

## Abstract

Despite the term Bildungsroman being associated mainly with novels of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, this genre, or at least its features, persists in contemporary literature. Manfred Engel defines three main assumptions for the definition of the Bildungsroman: one central figure who undergoes development, which usually commences in childhood and ultimately reaches maturity, with *Bildung* referring to the formation of identity.

The Bildungsroman is intertwined with society since it features rebelling or conforming to it. The genre, which originated thanks to the changes in society, developed with societal changes and several variants of the genre appeared. Critics eventually began to recognize female and feminist Bildungsroman that introduced a female protagonist, which was not usual in the earlier novels of the genre. The rise of new female protagonists in the twentieth century was partly caused by the fact that women were able to gradually obtain the same opportunities formerly available exclusively to their male counterparts.

The Bildungsroman in Irish literature follows the general tradition of the genre in many aspects. Nevertheless, there are some recurring features typical of the Irish tradition. One of the frequent themes is leaving as a means of finding one's identity or potential. Unlike in the classical Bildungsroman, the protagonists often do not conform to the societal norm, which brings up a notion of inner exile: they do not physically leave the community, yet they are estranged from it.

Anna Burns's novels *No Bones* and *Milkman* might be considered representatives of this genre. *No Bones* is a more typical example of the Bildungsroman as it follows Amelia Lovett through 25 years of her life, from childhood to her mid-thirties. The question of time span is more complicated in *Milkman* as the events occur during several months, but the protagonist-narrator tells her experience after twenty years. This distance creates a broader scope of the protagonist's life, and it is possible to follow her development.

The common theme of these two novels is a main female character who grows up during a long-term conflict that impacts their development and identity formation. Whilst *No Bones* setting is evident from the beginning – Belfast, mainly Ardoyne, from the late 60s to early 90s, the time and place of *Milkman* are less apparent. In many ways, it resembles the Belfast of the late 70s; however, no place, name, or specific political term is ever mentioned since middle sister coins her own expressions, although analogical to the Troubles.

Apart from the collective trauma caused by the conflict, the thesis also outlines a theme of personal trauma as it is central in both *No Bones* and *Milkman* and how it is connected to forming one's identity. Both protagonists, Amelia and middle sister, had traumatic experiences, and Burns describes their different coping mechanisms. Amelia tries to regain control over her life by starving herself. At first, middle sister attempts to escape from the conflict through her habit of reading-while-walking. After her traumatic experience of being stalked and threatened by Milkman, she cannot address it and only after decades does she find the language to do so, which is then her way of therapy. They both attempt to leave, which is one of the aspects of the Bildungsroman, although in different ways: middle sister through her reading, Amelia leaves for London. However, it turns out they are unable to escape the trauma since both the conflict and the people engaged in it seem to follow them.

Key words: Anna Burns, Bildungsroman, trauma, Northern Ireland, Milkman, No Bones