formulation, the novel portrays Susie as a naïve, innocent, and ingenuous character whose naivety is juxtaposed with the brutality of Mr. Harvey in the very first chapter. The antagonist takes advantage of Susie’s innocence to persuade her to see the sinkhole under the ground. Firstly, he asks “if [she] would like a refreshment.” When Susie hesitates, he appeals to her childish desires and lies; “I built this for the kids in the neighborhood. I thought it could be some clubhouse.” Susie gets suspicious, and acknowledges, “I don’t think I believed this even then” but gullibly thinks that “it [is] a pitiful lie, [she] imagined he [is] lonely,” and she feels “sorry for him” (11). She repents while reflecting on the scene later: “I wish now I had known this was weird” (7). In contrast to her innocence, Mr. Harvey is a serial killer having violated many other girls before Susie. The stark contrast highlights the childish manners of the protagonist. Even in heaven, Susie is pictured as an apprentice looking for the help of others to have an idea of her eternal hometown: “I did begin to wonder what the word heaven meant” (120). She does not feel that she belongs to the afterlife and constantly seeks a way to abolish the border between the world of mortals and of heavenly characters. She “push[es] and push[es] against the unyielding borders of [her] heaven” (139). She’s not aware of the impossibility of

resurrection here but, in time, she awakens to the futility of her desire. The period between ignorance and enlightenment is infused with a wide range of experiences. Briefly, Susie's initial portrayal as a potential *bildung* heroine hints at the long-distance that she has to travel. Through observations, flashbacks, interactions - either directly or indirectly-, and reflections; the character will earn a degree in the art of living, though in another world. Therein lays the *bildung* *Bones* narrates.

"I was fourteen when I was murdered on December 6, 1973" (5) says the protagonist as a part of her initial self-description. These opening remarks set the most crucial characteristic of the narrative that begins to unfold following the day of Susie's murder: the story will be retrospectively told through the eyes of a deceased narrator with the ability to contact both other characters and the readers.<sup>20</sup> By doing so, "*Bones* invites us to stretch our cognitive categories to picture a situation in which the dead narrator continues to interact with the world she had to leave" (Alber 90). At first, one may accept it as impossible and dismiss the narrative as irrational. The motives behind presenting a *bildung* heroine at a seemingly dead-end -as death is considered to a closure- may be questioned since the main distinctive characteristic of a *bildung* hero/heroine is having a potential for self-development. However, Sebold masterfully manipulates the end to serve a new beginning. As discussed in the Introduction, journey is at the center of any *bildungsromane* and death in *Bones* functions as a point of both departure and arrival. It is the arrival because it signals the beginning of a new life for the heroine in the eternal hometown; as she departs from suburbia -though it is by force- to the hereafter, a place with a no-return. It is the departure because only by the help of death are all the characters able to set off, wander, and finally restart their lives with a new philosophy. Therefore, Caldwell is right in her observation that it is "a story about the energy that emerges from the void left behind" (qtd. in Tanner 216). After all, they consider death as something that "doesn't have to be sad or scary" (309) but an opportunity to raise an awareness.

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<sup>20</sup> It is awkward that someone having passed away has a dialogue with the reader so "Sebold makes the non-natural the founding premise of the narration" (Heinze 287).



The deceased heroine narrates the story from a gazebo in heaven. The choice of such a setting provides the author with a certain advantage. Even though heaven has been among the most familiar concepts to human beings, it is actually one of the most unfamiliar ones since nobody has concrete schema of it. Thus, it permits the author to manipulate the setting to make it serve her purpose, and as a result, Sebald's heaven is not similar to common conceptions, but as Heinze reports, "this heaven is, noticeably, this particular teenager's heaven, not a transcendental realm of transubstantiation of subjects into some higher form being" (289).<sup>21</sup> Throughout the novel, though heaven dominates over the narrative, none of the characters mentions God. The detail here gains significance. The lack of a God figure obviously approximates the heavenly setting to the worldly one and thus indirectly serves the reliable narration. More importantly, it ensures Susie's liberation and authority that are essential to the development of an autonomous character that is the main harvest of the *bildungsprozess*. Definitely, it is "the spinning of authority out of the very lack of it" (Minden 13). That is, "Susie herself is God of her heaven" (Kiaei and Safdari 57).

The heroine even "came to believe that if [she] watched closely, and desired, [she] might change the lives of those [she] loved on Earth" (20). While Susie declares her authority in heaven, her little brother, Buckley, prays to Susie rather than to God for their father's recuperation: "Please don't let Daddy die, Susie. ... I need him" (260). The character's first impressions of the afterlife clarify the nature of the novel's main setting:

When I first entered heaven I thought everyone saw what I saw. That in everyone's heaven there were soccer goalposts in the distance and lumbering women throwing shot put and javelin. That all the buildings were like suburban northeast high schools built in the 1960s. Large, squat buildings spread out on dimly landscaped sandy lots, with overhangs and open spaces to make them feel modern. ... After a few days in heaven, I realized that the javelin-throwers and the shot-putters and the boys who played basketball on the

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<sup>21</sup> In "Hyper-reality in Sebald's *The Lovely Bones*," Kiaei and Safdari attract attention to the same issue and explain: "The heaven that Sebald has described is completely different from the typical heaven religious doctrines express" (Kiaei and Safdari 53).

cracked blacktop were all in their own version of heaven. Theirs just fit with mine --- didn't duplicate it precisely, but had a lot of the same things going on inside. (16-17)

It is quite evident here that “the writer depicts heaven as an earthly landscape” (Kiaei and Safdari 53) as it reflects the colors of Susie’s suburban hometown, which is significant mainly for two reasons; firstly, the striking similarity implies that it is the product of the character’s imagination, a kind of picture she draws considering what is in front of her. It definitely contributes to the reliability of the narrative valued by the genre of the *bildungsroman* for it suggests to the reader that heaven is only a metaphor Sebold uses for a distant place. Secondly, the resemblance blurs the line between the here and there, namely the physical world and the hereafter. Lack of a clear-cut boundary<sup>22</sup> helps the reader rationalize the interaction between the two worlds. Susie herself realizes that “the line between the living and the dead could be, it seem[s], murky and blurred” (48). In any case, Sebold’s design is not absurd; she just utilizes the image of heaven as a device to allow the *bildung* heroine to take her apprenticeship in another place. So, heaven represents the city in the classical *bildungsroman* and it “seems to promise infinite variety and newness, all too often brings disenchantment ... alarming and decisive” (Buckley 20). It is an informal school located out of the world’s borders.

Norman argues that “heaven consists of overlapping personal visions created by the dead themselves out of their individual experiences and desires while living” (145). Likewise, realization dawns on the naïve heroine that despite certain similarities, the setting is unique to each character settling in heaven, so it symbolically represents Susie’s personal bird’s-eye-view that supplies her with a remote outlook on the mortals, worldly issues, personal affairs, and all the other familiar things. Whitney also points out that the expanded consciousness granted to Susie provides her with the significant privilege of being able to gain access to the minds of the characters and to assess the situations in the light of their history

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<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Harrison argues that “between the living and the dead in literature the difference is strictly ‘fictional.’ Be they invented or historical, contemporary or bygone, dead or alive, the persons who speak in and through the literary work belong to the afterlife” (qtd. in Tanner 217).

(356). Susie herself says “one of the blessings of my heaven is that I can go back to these moments, live them again” (150). As Whitney states, “through this process, she can investigate the inner life of her murderer, Mr. Harvey, as well as the intricate dynamics of her parents’ marriage” (356). For a true understanding of anything one’s alienation is a prerequisite. Depending on that assumption, Sebald puts the character in an unfamiliar environment and lets all the people involved - the protagonist, her beloveds, and the reader- have an objective viewpoint that is the main asset to their coming-of-age. Through the oddly designed structure, Susie takes firm steps towards maturation. She inquires into the lives of any characters and interprets the current state in relation to the background; it is what one cannot succeed while living.

One of the most profound realizations is regarding her mother, Abigail; she can “be with [her] mother in a way [she] never could have been” (150). At that moment, she is “unnerved by the awareness that her mother has an independent identity” (Bliss 866). In a scene, for instance, Susie says, “I looked at what I had never seen as anything but Mom and saw the soft powdery skin of her face –powdery without makeup– soft without help” (43). She for the first time examines her mother as Mrs. Salmon and becomes aware of her general discontent with her life. She has never paid attention to “the loss” she sees in her mother’s eyes before. Only now, Susie notices that Abigail is divided into multiple identities and is about to get lost: “[T]he mother of the birthday girl, owner of the happy dog, wife to the loving man, and mother again to another girl and a cherished boy. Homemaker. Gardener. Sunny neighbor” (43). Abigail is well-educated but she does not have a room of her own.<sup>23</sup> She feels exhausted and tormented due to her deferred dreams: “She had gotten her master’s in English -having fought tooth and nail with Grandma Lynn to go so far in school- and still held on to vague ideas of teaching when the two of us were old enough to be left on our own” (149). But only after her

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<sup>23</sup> It is derived from the title of Virginia Woolf’s famous piece, *A Room of One’s Own*.

death, Abigail's desperate state calls Susie's attention.<sup>24</sup> She herself confesses, "I thought I had my whole life to understand them, but that was the only day I had. Once upon Earth I saw her as Abigail" (43).

Other than her mother, she approaches her murderer from a different angle. Initially, Mr. Harvey introduces Susie to the world of corruption, sophistication, and hypocrisy. She gains first-hand experience of violation and deception. She learns well not to trust without questioning. She witnesses the significant extent to which one may hide behind hypocrisy, and she is surprised while watching: "I was in my heaven, by that time, fitting my limbs together, and couldn't believe his audacity. 'The man has no shame,' I said to Franny, my intake counselor. 'Exactly,' she said, and made her point as simply as that" (8). It is noteworthy that as an adult, Franny is accustomed to such scenes and just confirms without any surprise; a calm attitude Susie can only have towards the end of her *bildungsprozess*. By means of her omniscient point of view, Susie learns about Mr. Harvey's history: "They [Mr. Harvey and his mother] were scavengers at best and made their money by collecting scrap metal and old bottles and hauling them into town on the back of the elder Harvey's ancient flatbed truck" (187). The deceased heroine discovers that a rapist, serial killer, and a psychopath might deserve to be pitied for. He suffers from poverty, paternal abuse, and violence. He witnesses his mother's abduction before his eyes. The background to her murderer discloses that "Mr. Harvey's crimes are motivated and are thus, at least ostensibly, understandable" (Tarrrier 364). Susie's privileged outlook impels her to see Mr. Harvey "whose actions can only be characterized as evil" (Olson 142) in quite a different way. Unlike many others like Ruana Singh who protests by saying, "I would find a quiet way, and I would kill him" (88), she "doesn't equate Mr. Harvey with an animal or monster or suggest that he is wholly without human feeling" (Olson 142). Without having a detached point of view, Susie would not be able to develop that perception and to further in her journey. Susie's humane attitude precludes her

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<sup>24</sup> Whitney asserts, "Abigail's resistance to domesticity is well documented in Susie's memories" (360).

from consuming her energy for vengeance; she turns her deception into experience and keeps herself busy with growing up. She earnestly says: "I knew I did not want to chase after Mr. Harvey. I looked at Ray" (304). What better serves her growth is not avenging on the murderer but rather completing the cut-short emotional affair with Ray, a young boy Susie is emotionally inclined to. Then, Norman's assessment is legitimate: "Susie wants to be in a coming-of-age story, preferring a bildungsroman to a serial killer novel" (146).

While analyzing *Oliver Twist* (1837-39), Ian Wojcik-Andrews describes the scene of Nancy's murder, and calls attention to the tragic end of her *bildung* through a violent death (94). The same comment could also be made for Susie's case but it would solely be misleading. Her physical growth -in the very first sense- is terminated by Mr. Harvey's act. She is not able to grow up biologically from then on; however, more significantly, her first emotional crush is ruined. Ray and Susie are enchanted by each other. She "[has] waited weeks for it [the first kiss]" (286). At last, Susie excitedly gets ready to have an affair, saying, "it was my one day in life of being a bad kid - of at least feigning the moves" (74). Her romantic dream is first temporarily interrupted by Mr. Peterford, the art teacher and then permanently by Mr. Harvey, making Susie repent: "If I had known this was to be the sex scene of my life, I might have prepared a bit" (75). On the other hand, Susie's introduction to Mr. Harvey paves the way for the process of her coming-of-age in several ways. Firstly, as discussed before, it familiarizes Susie with the real face of the world. Secondly, it elevates her to an omniscient position that opens the door to development. Lastly, it functions as the first step to maturity through the loss of her virginity that is considered to be in parallel to loss of innocence. Then, in Susie's growth as a *bildung* heroine, sexuality is so vital because her coming-of-age is both stopped and paradoxically initiated as well by a sexual assault.

Buckley's much-debated definition requires the *bildung* hero or heroine to "involve [in] at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting" (18). Susie has already been involved in an encounter fitting the first category with Mr.

Harvey. But that experience precludes an encounter of the second kind. Even the love note addressed to her remains unread: “On his mother’s special rice paper Ray had written me a love note, which I never read” (25). However, “in the sexual politics of the classical ... *Bildungsroman*, the literary convention demands that the budding hero[ine] must have his [or her] way. Given that the hero[ine]’s h(et)ero/s(exual) satisfaction is para(mount)” (Wojcik-Andrews 90). So, Susie concerns herself with satisfying her sexual desire before completing the maturation process; “[she] wanted so badly to kiss Ray Singh again” (286). She endeavors to satisfy her unfulfilled desire by proxy while watching her sister’s growth and her love affair as a part of that process: “I watched my sister and marveled. She was becoming everything all at once. A woman. A spy. A jock. The Ostracized: One Man Alone” (176).<sup>25</sup> She envies and shouts: “My sister! My Samuel! My dream!” (241) So many times in the novel, she gives voice to her strong desire: “I saw Lindsey move toward Samuel Heckler. She kissed him; it was glorious. I was almost alive again” (71). At times it reminds Susie of her own sexual intercourse and compels her to make a comparison between the two. She says in a broken-hearted manner: “At fourteen, my sister sailed away from me into a place I’d never been. In the walls of my sex there was horror and blood, in the walls of hers there were windows” (125). In contrast, her “vicarious coming-of-age narrative culminates in a marriage proposal” (Norman 147) as Samuel asks Lindsey to marry him following their graduation from the college. Observing the two from her heaven, Susie shouts in amusement: “... that moment I ran around my heaven like ... a chicken with its head cut off! I was so happy I screamed over and over and over again” (241).

Later on, to make her dream come true she goes one step further than experiencing by proxy and pays a short visit to the world in the body of Ruth, a girl with a psychic relation to the spirit of killed women. Ruth has caught Susie’s attention with her keen interest in macabre drawings, and Susie gets closer to her

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<sup>25</sup> It seems, “Susie is elated and claims her sister’s story as her own” (Norman 147).

particularly after her murder. She touches Ruth's body as Ray and Ruth bond with each other following Susie's death, and develops a close friendship with her. Susie expresses her feelings by saying, "[a]gain I was seeing something I never would have seen: the two of them together. It made Ray more attractive to me than he had ever been. His eyes were the darkest gray. When I watched him from heaven I did not hesitate to fall inside of them" (81). Shortly after this scene, she captures Ruth's body:

Ruth pushed up against her skin, wanting out. She was fighting to leave and I was inside now, struggling with her. I willed her back, willed that divine impossible, but she wanted out. There was nothing and no one that could keep her down. Flying. I watched as I had so many times from heaven, but this time it was a blur beside me. It was lust and rage yearning upward. (301)

Through Ruth's body, she experiences the second type of sexual encounter in Buckley's definition; she exalts herself to a more mature position while "her actions make the lesbian Ruth into a 'straightened' sacred feminine vessel" (Whitney 361). She asks Ray to "make love to her" (307). The passionate experience Susie has with Ray significantly contributes to her growth as only after that scene she feels relieved in her heaven. Susie depicts the intercourse and how she feels without censoring any obscene details:

"You're not Ruth," he said, his face full of wonder.  
I took the hand that had reached the end of the cut and placed it under my left breast.  
"I've watched you both for years," I said. "I want you to make love to me."  
...  
I touched every part of him and held it in my hands. I cupped his elbow in my palm. I dragged his pubic hair out straight between my fingers. I held that part of him that Mr. Harvey forced inside me. Inside my head I said the word *gentle*, and then I said the word *man*.  
"Ray?"  
"I don't know what to call you."  
"Susie."  
I put my fingers up to his lips to stop his questioning.  
"Remember the note you wrote me? Remember how you called yourself the moor?" (307-308)

The substantiality of that particular moment is better appreciated when it is considered that Susie allocates her single opportunity of remaining in the world for

a short amount of time to make love to Ray. She realizes “outside, the world [she] had watched for so long was living and breathing on the same earth [she] now was” (309). Instead of enjoying the earthly landscape she has long missed, she remains within the walls: “I knew I would not go out. I had taken this time to fall in love instead – in love with the sort of helplessness I had not felt in death – the helplessness of being alive, the dark bright pity of being human ... all of it part of navigating the unknown” (309). She discovers the unknown and unprecedented in a way to illustrate what scholars call, the maturation of a *bildung* heroine. If this process involves “the flight from an earlier, innocent self [to] a discovery of new reality” (Bluefarb 155), in Susie’s case, it is also a flight from forced sexuality to a desired one. In other words, it is the transition from penetrated childhood to womanhood. Susie herself takes notice of that change when she says: “Ruth had been a girl haunted and now she would be a woman haunted” (321). Here, if Ruth is the earthly embodiment of the dead Susie, then she herself becomes a woman along with Ruth.

The protagonist’s attainments convert the uplifted setting of the novel into a marginal school that bears resemblance to the informal school in the genre of the *bildungsroman*. It is well known that pursuant to the descriptive features of the genre, education is “a total growth process ... involving something more intangible than the acquirement of a finite number of lessons” (Swales 14). In the light of that description, Susie’s heaven itself is a precious contributor to the growth process since it presents a great number of new experiences that are turned into catalysts in cultivating her personality. Norman touches on the same point and affirms: “For Susie, this looks initially like high school without classes, save for art and band” (145). In addition, the school itself Susie attends in heaven is a tailor-made construction. The following pictures Susie draws attest the arguments here:

We had been given, in our heavens, our simplest dreams. There were no teachers in the school. We never had to go inside except for art class for me jazz band for Holly. The boys did not pinch our backsides or tell us we smelled; our textbooks were *Seventeen* and *Glamour* and *Vogue*. And our



heavens expanded as our relationship grew. We wanted many of the same things. (18)

The truth was very different from what we learned at school. (48)

Sometimes it looks like the high school did. ... in my heaven I can make a bonfire in the classrooms run up and down the halls yelling as loud as I want. (308)

As the commonly accepted father of the genre, Goethe likens the process of living to art, and it is not a coincidence that Susie's school requires her to attend only the art classes. In her school, the number of practical hours outweighs the hours of theoretical ones. She is learning through direct experience, experimentation, and practice. Moreover, they are not reading course books but rather they are engaged with fashion magazines designed for teenagers as a part of contemporary culture.

If "there were no teachers in school," a mentor<sup>26</sup> or counselor is at the disposal of the *bildung* heroine. Accordingly, Franny takes over the responsibility of counseling Susie on the nature of heaven. In the process of understanding the operations of heaven, the young heroine depends on Franny, a social worker in the world and a surrogate mother in her mid-forties for the adolescents in heaven. It takes Susie "a while to figure out that this [is] something [she] want[s]; [her] mother" (18). Franny earnestly offers her guidance when she says "I'm here to help" (19). She reminds Susie and her roommate, Holly, that "all you have to do is desire it, and if you desire it enough and understand why -really know- it will come" (19). Following her mentor's advice, Susie begins to enjoy her time in heaven as she is now able to realize her dreams. She "hate[s] how [their] house looked out onto another house and another and another" (19) on earth but in heaven she gets a duplex only through a strong desire. Above all, the technique Franny teaches Susie is the key to the *bildung* heroine's individuation process because it gives her the chance of watching the lives of people still living and having an in-depth understanding of the world. To achieve it, she only needs to desire and it is

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<sup>26</sup> Hatfield says, "a man can learn from others not mere facts but insights which may reshape his life" (qtd. in Gohlman, *Starting Over* 8) to underline the role of mentors in the developmental process.

surprising “how much [she] desired to know what [she] had not known on Earth” (19). She is able to watch “from beginning to end ... see how they did it ... know the secrets ... pretend better” (19). This is a golden opportunity for a *bildung* subject learning by observing and experiencing. The omniscience allowed to Susie puts her in a purgatorial state but provides her with a privilege almost no *bildung* hero or heroine has gained so far. Without a mentor, Susie would not be aware of the treasure she has, or be able to mature. The growth would not be completed and she would remain half complete. Her death would remain with its all negative connotations. At this point, the prologue to the novel makes more sense, for it implies that what seems to be imprisonment may paradoxically be freedom:

Inside the snow globe on my father’s desk, there was a penguin wearing a red-and-white-striped scarf. When I was little my father would pull me into his lap and reach for the snow globe. He would turn it over, letting all the snow collect on the top, then quickly invert it. The two of us watched the snow fall gently around the penguin. The penguin was alone in there, I thought, and I worried for him. When I told my father this, he said, ‘Don’t worry, Susie, he has a nice life. He’s trapped in a perfect world. (3)

The penguin stands for Susie. Her scarf is red-striped because she immigrates to heaven as a consequence of a bloody crime that may devastate the life of its victim. It is white-striped because the violation paves the way for a new horizon for the character. Though it seems to be an undeserved imprisonment at first, later it turns out to be “a perfect world” that no one in the physical world can experience. Whitney points at the same issue and identifies Susie as “the unusual example of the postfeminist survivor mystique” (356) due to her absolute control on the narrative and consciousness that overcomes the finality of death. Tanner, another critic touching on the unusual narrative structure in *Bones*, underlines that death sustains life rather than interrupts it as the dead narrator embodies a form, and is placed in heaven that is quite similar to the novel’s worldly setting (216).

Heinze properly establishes that “by transporting [Susie] to heaven, and thus into a narrative position of alleged otherworldly serenity and peace and of privileged observation, her narrative is, paradoxically, rendered reliable, although she does

voice opinions, emotions, and resentments” (289). Henzie’s assertion takes on a new significance within the framework of the *bildungsroman* since it considers the detachment of the narrator from the *bildung* hero or heroine as crucial to achieve a multi-directional approach. On the other hand, it is obvious that the first-person omniscient narration in *Bones* puts the character and narrator in one body, and it seemingly disrupts reliability, or restricts the scope of narrative as one’s viewpoint is limited or biased. Then, alienation is required between the narrated and narrating “I.” Ellis clearly states, “even in *Bildungsromane* with first-person narration, such as *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre*, the narrator is an older, more seasoned person with a distanced perspective upon the young character whose story is told” (108). The relationship between the narrated Susie and the narrating one is not different as it is in the works Ellis refers to. The interval between the time of narration and the time of action is explicitly noted. In Susie’s very first utterance, she refers back to the date of her violation or throughout the narrative she chooses the simple past or past perfect tense. Besides, the notable gap between Susie’s current mental or emotional state and the earlier one also contributes to the reliability of the narrative. The heroine sincerely remarks: “I was present somehow, as a person, in a way I had never been” (279). All prove that Sebold’s technique “in an ironic and morbid way ... amounts to a distinction between experiencing ‘I’ and experienced, i.e. dead ‘I’” (Heinze 288).

The experiencing or experienced “I” Heinze mentions is substituted for “we” in Sebold’s example of the *bildungsroman*. Goethe proposes the idea of “reciprocal growth or change in which “the individual and his environment are engaged in a process of mutual transformation, each shaping the other until the individual has reached the point where he or she experiences a sense of harmony with the environment” (Gohlman, *Starting Over* x). While opening the story, the heroine defines herself firstly by her surname: “My name was Salmon, like the fish, first name, Susie” (5), from which one may infer that rather than the individual identity of the character, the familial ties are in the forefront for the heroine. Thus, an

incident in one character's life impacts not solely the person involved but anyone around her.<sup>27</sup> So, Mr. Harvey wreaks havoc in the lives of both Susie and her beloveds. To put it another way, the novel multiplies the victims. Milonis in a similar way identifies the subject of rape as not only Susie but also "anyone living in the rape culture" (138).

Each character in the novel matures in one way or another. Susie learns from Franny along with observations and transcendental interactions the omniscient narration grants her to proceed from purgatory to her heaven. The *bildung* heroine consults her mentor: "How do you make the switch?" Franny's response directs her to the gate:

It's not as easy as you might think. ... You have to stop desiring certain answers. ... If you stop asking why you were killed instead of someone else, stop investigating the vacuum left by your loss, stop wondering what everyone left on Earth is feeling ... you can be free. Simply put, you have to give up on Earth. (120)

Initially "this seem[s] impossible to [her]" (120) but in time she is persuaded that "when the dead are done with the living, ... the living can go on to other things" (145). In order to put herself in comfort and let her loved ones move on, she enters "wide wide Heaven" (325). She feels relieved, and "the heroine's ready accommodation to posthumous existence calms the audience by reassuring them of meaningful life after death" (Whitney 359).

The worldly characters in the novel also drive lessons from the process. Olson ascertains, "like the eponymous fish that swims against the current or 'goes the hard way,' all members of Salmon family have to undertake difficult emotional journeys before they can come to some sort of rest at the end of the novel" (143). They develop various sorts of awareness and different strategies to cope with Susie's loss, and as a result, "all can conjure up, can feel her presence in palpable, tangible ways" (Tarrier 365). They all undergo certain transformations, and

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<sup>27</sup> Henry Travers in Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) tells, "each man's life touches so many other lives. When he isn't around he leaves an awful hole" (qtd. in Tarrier 369).

consequently accept a life without the physical presence of the deceased character. They at first dissolve and move to different directions but then they reunite and strengthen their relations. While Susie's death acts as the force that brings the family to the verge of disruption, it paradoxically constitutes the common ground on which they all come together again. Susie's bones preserved in an old safe by George Harvey encourage everyone "to bone up" on the issue of human relations and the operation of the world.

Susie's parents, following her rape, have great difficulties with coping with the emotional hole in their hearts. They are not only mourning or blaming themselves but also trying to get accustomed to an unprecedented situation. The spiritual injury puts the two and their marriage into a tough test. The dichotomy between Abigail's and Jack's reaction to their daughter's death drops hints about the fracture of the marital links:

For three nights he hadn't known how to touch my mother or what to say. Before, they had never found themselves broken together. Usually, it was needing the other but not both needing each other, and so there had been a way, by touching, to borrow from the stronger one's strength. And they had never understood, as they did now, what the word *horror* meant. (20-21)

Death is not only new to Susie; as it is reported in the narrator's description, it is also unfamiliar to the adults who have already completed their biological coming-of-age. Thus, the process invites them to growth as well. Olson addresses the initial refusal of the parents to acknowledge their daughter's loss to highlight the distance they go in the process (145). They console themselves through Susie's drawing. She observes them and comments on their present state:

Hours before I died, my mother hung on the refrigerator a picture that Buckley had drawn. In the drawing a thick blue line separated the air and the ground. In the days that followed I watched my family walk back and forth past that drawing and I became convinced that that thick blue line was a real place --- an Inbetween, where heaven's horizon met Earth's. I wanted to go there into the cornflower blue of Crayola, the royal, the turquoise, the sky. (34)

The drawing on the refrigerator functions as Susie's unfound corpse for the parents. Susie's visual representation keeps her alive in the memory of Mr. and

Mrs. Salmon. Their vivid memories of her mark Susie as the centerpiece of their lives. Jack questions his fatherhood, and accuses himself of not being able to protect his daughter. The sense of guilt impels him to set off to search for the identity of the perpetrator. On the other hand, her daughter's death causes Abigail to withdraw into herself to reflect on her identity and past. Susie outlines this state: "In those first two months my mother and father moved in opposite directions from each other. One stayed in, the other went out" (86). Jack keeps busy not only with investigating Susie's murder but also with taking care of his two other children and with earning the bread for his family. He shoulders the whole responsibility owing to Abigail's complete disinterest. His increasing obsession with Susie and his overwhelming paternal compassion cause hallucinations. The loss of one of his daughters makes him put a premium on the living children and solidifies his attachment to them:

My father had felt in that moment the first flicker of the strange sad mortality of being a father. ... He would find his Susie now inside his young son. ... my presence was like a tug on him, it dragged him back back back. He stared at the small boy he held in his arms. "*Who are you?*" he found himself asking. "*Where did you come from?*" (48)

Jack's intuitive sense points at Mr. Harvey as the murderer but it contradicts with the findings of the police investigation. His not being able to persuade the officials into the validity of his assertion consumes him more and drives him to the verge of burnout syndrome. Buckley's accusing his father of caring for the deceased daughter more than the living offspring is the last straw; causing Jack to suffer a heart attack. "Peek-a-boo, Daddy. She's dead" Buckley shouts, and Jack calmly responds, "I know that." The young son continues and cries: "But you don't act that way. Keesha's dad died when she was six. Keesha said she barely even thinks of him." After that, it begins to dawn on Jack that he needs to learn how to balance the living and the dead, how to focus on daily routines, and how to get rid of the haunting memories: "Then a little voice in him said, *Let go, let go, let go*" (257). Thus, Jack completes his *bildungsprozess* when he loosens his grip and lets Susie move on to a comfortable life in heaven.

Along with her daughter's loss, her husband's absorption in Susie's death trigger Abigail's psychological torment, and cause her to alienate herself from the Salmon's home; that is, "Susie's death allows Abigail to reclaim an identity eclipsed by her roles as wife and mother" (Norman 152). She has a senseless affair with Detective Len Fenerman, and moves to California to find solace in an environment that is remote from her repressed identity: "She felt like she had driven through nothing but families for four days --- squabbling families, bawling families, screaming families, families under the miraculous strain of the day by day" (222). Norman interprets Abigail's unsuccessful extramarital affair as an attempt to reclaim her disrupted solitude (152). It was not the affair itself but rather "it was the feeling of being unreachable" that soothes her. It is "simply a brief vacation from her life as Mrs. Salmon" (196). The books she has read in college, e.g. *The Awakening*, evoke the idea of committing suicide but "her attachments ... pull her back. ... A marriage. A heart attack" (265). After undertaking such a literal and spiritual journey, she realizes that "being a mother was a calling" (266). Susie thinks that her mother "had been punished in the most horrible and unimaginable way for never having wanted [her]" (266). She pays the penalty, and now she is ready to reunify with her family. Unlike the scene before the journey, "they [Abigail and Jack] manage to stretch out together beside each other so they could stare into each other's eyes" (280). They share their memories of Susie; how her soul haunts them, how they miss their deceased daughter: "Even in California she was everywhere. Boarding buses or on the streets outside schools when I drove by. I'd see her hair but it didn't match the face or I'd see her body or the way she moved" (281). Susie's vivid memories that have the greatest role in their separation unite them here, this time more tightly: "And I watched my parents kissed. They kept their eyes open as they did, and my mother was the one to cry first, the tears dropping down onto my father's cheeks until he wept too" (282). Olson discusses the collective coming-of-age of the Salmons and identifies the signs of development traced in each character; Lindsey quits playing the figure of Amazonian strength, Abigail and Jack come in of a second spring, and Buckley

now “finds solace for his decimated childhood in his drums and his marvelous garden” (146).

“It was no longer a Susie-fest on Earth” (236). Everyone acknowledges a life without the physical presence of the dead girl. They come to the realization that the birth-to-death story is the classic of the mortal world. The Salmons see they are bound to regenerate their beloved in their hearts to live content with all their agonies. Susie also learns to “stop questioning” and enjoy her perfect heaven: “The world she saw of dead women and children had become as real to her as the world in which she lived” (227). She is definitely right in her conclusion: “I knew we were taking a long trip to a place very far away” (311). The bloody bones are now lovely:

These were the lovely bones that had grown around my absence: the connections --- sometimes tenuous, sometimes made at great cost, but often magnificent --- that happened after I was gone. And I began to see things in a new way that let me hold the world without me in it. The events that my death wrought were merely the bones of a body that would become whole at some unpredictable time in the future. The price of what I came to see as miraculous body had been my life. (320)

The bliss of the Salmons is complemented when justice is done after George Harvey dies before being able to harm Lindsey as she reveals his secret life. With his deserved death, all of the characters enjoy their new identities. Susie addresses the readers by announcing, “[t]his little girl’s grown up by now” (328), and closes by wishing them “a long and happy life” (328).

The closure similar to the opening gets out of the literary realm and reaches out to the reader. Herein appears the last quality of the *bildungsroman* the present thesis covers; the involvement of the reader. Karl Morgenstern, a leading critic on the genre, argues, “each reader becomes his own Wilhelm Meister, an apprentice, a traveller, on his own account” (qtd. in Argyle 34). Within the context of *Bones*, each reader becomes his or her own Susie or Jack or Abigail or anyone they may choose to sympathize with. The readers gain second-hand experiences, draw morals and are encouraged to sharpen their acts. They are instructed in the ways



of surviving despite difficulties and manipulating sorrows to let them serve the emotional bond between the loved ones. Tarrier comments on the journey the readers go on as in the following:

*The Lovely Bones* conveys its main message in the contemporary parlance of love and healing: we are obligated to heal from our trauma, and its 'use' is to bring us closer to our loved ones. The rewards of an earthly life lie in our human frailties, in our vulnerabilities, our reliance on others, the promise of sustaining love. *The Lovely Bones* presents the grief and pain of Susie Salmon's parents, Jack and Abigail, and the temporary dissolution of their marriage, in order to cement those bonds, to make us believers in the power of grief's transformative potential. (363)

To conclude; *Bones*, as a contemporary example of the *bildungsroman*, becomes in itself a phoenix that is a mythological bird deconstructing itself every five hundred years, and rebuilding its body out of its ashes. Initially all the worldly characters are scourged by Susie's molestation and murder; and then, utilizing their pain, they create new identities for themselves. Similarly, Susie at first does not accept a life away from the ones she loves and endeavors to involve in worldly affairs but then she, like the other characters, learns to accept and proceeds to her wide heaven. The readers witnessing the healing of the Salmons pluck up their courage to recuperate following an agony. Hence, each character both in and out of the literary realm becomes a phoenix with the potential of rising out of his or her ashes. Everyone suffers from the loss of a beloved but they apprehend that they have to be survivors equipped with the ability of sustaining a life not in spite of, but by virtue of, the agonies life presents. It is how the Salmons acquire a new philosophy of life at the end of their *bildungsprozess*.

## CHAPTER III

### GOING THE DISTANCE IN HEAVY BOOTS

“Life is a perpetual yesterday for us.”  
from *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold

The present study has started off with the claim that the pieces subject to exploration within its scope represent the traditional features of the *bildungsroman*, and with the aim to illustrate how they are embedded in the contemporary canon while they blend those features with the novelties they bring in to revitalize the existing structure. Jonathan Safran Foer’s 2005 novel entitled *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, in conformity with this argument, not only exemplifies the qualities inherited from Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* but also adds new dimensions to the long-established *bildungsroman* tradition. The nine-year-old male protagonist it introduces, the journey he embarks on, his development from naiveté to maturity through his encounters and experiences, a troubled relationship due to the loss of his father at the center of the plot, and a fresh outlook acquired towards the end are all among the key components of the traditional characteristics of the genre. On the other hand; the unexpected level of intelligence<sup>28</sup> of the *bildung* subject, the first-person<sup>29</sup> narratives it presents, the close interaction between the literary and physical world<sup>30</sup> as its story centers on historical occurrences from different periods of time, the different portrayal<sup>31</sup> of the

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<sup>28</sup> Oxford Companion to English Literature (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.) notes, “Wilhelm provides the model of the innocent, inexperienced, well-meaning, but often foolish and erring, young man who sets out in life with either no aim in mind or the wrong one” (102). On the contrary to that description, Foer’s protagonist is extremely brilliant. What is more, his aim is quite definite from the very beginning.

<sup>29</sup> For instance, Kester argues that “the classical *Bildungsroman* questions the individual’s ability to write his or her own story” (67). The individual perspective is thought to be limited and fallible for a proper perspective.

<sup>30</sup> Kester observes that “Goethe’s novel separates itself more and more from realism and concludes with an ever increasing crescendo of fantasy and fairy-tale elements” (148).

<sup>31</sup> “In Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* or, in English, *Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship* (1795-1796; 1829 final version) and most other European *Bildungsromane* society is usually depicted as a benevolent force which envelops the worthy individual with care” (Kester 9). In Foer’s piece, as it will be further discussed, it is not only the victim but also the victimizer and the cause of the disasters human beings have long suffered from.

society, and hero's relation<sup>32</sup> with it are the divergent characteristics the twenty-first century example involves. Furthermore, the child protagonist of *Extremely Loud&Incredibly Close*, Oskar Schell's story, has ramifications beyond being a personal account. As Däwes argues, Oskar's narrative "replaces the individual concern with a communal one" (540) since he represents a great number of people indirectly affected by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Intertwined with analogous scenes of the Bombing of Dresden and Hiroshima,<sup>33</sup> 9/11's effects on human psychology are portrayed from a wider perspective; more precisely, "the novel universalizes grief" (Versluys 82), or in Contos's words, "Foer petitions the reader(s) to find the bridges that connect [them] to the characters and in a larger scale to others" (59). Moreover, Oskar's story is engaged with the epistolary narrative of the grandparents, the survivors of the Bombing of Dresden in the Second World War. Oskar's success in coping with trauma is contrasted with the grandfather's failure at overcoming it; in that way, the firm steps of the hero towards maturation are more prominently displayed. Although *Extremely Loud&Incredibly Close* has received the attention of literary critics, the novel's coming-of-age qualities have been overshadowed by the historical fiction characteristics; thus, the present study sets its sight on inquiring into Foer's acclaimed novel as a contemporary example of the *bildungsroman*.

The German word, *Werden*<sup>34</sup> constitutes the core of any *bildungsromane* proper, and it incorporates change and development in its essence. Hence, it requires a character at his beginnings with a "capacity for reflection" (Swales 36), a burning desire to go and discover, and an analytical mind. He is in pursuit of the concealed identity in Musil's theory. Then, as some scholars including Franco Moretti define, a *bildung* hero is an ordinary -in terms of socially constructed identities- but admirable character with his subjective aims of gaining an autonomous identity,

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<sup>32</sup> In the classical *bildungsromane*, the hero accepts the values of the society as his own, and integrates his powers but here, the hero even at the end remains different from mainstream society.

<sup>33</sup> Note that they are from the first half of the twentieth century and from history of different countries, namely Germany and Japan.

<sup>34</sup> In English, "to become."

and enhancing the current condition of the environment he belongs to. Holman and Buckley consider the hero's sensibility as the main asset to the *bildungsprozess* while Michael Beddow places emphasis on "the imagination of the hero as the faculty which allows him to transcend the limitations of everyday practicality" (qtd. in Swales 29). This theoretical framework features Foer's protagonist, Oskar Schell, as an ideal figure of the *bildungsroman*.

The first utterance of the protagonist is "What about a teakettle?" (1) A question establishing a dialogic tone. It gives hints about Oskar's character; a boy with an analytical and questioning mind hungering after new sources of information. As the story unfolds, the reader witnesses him to be "a very complex character" having "mature thoughts and ideas with an overall behavior typical of a child" (Uytterschout and Versluys 228). The mature tone of questioning is juxtaposed with Oskar's childish manners revealed through his enumeration of inventions that are the products of an overactive imagination. He asks, "what if the spout opened and closed when the steam came out, so it would become a mouth, and it would whistle pretty melodies" (1). Immediately in the next paragraph, he introduces the next invention he thinks of: "What about little microphones? What if everyone swallowed them, and they played the sounds of our hearts through little speakers, which could be in the pouches of our overalls?" Throughout his story, the protagonist thinks about many other inventions, and performs tasks necessitating a vivid imagination which could be called "a by-product of trauma" (Uytterschout 186). They prove that Oskar is able to think independently from physical boundaries;<sup>35</sup> it is what Beddow points at in his description of a *bildung* hero's transformative power of imagination. Moreover, they demonstrate how eager he is to undertake a journey. Then, both Oskar's prefatory speech and the title of the first chapter, i.e. "What the?" provide a preview of the way the *bildung* hero operates.

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<sup>35</sup> As it is discussed later, Oskar's imagination functions as his lifebuoy that allows him to clutch onto life without his father in the face of the agonizing realities of the world.

Oskar's juvenile attitude also manifests itself in his innocent, naïve perception of life and the people around him. He says, "he never used to lie" (6) to his mother. When she asks if "[he] give[s] a copy of [their] apartment key to the mailman," without hesitation but in perplexity, he replies "the mailperson is a mailwoman" (6). It is noticeable that while the mother tries to call his attention to Oskar's failure to keep their privacy, he concerns himself with the sex of the person. The mother responds in an annoyed tone: "But you can't give a key to a stranger. ... Sometimes people who seem good end up being not as good as you might have hoped, you know?" Oskar's childish innocence comes into focus following his comment: "She was obviously mad at me, but I didn't know why. I hadn't done anything wrong. Or if I had, I didn't know what it was. And I definitely didn't mean to do it" (6). The naivety underlined in Oskar's characterization, and its being contrasted with the skepticism of an adult evince how well he fits in the identity of an innocent *bildung* hero, and it foreshadows the distance he is bound to go to acquire maturity.

The details of Oskar's ideas of innovation clue the reader in on the troubled relationship of the *bildung* hero with his father. He claims, "he could invent a teakettle that reads in Dad's voice" (1). It implies that Oskar is longing for his father. Then, he incidentally says that his father passed away: "... the ring tone I downloaded for the cell phone I got after Dad died" (3). In another invention, Oskar drops one more hint regarding the death of his dad: "Sometimes I think it would be weird if there were a skyscraper that moved up and down while its elevator stayed in place. So if you wanted to go to the ninety-fifth floor, you'd just press the 95 button and the ninety-fifth floor would come to you" (3). Oskar's imaginary invention here depends on his memories of Thomas Schell, his deceased father, for the hero's narrative obliquely discloses that he is killed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It is oblique because Oskar never directly says it but just calls it "the worst day." He is "unable to mention disaster's [9/11's] name" (Codde 681). Oskar strives to save Thomas Schell by a stretch of his imagination: "Also, that could be

extremely useful, because if you are on the ninety-fifth floor, and a plane hits below you, the building could take you to the ground, and everyone could be safe, even if you left your birdseed shirt at home that day” (3). He “tries to undo time and make his father return to safety” (Codde 681). It is a childish way of dealing with the memories of a father who is physically remote from his son.

Thomas Schell’s absence occupies the broadest space not only in Oskar’s inventions but also in his whole life. The uneasy relationship of the protagonist with his father’s memory comes out as another dimension to his identity as a *bildung* hero. As discussed earlier; Buckley, Hendley, and many other theorists identify the central character of the *bildungsroman* as someone who is in a beleaguered connection with his father. However, unlike many other stereotypical portrayals of a father, Thomas Schell is not “hostile to his creative instincts” (Buckley 17). On the contrary, he serves as the main facilitator in the development of Oskar’s creativity and problem solving skills. On account of the Reconnaissance Expedition, the game Oskar and his father frequently play, and such other processes he is engaged in by the help of his father, Oskar sharpens his wits:

A great game that Dad and I would sometimes play on Sundays was Reconnaissance Expedition. Sometimes the Reconnaissance Expeditions were extremely simple, like when he told me to bring back something from every decade in the twentieth century – I was clever and brought back a rock - - and sometimes they were incredibly complicated and would go on for a couple of weeks. For the last one we ever did, which never finished, he gave me a map of Central Park. I said, “And?” And he said, “And what?” I said, “What are the clues?” He said, “Who said there had to be clues?” “There are always clues.” “That doesn’t, in itself suggest anything.” “Not a single clue?” He said, “Unless no clues is a clue.” “Is no clues a clue?” He shrugged his shoulders, like he had no idea what I was talking about. I loved that. (8)

Oskar’s mind is activated through the questions. Thomas Schell forces his son to think about the questions he poses, and in that way, he tries to improve the analytical thinking skills of the young boy. He uses clues to get the result and what is more, he learns that even lack of a clue is in itself a departure point. His last comment in the extract attests that he is fond of being challenged, and here it is foreseeable that he is “an extremely precocious and inquisitive child” (Saal 461).

In Oskar's case, not the father's presence or his physical or emotional mistreatment of his son, but Oskar's unexpected loss of his father, the interrupted father-son relationship cause trouble. Additionally, his sense of guilt concerning his father's death has a significant role in his *bildungsprozess*. On September 11, Thomas Schell calls home, and when he cannot get through, he leaves four messages on the answering machine. Oskar listens to the messages, and he sees the last call but bewildered, he cannot receive it. Codde also affirms, "what haunts Oskar is not only his father's death, but particularly his inability to pick up the receiver when his father called him from the burning towers" (681). The following clearly depicts Oskar's sense of guilt, a point made by some critics as well:

He needed me but I couldn't pick up. I just couldn't pick up. I just couldn't. *Are you there?* He asked eleven times. I know, because I've counted. It's one more than I can count on my fingers. Why did he keep asking? Was he waiting for someone to come home? Why didn't he say "anyone?" *Is anyone there?* "You" is just one person. Sometimes I think he knew I was there. Maybe he kept saying it to give me time to get brave enough to pick up. Also, there was no space between the times he asked. ... You can hear people in the background screaming and crying. And you can hear glass breaking. ... And then it cut off. ... it ended at 10:24 which was when the building came down. So maybe that's how he died. (301-302)

Although the loss of his father and the damage brought about by it are Oskar's main concerns, in his initial self-description, Thomas Schell's death is squeezed into the minor details. It seems that Oskar represses the haunting memories of his father and cannot acknowledge his absence. It appears as a sign of melancholia in Freud's lexicon or "acting out" for LaCapra who explains, "acting out disables trauma survivors to express what they feel and forces them to express what they cannot feel. Thus, they are prevented from converting their traumatic memory into a narrative one" (qtd. in Uytterschout and Versluys 218). Within the context of the *bildungsroman*, it is a sign of an immature personality to be devoid of the capability of properly coping with loss.

Oskar, as a *bildung* hero at his beginnings, cannot accept loss, and he shrinks from anything that reminds him of Thomas Schell or the traumatizing event. He

reports, “I got out of bed and went to the closet where I kept the phone. I hadn’t taken it out since the worst day. It just wasn’t possible” (68). He suffers from the post-traumatic effects of the disaster on his life and dodges so many things. He says, “there was a lot of stuff that made me panicky,” and begins to enumerate; “suspension bridges, germs, airplanes, fireworks, Arab people on the subway (even though I’m not racist), Arab people in restaurants and coffee shops and other public places, scaffolding” etc. (36). It is apparent that what frighten Oskar are the objects or people that could be associated with the disaster in one way or another.<sup>36</sup>

He battles with any reminiscences of his father; therefore, when his mother says to Oskar, “you sound just like Dad,” he gets nettled and responds: “What do you mean I sound just like Dad? ... It doesn’t make me feel good when you say that something I do reminds you of Dad” (43). Obviously what disturbs Oskar is not the fact that “it makes [him] feel unspecial” (43) but retrieval of the deeply distressing memories because “it is so painful to think” (17). Besides, “in so doing they expose the boy to the danger of losing his identity as an autonomous individual” (190) notes Uytterschout. In that case, Oskar’s refusal to be “a living memory of the lost loved ones” (Uytterschout 190) or his wish to be special signals his inclination to be an autonomous character that is the ultimate outcome of the developmental process of a *bildung* hero. However; as a prerequisite to his maturation and autonomy, Oskar will have to learn that “when every aspect of life is permeated by trauma, running away from trauma is running away from life” (Versluys 85). So, he is supposed to make peace with it to move on to a normal life with the spiritual presence of the father in heart.

As Oskar indicates, “[s]elf-defense [is] something that [he is] extremely curious about” (2), he develops some strategies to implement to overcome the traumatic effects of loss. He says, “a few weeks after the worst day, I started writing lots of

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<sup>36</sup> See Aránguiz (6) on the same issue.



letters. I don't know why, but it was one of the only things that made my boots lighter" (11). In Oskar's vocabulary "wearing heavy boots" is a euphemism for "his expression of being very sad and depressed" (Uytterschout and Versluys 228). Initially, when he wears heavy boots, he cannot vocalize his feelings or share how he feels with the people close to him, and writing functions as a medium for the healing: "... there was only one way to be free of [the teeming memories of the past life] and that was to write them all down on paper" (Maugham 6). Other than writing, keeping his mind busy with inventions is also therapeutic for Oskar. He manipulates even something quite ordinary to make it serve his purpose. That is, he tries to heal and let life go on, by means of the greatest inheritance from his father; a creative mind and vivid imagination. Thus, the person dragging the character into a trauma is again the one equipping him with the required strategies.<sup>37</sup>

Similar to his fears, Oskar's inventions originate from the trauma or his memories of the deceased father. Anything or anyone takes on significance for the protagonist so long as they relate to Thomas Schell or his death. The balance between the prosaic and poetic is another feature of the *bildungsroman*. Freedman and Swales argue that events or characters gain importance if they mean something to the *bildung* hero or if they have a role in his individuation process. Objects or people irrelevant to that context are disregarded in the genre. In line with this quality of the *bildungsroman*, Oskar thinks about dead people and asks: "Isn't it so weird how the number of dead people is increasing even though the earth stays the same size, so that one day there isn't going to be room to bury anyone anymore?" (3) What makes the number of people having passed away or burying them intriguing for the hero is his father's death and the fire in the World Trade Center where he dies. The "most impressive song that [Oskar] can play on [his] tambourine" (2), namely "The Flight of the Bumblebee"<sup>38</sup> bears on the father-

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<sup>37</sup> Uytterschout (194) points at the paradoxical role the father plays.

<sup>38</sup> "The Flight of the Bumblebee" is composed by Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov as an orchestral interlude for the opera *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*. In the scene that the song closes, the son, Gvidon

son relationship as well, and it clues the reader in on the journey Oskar embarks on through the five boroughs of New York. After all, throughout the novel, the questions, situations, characters, or any details revolve around the same matter, in a manner to validate the arguments of Swales: "... the characters and experiences are allowed to recur because they are abidingly present in the selfhood of the hero" (23).

Among the objects that "strike an answering chord" (Swales 23) in Oskar's cultivation, the key he finds in an envelope written "Black" in red on its backside is the crucial piece. He says, "it [is] a weird-looking key, obviously to something extremely important, because it [is] fatter or shorter than a normal key. I couldn't explain it: a fat and short key ... on the highest shelf in his closet" (37). Oskar ascribes a special meaning to the key because he interprets it as the single clue left by his deceased father as a part of the last Reconnaissance Expedition. Oskar thinks it might bring him closer to his father or help him learn more about him. Thus, "the ensuing treasure hunt is driven by the boy's need to soothe his painfully lively imagination and quell an insatiable desire to recreate his father's image as accurately as possible" (Uytterschout 186).

The key immediately cracks the door to the maturation process since it provides a reason for Oskar to interact with others. He needs a plan to find the lock it opens and he begins to consult people about it. Firstly, he asks Stan, the doorman at their apartment building whether he "could tell [him] about it" (39). There, he learns that "it's for some kind of lockbox" (39). Depending on the first piece of information, he does "some research on the Internet about the locks of New York" (40), but he realizes they are far too numerous and that "[he] need[s] a better plan" (41). A woman in an art supply store directs his attention to the possibility that "Black is someone's name" (46). She also says that the initial letter is capitalized so it could be a last name. He does some more research in the evening of the day and finds

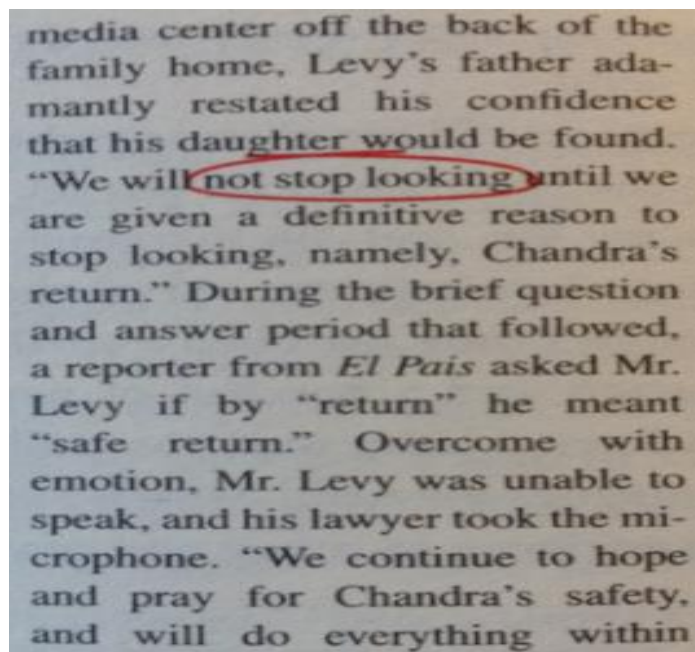
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Saltanovich remains brokenhearted because of his separation from his father. The magic Swan-Bird in an attempt to soothe his pain transforms Tsar's son who is not aware that his father is still alive into an insect to let him fly away for a visit to his father.

“472 people with the name Black in New York. There [are] 216 different addresses, because some of the Blacks live together” (51). He decides to undertake a journey in pursuit of someone or something that may inform him about the lock, and not to mention, about his father. He predicts that “in a year and a half [he] would know everything” (51). Definitely what Thomas Schell taught Oskar has its marks on such a courageous decision. Prior to his death, he designs Reconnaissance Expeditions so Oskar “[has] to talk to people” (8). He “[goes] up to people and ask[s] if they know anything that [he] should know.” Oskar describes how he is challenged by the games as an initial part of his narrative and it draws certain parallels to the last Reconnaissance Expedition he plays while tracing the lock:

I looked for clues around the reservoir. I read every poster on every lamppost and tree. I inspected the descriptions of the animals at the zoo. I even made kite-fliers reel in their kites so I could examine them, although I knew it was improbable. But that’s how tricky Dad could be. There was nothing, which would have been unfortunate, unless nothing was a clue. Was nothing a clue?  
(8)

As a part of those memories, he thinks about one of their challenging experiences and recalls the part Thomas Schell circles in an article about a lost girl (9):



media center off the back of the family home, Levy's father adamantly restated his confidence that his daughter would be found. "We will not stop looking until we are given a definitive reason to stop looking, namely, Chandra's return." During the brief question and answer period that followed, a reporter from *El Pais* asked Mr. Levy if by "return" he meant "safe return." Overcome with emotion, Mr. Levy was unable to speak, and his lawyer took the microphone. "We continue to hope and pray for Chandra's safety, and will do everything within

He believes that “it wasn’t a mistake! It was a message to [him]” (10). Oskar considers his father and sets off on foot<sup>39</sup> with his tambourine both to soothe his mind by engaging himself with a task apropos his memories of Thomas Schell and to learn more about him because he “desperately clings to his memory of his father and does his best to remember every tiny detail about him” (Uytterschout and Versluys 232). In so doing, Oskar verifies Buckley’s thesis stating that “the defection of the father becomes accordingly the principal motive force in the assertion of youth’s independence” (19). In Oskar’s case, the yearning for a more coherent image of the father paves the same way. As a nine-year-old child, he dares to challenge the dangers the streets expose, and departs on his own without the company of an adult to meet new people in the hope of adding one more detail to the image of his deceased father by means of any information gathered from others. In an attempt to describe his feelings, he states: “Every time I left our apartment to go searching for the lock, I became a little lighter, because I was getting closer to Dad.” (52). He himself accepts that rather than the lock itself, the state of being on the road after the memories of his father concerns him. The key functions just as a device serving the goal of struggling: “Even if it was relatively insignificant, it was something, and I needed to do something, like sharks, who die if they don’t swim, which I know about” (87). His expressions demonstrate that “on a symbolic level Oskar’s quest for the lock to which he has the fitting key is a tentative step towards ‘unlocking’ his trauma” (Uytterschout and Versluys 230).

The journey solidifies the hero’s connection with his father but it is perfectly clear that it at first harms Oskar’s relationship with his mother. The protagonist laments: “I also became a little heavier, because I was getting farther from Mom” (52). Firstly, the honest character having never lied before begins to concoct excuses in order not to attend school for saving time to investigate the mystery of the key: “I told Mom that I couldn’t go to school, because I was too sick. It was the first lie that I had to tell” (38). The next morning he uses the same excuse: “I couldn’t go to

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<sup>39</sup> He cannot use the subway as it reminds him about his father.

school again. ... The same thing that's always wrong" (42). The initial naiveté of the protagonist is gradually disappearing, and that loss is required in the *bildungsprozess*, for "only birth can conquer death – the birth, not of the old thing again, but of something new" (Campbell 15). More precisely, so as to give birth to a mature personality, the character sacrifices his innocence. Buckley, as an influential critic, identifies the corruption of the naïve character as a prerequisite step for the *bildung* hero. In that sense, Oskar takes a further step when he types a fake letter in his mother's name to cancel French lessons on Sundays:

Cher Marcel,  
 Allo. I am Oskar's mom. I have thought about it a lot, and I have decided that it isn't obvious why Oskar should go to French lessons, so he will no longer be going to go to see you on Sundays like he used to. I want to thank you very much for everything you have taught Oskar, particularly the conditional tense, which is weird. Obviously, there's no need to call me when Oskar doesn't come to his lessons, because I already know, because this was my decision. Also, I will keep sending you checks, because you are a nice guy.  
 Votre amie dévouée,  
 Mademoiselle Schell (51)

The motive behind his decision constitutes another core element of the *bildungsroman*. He asks the teacher to dismiss the classes to allocate more time to the journey he intends to go on. That is, he prioritizes learning through direct experience and constant experimentation over the theory. As Bakhtin argues, the concept of school in any *bildungsroman* lies beyond the four walls. The world itself stands for the school and any new experiences or characters play their own roles in the educational process of the hero. In his journey, Oskar replaces the instruction of the French teacher with the potential information he can get from people with the last name of Black, and exchanges the language classes with various experiments with life. His preference for the informal education fits the characteristics of a *bildung* hero.

The protagonist's troubled relationship with his mother also manifests itself in his childish notion that his mother does not care for the death of his father, as she often spends her time with Ron to whom Oskar assumes that her mother is

emotionally attached: “I couldn’t explain to her that I missed him more, more than she or anyone else missed him” (71). He explicitly blames her: “It’s just that you don’t act like you miss him very much” (171). He considers her mother’s laughing - a strategy she implements to overcome grief- or her not externalizing sorrow as a sign of her indifference to loss. The following dialogue between the two bespeaks the lingering problems in the mother-son relationship and shows how immature Oskar’s view is:

She said, “I cry a lot, too, you know.” “I don’t see you cry a lot.” “Maybe that’s because I don’t want you to see me cry a lot.” “Why not?” “Because that isn’t fair to either of us.” “Yes it is.” “I want us to move on.” “How much do you cry?” “How much?” “A spoonful? A cup? A bathtub? If you added it up.” “It doesn’t work like that.” “Like what?”

She said, “I’m trying to find ways to be happy. Laughing makes me happy.” I said, “I’m not trying to find ways to be happy, and I won’t.” She said, “Well, you should.” “Why?” “Because Dad would want you to be happy.” Dad would want me to remember him.” (171)

It is obvious that Oskar is not aware of the necessity of letting life go on. From his self-absorbed and childish perspective, Oskar puts himself and his loss at the center. He seems to be blind to the sufferings of even those who are the most beloved to him. Instead of trying to sympathize with his mother or unite with her, he prefers to be haunted by memories. Under the influence of post-trauma, he goes too far and spits out: “If I could have chosen, I would have chosen you!” (171) Oskar wishes that it were his mother rather than Thomas Schell who was killed in the attacks. The same pessimistic and peevish perception comes into prominence in his dialogue with the therapist, Dr. Fein. The question of the therapist whether “any good can come from [his] father’s death” inflames Oskar: “No! Of course not, you fucking asshole!” (203) shouts the protagonist as a soliloquy. Oskar proclaims, “you should wear heavy boots when your dad dies, and if you aren’t wearing heavy boots, then you need help” (200). The quoted part of the dialogue between Dr. Fein and Oskar comes up again towards the end of his journey as the distance he goes in heavy boots leads to some possible positive consequences of trauma, such as new ways of thinking and perceiving the world.

Voytilla equates the physical journey of the hero with a journey to the depth of the self. For Oskar, it is not only to the depth of the self but also of the culture that also perseveres in its attempt to survive in the aftermath of the trauma of 9/11. Thus, Oskar's journey is the crucial step towards his individuation as a *bildung* hero, for it "has a therapeutic effect on him as he starts working through his trauma by walking around the city and running into different people and places that have also been affected by experiences of the same nature" (Aránguiz 1). He communicates with numerous people from different backgrounds, shares his memories that he could not put across in a familiar environment, witnesses much worse cases proving him that he is not alone, and enlarges his repertoire of experiences. Hence, as Smith touches on, trauma offers him "opportunities for new ways of seeing and new ways of thinking" (qtd. in Contos 54). For instance, he learns from Mr. Black, a weird-looking old man he meets in his quest, that "so many people enter and leave [our] life! Hundreds and thousands of people! [We] have to keep the door open so they can come in! But it also means [we] have to let them go!" (153). It awakens Oskar to the fact that a large amount of knowledge one has is comprised of the information he gathers through constant interactions with others. It becomes even more significant within the framework of the *bildungsroman* since the hero's interaction with other people is an important source of knowledge for him. In the end, "[his] life story [becomes] the story of everyone [he's] ever met" (130).

"Oskar can be seen as a synecdoche of the city" (2) indicates Aránguiz because just as Oskar, all the people he interacts with in his quest are either directly or indirectly traumatized by violence, so they themselves are in need of consolation and healing. The city itself undergoes a *bildungsprozess* just like Oskar since it reconstructs itself through the morals it draws from the disaster. In that sense, the people he meets play a paradoxical role in his developmental stages. They facilitate the healing process as they are able to sympathize with Oskar in the interest of the common memories and listen to him attentively, hence "the quest-

journey present[s] various didactic stages enabling Oskar to cope with traumatic loss and to mature in the process” (Saal 457). On the other hand, the encounters in the journey deteriorate the process as they drag him out of the way since each encounter introduces him to a new grievous story that renders a smooth closure impossible.<sup>40</sup> Given the scope of the study, it is not possible to mention every visit Oskar makes. However, some of them need a closer treatment for a better understanding of his *bildung*.

The most prominent “Black,” Oskar meets is one-hundred-three-year-old Mr. Black who has witnessed every decade of the twentieth century and worked for a long period of time as a war correspondent. The numerous souvenirs the old man has collected throughout his travels reflect the canvas of his experiences, and they intrigue Oskar. They represent the tie between the past and the present, or they might be seen as “his mechanism of coping with loss” (Aránguiz 13). Oskar hears Mr. Black’s lamentable story about his wife. Owing to his duty as a war correspondent, he had to be away from his wife and now he is “unable to live in the present” and “equally unable to let go of the past” (Uytterschout and Versluys 221). That is, akin to Oskar’s life, the center is also occupied by loss in Mr. Black’s story. Although they share a similar past, Mr. Black does not know anything about the lock or Oskar’s father. He has numerous cards identifying people who have a place in his life but does not have one for Thomas Schell. Oskar complains, “why would you have one for him [Mohammed Atta] and not one for my dad? ... My dad was good. Mohammed Atta was evil. ... My dad deserves to be in there” (159). Still, he helps Oskar in his quest; and as distinct from other members of the “Black” story, the old man functions as a mentor to the *bildung* hero throughout his initial visits. Oskar as a novice consults his vast repertoire of knowledge upon an ambiguity, and he points the right direction.

In a visit to Agnes Black’s apartment, the two encounter Feliz, a woman in a wheelchair who cannot speak English. They learn from Feliz that Agnes was

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<sup>40</sup> See Aránguiz (2) for a detailed analysis of the issue.



working as a waitress at the Windows on the World<sup>41</sup> and died on September 11 like Thomas Schell. Although the result is disappointing for Oskar, it serves as an experience that brings him closer to the brink of a new perception. Ruth Black, as another person on the same track, lives on the observation deck of the Empire State Building. Not surprisingly, Ruth cannot clarify anything concerning Thomas Schell but she features as another similar example that is added up to the repertoire of people with their distressing stories. She has begun to live there following her husband's death because she "was looking for his light" (252). She tells, "I knew it was there, I just couldn't see it. ... I couldn't bear to go home. ... Because I knew he wouldn't be there" (252). Lastly; William Black, Abby Black's husband to whom Oskar pays one of his initial visits but leaves empty-handed, uncovers the uncertainties keeping the *bildung* hero's mind busy for months. When Oskar shows the key to him, he learns that "[he's] spent two years trying to find this key" (295). Oskar poses "the most important question of [his] life. 'What does it open?'" The answer is not different from the one he gets from the first-person he asks, "a safe-deposit box." But the quest ends in disappointment for Oskar. He finds out that his father bought the vase in the estate sale where William Black sold off his father's possessions. "The most amazing letter" (296) addressed by his father to William Black directs him to the safe deposit box, and he begins to search for it. The journey is a success for William Black since he obtains what he has been looking for to satisfy his curiosity but what Oskar obtains after a long quest is a very limited amount of information about some tiny details such as the color of his suit, his thick glasses, and the fact that his father bought the vase for Oskar's mother on their anniversary. Feeling disillusioned, he remarks: "I wished he could remember even more details" (298), then he laments, "I wish I hadn't found it" (302) because he is afraid of losing his *raison d'être*.<sup>42</sup>

Notwithstanding Oskar's final disappointment, his quest is a roaring success. Firstly, he breaks his "shell" since he has encountered numerous people and

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<sup>41</sup> A restaurant at the top floors of the World Trade Center.

<sup>42</sup> A French expression Oskar knows. It can be translated as "reason for existence."

gained a wide variety of second-hand experiences while listening to the stories of others. He is convinced that his “trauma echoes theirs and, at last to some extent, embodies New York’s wound” (Aránguiz 2). In this way, he throws off his self-absorbed perception because he has himself witnessed that he is not solitary in his battle with loss or trauma.<sup>43</sup> When he visits the cemetery, he “[thinks] about everything underground, like worms, and roots, and clay, and buried treasure” (319). For a boy who is formerly concerned only with his father’s death, being able to think even about worms is surely a sign of healing.

In addition, he makes peace with the memories of his deceased father, and it is manifest in his manners. Previously, when someone likened Oskar to his father, he felt disturbed and reacted. But now he himself says, “I shrugged my shoulders, just like Dad used to” (302). It implies that he does not try to repress his memories anymore. Moreover, he begins to conquer his fears and in his last visit to “the Blacks” for the first time uses the subway that is among the things which frightened him after the 9/11 attacks. Along with the subway, he also makes peace with every other object that is related to his memories of Thomas Schell:

“Maybe I could bury things I’m ashamed of,” I suggested, and in my head I was thinking of the old telephone, and the sheet of stamps of Great American Inventors that I got mad at Grandma about, and the script of *Hamlet*, and the letters I had received from strangers, and the stupid card I’d made for myself, and my tambourine, and the unfinished scarf. But that didn’t make any sense either, because the renter reminded me that just because you bury something, you don’t really bury it. (322)

It is obvious here that he faces with the truth instead of repressing the memories by burying the remniscences of the disaster and his father’s loss. He reconciles with his father’s death. He says to the renter that “it’s the truth, and Dad loved the truth. ... that he’s dead” (321). He once more mends his relationship with his father, but this time unlike the former one, he does not hurt his mother anymore. In other words, “once Oskar overcomes his unvented feelings, he is then able to

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<sup>43</sup> “As Oskar chronicles his journey only a year after the death of his father in the 9/11 tragedy, it is not surprising that Oskar is self-consumed in his desolation. Yet he begins to realize how omnipresent grief is” (Contos 61).

reach out and ease his mother's suffering due to estrangement" (Contos 62). He learns that Ron to whom his mother stays close is devoid of a proper family life since he lost his wife and daughter in a car accident. He is surprised when his mother discloses that they have met one another in a support group for the survivors of family tragedies. Owing to this new intimacy he is now able to feel, he makes up his mind to tell about the messages on the answering machine to his mother but he learns that "dad called [her] from the building that day" (324). He becomes aware of his own ignorance because the person he is looking for so long to learn more about his father's death is actually so close to him. Oskar, as the last product of his imagination in the novel, resurrects his father and soothes his soul with his magical presence. He finds the pictures of the falling<sup>44</sup> in his book, *Stuff That Happened to Me*. For a moment, he questions whether the falling man could be his father but then stops caring about the man's identity -it is a prominent sign of development-, he reverses the order of the pictures of the falling man, "so the last one [is] the first, and the first [is] last" (325). Codde notes that "by reversing the order of this flipbook, he manages to make the victim soar upward, back to safety, undoing what was in reality a certain death" (682). Oskar's fantastic design is completed with bliss: "He would have told me the story of the Sixth Borough, from the voice in the voice in the can at the end to the beginning, from "I love you" to "Once upon a time..." We would have been safe" (326). In the photograph, the man seems to be "floating up through the sky" (325). The photograph originally represents the victimization of the people having died on September 11 but here the symbolic man is not approaching death as in the original but rather he has been saved from a disastrous end. It is definitely a product of his childish imagination and a successful way of coping with trauma. Similar to the fantastic inventions, it subverts the reality to soothe Oskar's psyche.

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<sup>44</sup> "The Fallig Man" is an iconic photograph of a man who was falling from the North Tower of the World Trade Center during the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Trapped on the top floors of the skyscraper, many people did not have any other options but to jump to their own death. The identity of the man in the photograph is unknown so he represents anyone sharing the same fate. It was taken by Richard Drew.



**Source:** <[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/\\_hg2h6munWkQ/RqWAgcqetDI/AAAAAAAAAJQ/fmpK-2sOfE0/s320/JSF\\_flip.jpg](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_hg2h6munWkQ/RqWAgcqetDI/AAAAAAAAAJQ/fmpK-2sOfE0/s320/JSF_flip.jpg)>. 10 May 2014.

Though Oskar imagines the man in the photograph as Thomas Schell,<sup>45</sup> within the context of the *bildungsroman* he is Oskar himself. He has recovered from melancholia, and he is now able to work through loss as expected from a person with a healthy psyche. Then, “Oskar develops from having ‘heavy boots’ to still having ‘heavy boots’ but being able to engage and identify with those around him” (Contos 62).

After all, Oskar’s personal narrative is rendered into a narrative of community that perceives the self as an integrated part of the society. He sets off to solve the mystery of the key and contact many others sharing a similar fate with him. In the journey, “he comes to understand that he is not the only one suffering from loss” (Contos 59). Oskar can understand his own story “only in relation to other paths/stories which might interfere in his ... narrative” (Aránguiz 4). Through an approximation of Oskar’s story to the stories of many others, Foer “subscribes ‘ethically and structurally’ to a cosmopolitan memory” (Saal 459). Foer does not confine the community to New York but he also incorporates people from different descents.<sup>46</sup> The collective memory of the 9/11 terrorist attacks is interwoven with the trauma of the Bombing of Dresden through the epistolary narrative of Oskar’s

<sup>45</sup> The man is not falling but floating up through the sky, so symbolically Thomas Schell has been saved from the disaster, and in that way, is together with Oskar again.

<sup>46</sup> Primarily Germans and Japanese people through the grandparents’ memories of the Bombing of Dresden, and through the interview about the Bombing of Hiroshima.

grandparents. In addition, it deals with the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima through an interview Oskar shares with his classmates as a part of his presentation. While the novel does not even mention the name of the disaster of 9/11 except for analogies and euphemistic naming -the worst day-, it gives a quite comprehensive account of the other two disasters, particularly the one in Dresden, and their traumatizing impacts on the survivors. They are also tied up to the structure of the *bildungsroman*, and that's why they are worth elaboration.

Oskar's grandfather is portrayed through his unsent letters addressed to his unborn child as a war-survivor suffering from severe pain throughout the period of his life after the trauma. He falls in love with Anna, and at the time when Anna extends the news that she is pregnant, bombs begin to fall on Dresden and disrupt the lives of all the inhabitants except for Oskar's grandmother. Due to the traumatizing effects of the bombing, he has lost his ability to speak and to engage in an emotional relationship with anyone. Other than the trauma itself, the grandfather's sense of guilt also plays a crucial role in his present disability. He accuses himself of punching a hole into Anna's life and continues to live after her death. Furthermore, he leaves his son behind since he is "afraid of losing him" (322). In the following extract from a letter embedded in the novel, he narrates the turning point in his life (210):

"Everyone says so." "Everyone has always been wrong." "It will be over, and life will go back to how it was." She said, "Don't be a child." "Don't turn away from me." She wouldn't look at me. I asked, "What's happened?" I'd never seen her cry before. I told her, "Don't cry." She said, "Don't touch me." I asked, "What is it?" She said, "Will you please shut up!" We sat on her bed in silence. The silence pressed down on us like a hand. I said, "Whatever it is—" She said, "I'm pregnant." I can't write what we said to each other then. Before I left, she said, "Please be overjoyed." I told her I was, of course I was, I kissed her, I kissed her stomach, that was the last time I ever saw her. At 9:30 that night, the air-raid sirens sounded, everyone went to the shelters, but no one hurried, we were late to the alarms, we assumed they were false, why would anyone want to bomb Dresden? The families on our street turned off the lights in their houses and filed into the shelter. I waited on the steps. I was thinking of Anna. It was silent and still and I couldn't see my own

Both the grandfather and the grandmother strive to live under the effects of their memories similar to Oskar. Their roads cross each other's and due to their common past, they decide to marry. They develop many strategies but for most of the time these strategies serve the purpose of repressing their memories rather than reconciliation: "she never looks over [his] shoulder when [he is] writing, ... [they] never listen to sad music, [he] never lights candles when she is in the room" (108). The grandfather says "your mother and I never talk about the past, that's the rule" (108). Akin to those, they have many other rules. The grandpa states that "sometimes he cannot remember what is a rule and what isn't" (108). They are determined to keep themselves away from the past. "He "[tries] not to remember the life that [he] didn't want to lose, but lost" (107). They create "nothing" and "something" places in their home. In "nothing places," they ignore each other and one's complete privacy is assured. Uytterschout and Versluys assert, "[their] inability to live in the present is represented by their creation of Nothing and Something Places in their apartment" (221). In time, they realize that the number of "nothing places" outweighs the number of "something places." It is obvious that they cannot properly cope with the memories of the past. It becomes apparent in the grandfather's expressions:

Does it break my heart, of course, every moment of every day, into more pieces than my heart was made of, I never thought of myself as quiet, much less silent, I never thought about things at all, everything changed, the distance that wedged itself between me and my happiness wasn't the world, it wasn't the bombs and burning buildings, it was me, my thinking, the cancer of never letting go, is ignorance bliss, I don't know, but it's so painful to think, and tell me, what did thinking ever do for me, to what great place did thinking ever bring me? I think and think and think, I've thought myself out of happiness one million times, but never once into it. 'I' was the last word I was able to speak aloud, which is a terrible thing, but there it is, I would walk around the neighborhood saying, 'I I I' (17)

What drags the old man into such a psychological turmoil is not the disaster itself but rather his inability to let it go. The grandfather's traumatized state echoes Oskar's case. Just like his grandfather, Oskar at first could not work through his grief. What haunts him is not death itself but rather the memories or his sense of

guilt that stems from his not being able to pick up the receiver when Thomas Schell calls on September 11. It demonstrates that “trauma is passed down through families” (Langdon 1) and “the failures of his Grandma especially his Grandpa to cope with their ordeals is a foil to Oskar’s own more successfully completed struggle” (Versluys 82). As Saal says, “the heteroglottic structure of the novel invites us to compare and contrast Oskar’s experience with that of his grandparents” (470). Oskar’s success in his quest is better appreciated through the contrast between the two stories. Oskar overcomes the post-traumatic syndrome by means of his inventions that are the products of a vivid imagination and by-products of trauma, the journey he undertakes, reflective thinking skills, and the experiences he collects. On the other hand, the grandparents cannot get out of the physical boundaries and get lost in their own “loss.” While the biologically mature characters cannot psychologically “mature,” the biologically immature character can psychologically and spiritually “mature.” It confirms the thesis of the *bildungsroman*; coming-of-age is not defined by age but by mental or emotional advancement.

Through its presentations of disasters in different locations -New York, Dresden, Hiroshima-, “the novel blurs the lines between ‘us’ and ‘them’.” It explores “trauma inflicted by us not on us” (Mullins 299). It is clear that the victim of a disaster functions as the perpetrator of another: “Jews are destroyed by Germans, who are bombed by Americans, who are bombed by Muslims, who are bombed by Americans and Germans, and so forth” (Saal 469). The interview Oskar uses in his presentation announces the unifying message of the novel: “That is what death is like. It doesn’t matter what uniforms the soldiers are wearing. It doesn’t matter how good the weapons are. I thought if everyone could see what I saw, we would never have war anymore” (189). It instructs the reader about the devastating nature of violence through the lens of a nine-year-old protagonist who is away from the contamination of the world. It also answers the question Dr. Fein asks Oskar, if anything positive may spring from negativity, and provides the answer in Oskar’s

characterization. The hero-reader relationship is a feature of the *bildungsroman*, and in Foer's piece it stays in the forefront from the beginning to the end.

In conclusion, Foer's *Extremely Loud&Incredibly Close* establishes a tie between history and fantasy as three different historical events, namely the 9/11, the Bombing of Dresden, and Hiroshima are colored by the childish psyche of the nine-year-old genius. Thus, it invites the reader to throw off the culturally-biased vision and approach the issues on the basis of humanity. Proving the accuracy of Kennedy's argument that states "language distances us from reality" (qtd. in Langdon 6), Foer constructs the narrative on the visuals, and in this way, introduces another novelty into the *bildungsroman*. Bringing in such novelties and masterfully blending them with the traditional features, Foer's novel revivifies the genre of the *bildungsroman*.



## CONCLUSION

*Bildungsroman*, a genre primarily concerned with the process of the development of a youth, was born in Germany in the eighteenth century. Since its emergence, it has undertaken a long journey, in which it has been universalized and exemplified by numerous authors with different affiliations. Each piece recapitulates the traditional qualities while blending them with new ones, thus the definition and distinctive features of the genre have always been subject to discussion. The present thesis, through an analysis of three prominent contemporary examples from American literature -Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* (2002), Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* (2002), and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud&Incredibly Close* (2005)-, proposes a view of the deeply-rooted genre through the lens of the twenty-first century. Thus, it examines both the representation of the conventions within the contemporary context and the way they are manipulated or reconstructed by three influential authors, namely Sue Monk Kidd, Alice Sebold, and Jonathan Safran Foer.

The novels chosen for the study deserve attention primarily for their representative qualities of the *bildungsroman*. All the characters are initially portrayed as immature, naïve, and innocent but having a burning desire to learn and a potential for development due to their sensibility, imagination, and intelligence. They are all aware that home cannot offer much for cultivation, hence they undertake a journey which provides them with a detached view of their environment. Rather than formal schooling, they opt for learning through experience, so the concept of a school-without-walls is apparent in their individuation process. A loss of either physical or emotional kind is at the center of their lives, which torments the protagonists and drags them into turmoil. But they succeed in utilizing their experiences and encounters as effective sources of knowledge; hence, they all function as catalysts in their formation. In that sense, all the other characters and events are assessed in terms of their relation to the protagonist. In one way or another, all of the three protagonists have a troubled relationship with their

parents. In their journey, they are accompanied by a mentor who guides the characters and helps them in the moments of ambiguity and confusion. Furthermore, due to emotional burnout caused by the absence of a parent, mentors also serve as surrogate parents. Towards the end of their journey, all three protagonists mature and acquire a fresh philosophy of life that equips them with strategies to deal with prevailing difficulties. Besides, they communicate with the reader and instruct them in the art of living.

Foer says, “the origin of a story is always absence.” All of the three novels legitimize Foer’s argument as the protagonists’ *bildungsprozess* is derived from loss. In *Bees*, the fourteen-year-old protagonist is initially portrayed as an immature character without a philosophy of life that may soothe her in a life without maternal care. Her uneasiness drives her to embark on a journey in pursuit of a more coherent image of her mother. Likewise, in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the nine-year-old *bildung* hero is tormented by the memories of his deceased father. His immature character is manifested in his inability to acknowledge loss and sustain a life without Thomas Schell’s presence. Similar to Lily, Oskar is looking for details that may clarify Thomas Schell’s image, therefore with the key he finds among the possessions of his father in hand, he sets on a journey through the five boroughs of New York. The key in Oskar’s story is substituted for a picture of her mother in Lily’s, which bears the inscription, “Tiburon, SC” on its back specifying her destination in her journey. Both are seeking people that may inform them about their deceased parents. Susie, in *Bones*, is suffering from her separation from her parents as well. However, in her story, the one who leaves the world behind is not a parent but herself. She is forced to be separated from her parents as a consequence of Mr. Harvey’s crime, and now she cannot proceed to heaven but remains in purgatory as she observes her parents with a desire to be together with them once again. In terms of their objectives, the journeys taken by all of the protagonists result in failure; however, they are all reborn with a new philosophy that allows them to acknowledge loss

and a life without the physical presence of the parents. Lily, in her new environment finds peace and fills the emptiness in her heart with the help of the surrogate mothers she has. She learns to use her spiritual hole to produce honey, and finally she becomes aware of her strength. Similarly, Oskar accepts the truth and promises to get well. Through his imagination, he reverses the timeline of events, and resurrects his father in his world of fantasy and finds solace. Susie also becomes aware of the thick line between the world of dead and living people. She also discovers the comfortable life that is offered to her in her wide heaven. As a result, the maturation process that all the protagonists go through conforms with the structure of the classical *bildungsroman*.

As another element of the *bildungsroman*, the maturation stories of all the characters invite the reader to rethink about their perception of the world, human relations, and experiences. Lily in *Bees* embodies the impact of faith-healing. Her way of maturation underlines the importance of discovering one's own resources for solace. Susie in *Bones* manifests how influential one's perception is for an appreciation of life. Oskar does not only represent the transformative power of imagination but also offers an unbiased view of the disasters. The reader accompanies the protagonists in their individuation process and evolves through the lessons they derive from the second-hand experiences.

Notwithstanding the parallels, the three pieces also significantly diverge from some of the conventions of *bildungsroman*. The most notable challenge against the traditional structure is obviously posed by Sebald's *The Lovely Bones* through its posthumous *bildung* heroine. The individuation process goes into reverse in *Bones* as the central character's development is initiated by her murder. The end is a new beginning for Susie. It proves that development is not confined to worldly presence. The death of the heroine is rendered into an opportunity to observe the operation of the mortal world, human beings, and daily life through an alienated viewpoint. Without being involved in the situations, she acquires a unique viewpoint. The city that is considered to be the source of liberation and corruption

is heaven here. It also demonstrates that disaster or loss may spawn positivity if it is viewed through the right perspective, thus it teaches a lesson to the reader and serves their cultivation. What is more, Sebald reconciles gothic fiction with the novel of development through its involvement of gothic elements into a maturation story. Along with *Bones*, *Bees* reconstructs the maxims of the genre through its presentation of a female as the central character of the *bildungsroman*. Both *Bones* and *Bees* contribute to the female *bildungsroman*, and argue the potential of females for growth. Foer's *Extremely Loud&Incredibly Close* embeds epistolary narrative into the genre as a unique contribution. It also uses visuals to consolidate textual narrative.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, with its strong emphasis on historical phenomena, it approximates the *bildungsroman* that is close more to a fairy tale than reality to the historical fiction. All three novels challenge the classical structure through the first-person narrative they present. They solidify the possibility that one may retrospectively tell his or her own story in an accurate way due to the gap between the time of narration and of action, so third-person narration is not a must for *bildungsroman*.

In the novels analyzed within the scope of the study, the relationship between the society and the individual is also inverted. In the view of the classical *bildungsroman*, the source of confusion is the individual while society establishes order. The hero accepts the social values as his own towards the end. On the contrary, in all three novels, the society is not that innocent and the norms imposed by the community are not negotiable. In *Bees*, racism and social hypocrisy are identified as the diseases prevailing in the society, and they make it impossible for the characters to internalize its values. In a similar way, in *Bones*, the protagonist is molested by a social psychopath. Her only misdeed is feeling pity for the loneliness of a stranger. It teaches the character not to trust others. While the society is so contaminated, the character cannot be expected to come to terms with it. Likewise, *Extremely Loud&Incredibly Close* considers the society as

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<sup>47</sup> See page 84 for discussion of an example.

the perpetrator of massacres. It invites the society to adopt Oskar's view whose childish vision is not blurred by violence rather than impelling the protagonist to be integrated into the society. Thus, the novels reverse the roles.

The narratives in three novels go further than recounting histories since the pieces describe a communal development. *Bees* narrates the story of a group of women unified around the Black Madonna. Lily is described in that community, so her story is turned in a way into the narrative of community. Sebold's work, akin to *Bees*, tells the developmental story of the Salmons. Susie's death wreaks havoc in their lives and just as Susie, they also undergo a process of maturation until they acknowledge their loss. *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* presents the narrative of the broadest community of all the three. Within the economy of the novel, Oskar holds a mirror before New York striving to survive in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Besides, through its blend of the stories of the grandson and grandparents, it involves all the people affected by wars and genocides throughout history. In that sense, they contribute to the thesis that the development of a *bildung* hero or heroine is reciprocal; his independent existence gains meaning only in a social network. That is why, an analysis of these three contemporary examples of the *bildungsroman* also sheds light on contemporary and historical issues.

Each piece, though they all belong to the same genre, expands the borders of *bildungsroman*. *Bees* through its presentation of a white girl as minority, *Bones* through its reverse of the developmental stages, and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* through its visual narrative and epistolary style redefine the overarching features of the genre, paving the way for new experiments in the field of the contemporary American *bildungsroman*.

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