

FINDING SELF IN LITERARY FICTION

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PREFACE

It is a great pleasure for me to present to you my master thesis, which entails a reception study of the *Bildungsroman*. I think it remains an important task to do empirical research on the role of arts to the people who perceive and consume it. The need for this kind of research implies the main reason for which I have chosen this research topic. This is also my final paper due to which I hope to demonstrate, for a final time, my academic skills. The process, from the first- until the last word of this paper, has been a great experience for me as also the other courses of the master program *Arts, Culture and Society* at the *Erasmus University Rotterdam*. I sincerely enjoyed the intellectual challenges and the inspiring lectures of my professors. I can look back on two inspiring years, that both prepared me and developed my interest for the professional career that is ahead of me. Therefore I would like to thank all my professors and the people who are responsible for the great organization of the department *Arts and Culture Studies*.

Especially, I would like to thank Niels van Poecke for all his involvement as my supervisor. During the whole process of writing my thesis, he helped me to enhance the quality of my work. He repeatedly studied my work (intensively and critically) and provided me clear and helpful feedback to better my work. He did not only introduce to me the several theoretical concepts that were important to this study, but he was also always approachable to discuss the difficulties that I encountered. I experienced his involvement as my supervisor as very motivating and inspiring. I was able to execute research in a relatively complex field of narrative identity (construction), which is also largely his merit. I would also like to thank my second reader, Dr. Pauwke Berkers, for his critical view and helpful feedback with regard to my thesis proposal. Besides that, I used many theories for my thesis that were introduced to me by him during my first year at the *Erasmus University Rotterdam*. Partly because of this, I felt confident in my work on my thesis. At last, I would like to thank all of the international participants who contributed to this research.

For me this thesis represents the completion of my time as a master student of the master study *Arts, Culture and Society* and an interesting introduction to scientific research. I trust that this thesis will clearly present to you the results of this study and I hope that it may appeal to your interest.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of literary fiction and in particular the *Bildungsroman* for narrative identity construction. It emphasizes the consumption of its fans, as one can say that they are the most devoted consumers. The results of in-depth interviews with 10 international respondents demonstrate that the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* by its fans is a form of narrative practices. The consumption of the *Bildungsroman* as a form of narrative practices is based on three integral concepts. The first implies *embodied reading* (a potential subcategory of embodied cultural capital), which refers to potential effects of experiencing literary fiction. The second concept is the *narratable self*, which emphasizes the idea that one cannot narrate the self just individually, but that we also need the other in order to get a full image of who we are and what we can be. The third concept is narrative identity construction, which in this case entails the construction of the self, (partly) based on the subjective experience of fiction. In other words, this study demonstrates that the consumption of fiction has potential effects on narrative identity construction.

Keywords: Bildungsroman, fans, reception, interpretative practice, narrative practice, narrative identity

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the role of literary fiction, particularly the so called *Bildungsroman* for narrative identity construction. Theories on narrative identity emerged from various schools and approaches within the humanities and social sciences, notably pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics and developmental, cognitive and narrative psychology. Influential thinkers of narrative identity (such as Ricoeur and McAdams) emphasize the idea that we are constantly relying on narratives in order to construct our personal identities (De Mul, 2000; McAdams, 2001). This study examines in particular the potential role of fiction as an instrument for narrative identity construction.

With regard to this research, the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* by its fans will be studied on the basis of in-depth interviewing for its potential role for narrative identity construction. The *Bildungsroman* is a novel of transformation, which emphasizes the personal growth of the protagonist from immaturity to a better state of being (Moretti, 2000). It emerged as an exponent of *German Romanticism* centuries ago, but it is still considered to be a popular and universal beloved literary genre today (Minden, 1997; Bauer, McAdams & Pals, 2008).

Previous studies

Previous studies on the concept of narrative identity, also emphasize a vital function for fiction with regard to narrative identity construction (De Mul, 2000; McAdams, 2001). We know that there is fiction involved with a variety of cultural genres that most of us consume. One of those genres is literature. There has been theorized that practices of interpreting literature can contribute to what one may call personal coherence, that is, that literature can generate shifts in thinking and understanding for people and situations and that fiction has an exploratory value to individuals. This all may constitute identity formation (Sumara, 2002; De Mul, 2000). The link between the consumption of literature and the formation of identity can be indicated with the term *embodied reading*, which contains the effects that are previously mentioned (Sumara, 2002). In other words, one can say, that the consumption of literature is a practice of discovering more about who we are and what we can be.

Furthermore, one has to take account of the fact that we have a desire for narration (Cavarero, 2014). This desire is evident, because we do not have a complete image of who we are, without the narratives of ourselves and of others. This is to say that we need the stories of others about ourselves to gain a coherent personal life story, a sense of who we are. For this reason, everyone entrusts to some extent his or her identity on the narration of others

as it also appeals to the question of who we are. (Cavarero, 2014). When the construction of narrative identity is partly caused by the influence of fiction as it appeals to the question of who we are, one can speak of *narrative practice* (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

Previous studies have demonstrated that an important phase of life with regard to the construction of narrative identity is the adolescence and young adulthood. Pre-dominantly, people in this phase of life are engaged in practices of narrative identity construction. The construction of narrative identity, starting in the period of adolescence, emerges as a response to expectations of society and the increasing notion of the need of becoming mature (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Young adults or adolescents are considered to be exploring ideologies available in society in order to shape their values and beliefs. Those ideologies are for instance inherent in the cultural goods they consume. For this reason it has been argued that the cultural context in which a person is embedded, determines how a person gives meaning to his or her life (McAdams, 2001).

Relevance

In line with the previous, this study examines the role of the *Bildungsroman* for the construction of narrative identity. The name of the genre entails the German philosophical term *Bildung* that was introduced within the academic discourse during the eighteenth century. According to contemporary theorists, the term *Bildung* refers to the personal growth of an entire human being (Westbury, Hopmann & Riquarts, 2012). The *Bildungsroman* is, as its name shows, irrefutably related to the concept of *Bildung*. For both phenomena, the term refers to the personal growth of an individual. There are many characteristics of the literary genre that illustrate its relation with *Bildung*. One of those characteristics is that the *Bildungsroman* represents a portrayal of a rather sensitive person during his or her process of personal growth (Jeffers, 2005). The conflict situations that he or she encounters form the necessary stages for the process of *Bildung* (Moretti, 1997).

The *Bildungsroman* usually emphasizes youth and the transformation to adulthood as well as that it considers the period of adolescence to be the most meaningful part of life (Moretti, 2000). This corresponds with theories on narrative identity, stating that the adolescence should be regarded as the phase of life during which people are most actively engaged in activities of identity formation (McAdams, 2001). This emphasizes the potential role of the *Bildungsroman* for the narrative identity construction of especially people that intensively consume it. As stated before, the cultural context in which a person is embedded,

influences how a person gives meaning to his or her life (McAdams, 2002). For that reason, this study focusses on fans as they represent the most intensive consumers (Lewis, 1992). They are the most visible and dedicated audiences and for this reason they can be considered to be experts with regard to this study (Lewis, 1992). It increases the possibility to generate insights in the potential role of the *Bildungsroman* as a form of fiction and an instrument of narrative identity construction.

The social relevance of this study is indicated by the outcomes of previous studies on narrative identity, which indicate that the active construction of a coherent life story, constitutes the experience of *eudaimonic well-being*. The concept of *eudaimonic well-being* refers to a human state of happiness that is entwined with a strong sense of meaning in life. People with a large volume of *eudaimonic well-being*, emphasize the experience of personal growth in their internalized life-stories. Besides that, the consumption of culture is said to increase people's experience of well-being (Bauer, McAdams & Pals, 2008).

It has been stated that fiction functions as an important tool to construct narrative identity with (De Mul, 2000; McAdams, 2001). Previous studies have demonstrated that the coming of age story (that is often used as a synonym for the *Bildungsroman*) is a timeless and universally beloved cultural exponent (McAdams, 2001). People are considered to have great admiration for characters that are reflected by coming of age stories as they are individualists-who experience growth from immaturity to a better self (Bauer, McAdams & Pals, 2008). This explains also the popularity of contemporary writers of *Bildungsromane*, such as Haruki Murakami, Paulo Coelho and Joanne Rowling, who's novels reflect these themes most common to the genre of the *Bildungsroman*. This will become clear in the chapter of the results of this study. It demonstrates that there is a variety of contemporary novels that are (potential) *Bildungsromane*. Moreover, the *Bildungsroman* can be seen as an important vehicle for the construction of a narrative identity for its fans, as the concepts of development, formation and of self-discovery of the young individual represent the central themes of the novels (Minden, 1997).

To summarize, one could say that the adolescent years implicate an important phase in the construction of narrative identity and that the protagonist as a young adult is centralized in the *Bildungsroman*. Furthermore, fiction is considered to be an important tool to constitute a narrative identity, but even though there is theorized about it, not so much empirical research has been executed to enhance the validity of that statement. This study aims to follow up previous studies that indicate a potential role of fiction for the construction of a narrative identity by focusing on the consumption of the *Bildungsroman*. The major

purpose of this study is to examine the potential role of the *Bildungsroman* for the construction of a narrative identity of its fans.

Research question

This study involves posing the following research question: how is the *Bildungsroman* consumed by contemporary fans and how and to what extent is the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* linked to the process of *narrative identity* construction? Therefore, this study relies on qualitative research, more specifically on semi-structured in-depth interviews with contemporary fans of the *Bildungsroman*. As this study explores motives, experiences and identification of people, it is necessary to go into depth about the subject of this study. In the chapter of the research methods, more information will follow on how the necessary data will be generated.

Chapter overview

The contents of the chapters will be briefly discussed in the following sections of this paper.

CHAPTER 1. THE BILDUNGSROMAN

In the first chapter, a distinctive image will be given of the cultural good that is central to this study. Therefore definitions and characteristics of the genre will be discussed. The first chapter also emphasizes the cultural context, the context of *German Romanticism*, during which the *Bildungsroman* was invented. Furthermore, descriptions of a classic (respectively the first recognized *Bildungsroman*) and a more contemporary *Bildungsroman* will be given in order to demonstrate that an evolution took place within the genre. This evolution did not, however, vanish the genre's most distinctive characteristics.

CHAPTER 2. EVOLUTION OF THE VIEW ON THE SELF

After examining the production side in chapter one, the focus turns to the reception side. Chapter two emphasizes the evolution of the academic view on the self (identity) during the twentieth century. This chapter emphasizes a variety of different perceptions with regard to the self that emerged during the twentieth century, such as the views deriving from pragmatism, symbolic interactionism and postmodernism. It demonstrates how the academic view on the self was subject to the changing times and how eventually a postmodern perception on narrative identity was constructed after the self was declared to be death.

CHAPTER 3. RECEPTION AND NARRATIVE IDENTITY

Chapter three implies an in depth discussion of reception theories that are relevant to this study. It demonstrates that these reception theories somehow elaborate on the legacy of pragmatism, symbolic interactionism and a postmodern theory on the self as a construct of interpretative practices. This chapter also emphasizes theory on narrative identity and the idea that the self is narratable by the other. In that sense, it demonstrates that the consumption of fiction can appeal to the question of who we are and who we want to be.

CHAPTER 4. METHODS

After discussing all theories that are considered to be relevant to this study, chapter four is dedicated to discuss the research methods that this study relied on. The reasons will be discussed for which this study relied on qualitative research methods and particularly semi-structured in-depth interviews and an active role of the interviewer. Furthermore it will be explained why these research methods appeal to a valid execution of this research.

CHAPTER 5. RESULTS

In the last chapter the results of the interviews will be discussed. An answer to the research question will be constituted by referring to authentic data (quotes of respondents) and by linking this to the theories that are discussed in the previous questions. After this final chapter, a conclusion and discussion will follow.

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CHAPTER 1. THE BILDUNGSROMAN

In this chapter, a profile of the *Bildungsroman* will be drawn, referring to the context in which it emerged, its characteristics and its evolution until today. This will generate an image of the *Bildungsroman* as a cultural good and a potential social stimuli for its consumers to relate with, especially with regard to its most devoted consumers (fans). In order to understand how the *Bildungsroman* is consumed and evaluated, one must first know the product.

1.1 Definitions, characteristics and structure

The *Bildungsroman* is loosely defined by the Encyclopedia Britanica, which states that it implies a novel of formative education (Nordlén, 2009). Usually, the story is based around a protagonist that is involved in the transitional period from childhood or adolescence into maturity. The obstacles that the protagonist encounters on its way to maturity or to a better self, in other words, form the necessary stages of his development (Moretti, 2000).

Characteristics and structures that give a more coherent and distinctive image of the genre are identified by Buckley (1970). He argues that the *Bildungsroman* is pre-dominantly autobiographical in character. The protagonists of the *Bildungsroman* encounters obstacles during his or her way of becoming mature. On this way, the protagonists experience situations that generate insights, revelations and confrontations with (the hardships of) reality, due to which they feel an increasing responsibility to change conduct. The protagonists are guided by a framework of norms, values and lessons learned during their youth. Those assets of the protagonists determine their behavior in the variety of circumstances they are involved with (Nordlén, 2009).

Usually the protagonists have troubled backgrounds that partly constitute the obstacles they encounter, but the central conflict of the character has a personal and intrinsic nature, which implies that the major problem of the protagonist relies inside him or her. The conflictive situations that have a shaping effect on the protagonists are pre-dominantly emotional and for this reason, in the end of the story, the protagonists need to come to terms with themselves (Nordlén, 2009).

These problems and obstacles that the protagonist encounters, represent stages in the protagonist's development. For this reason, the development is considered to be educational and formative, as is stated previously. The experience of the protagonists functions as an instrument to discover who they are and furthermore the protagonists are moved with regard to that experience, by the aspiration to discover meaning and vocation in life. Those

experiences increase the complexity of meaning they find in life (Nordlén, 2009).

What the novels of the *Bildungsroman* usually have in common is described in two definitions given by two prominent literary dictionaries (Baldick, 2008; Cuddon, 1998). *The Dictionary of Literary Terms* describes it as a kind of novel that follows the development of the protagonist (hero or heroine) from childhood or adolescence to maturity in a struggle for identity (Baldick, 2008). *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* defines the *Bildungsroman* as a term synonymous to *Erzielungsroman* and as an upbringing or education novel. This dictionary also emphasizes the idea of the *Bildungsroman* as a story reflecting the development of a hero or a heroine and as one that describes the process towards maturity through various ups and downs (Cuddon, 1998).

According to Engel, the *Bildungsroman* reflects some general features that distinguishes the literary genre from others. They are also somewhat represented by the previous definitions and the description of a general structure, given by Buckley. She states that the *Bildungsroman* tells the story of a young individual. This protagonist stands in life as a wanderer, searching for related souls in friendship and love. In the meantime he or she is confronted with the hard realities of the world that one encounters while growing up. A transformation of youth to maturity or to a higher plan of being manifests within the plot and the protagonist discovers the self and finds his vocation in life. The conflictive situations he encounters appear to be the necessary stages for his process of *Bildung* and the finding of harmony within him- or herself and the surrounding environment (Engel, 2008). Based on the previous, one can say, that the descriptions and definitions given by several theories, correspond with one another. Altogether, it emphasizes the idea of the *Bildungsroman* as a distinctive literary genre.

1.2 Origins

In order to generate a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of the *Bildungsroman* it is also useful to explore the context in which it emerged. The *Bildungsroman* was invented somewhere between the end of the eighteenth century, when Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795 or 1796) was published and the early nineteenth century, when Karl Morgenstern introduced the term to generate attention for the emergence of a new literary genre as an exponent of German Romanticism (Engel, 2008). After the term's first appearance due to the introduction of Karl Morgenstern, it disappeared again for almost a century (Boes, 2008). At the end of the nineteenth century, the term *Bildung* would become more significant within academic discourse, under the influence of German thinkers such as

Freud, Weber and Simmel (Westbury, Hopmann & Riquarts, 2012). Soon the attention returned to the literary genre of the *Bildungsroman*, due to the work of Dilthey (Boes, 2006).

The first English occurrence of the term emerged in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1910 (Boes, 2006). The name of the genre entails the German philosophical term *Bildung* that was introduced in the academic discourse during the eighteenth century. According to contemporary theorists the term *Bildung* refers to the development of a person with regard to his or her entire being (Westbury, Hopmann & Riquarts, 2012). *Bildung* implies the major theme of the genre (Moretti, 2000).

The term *Bildungsroman* originated in order to coin a new literary genre and to introduce it within academic discourse. It appeared for the first time in 1820, after which it would be forgotten or neglected for almost a century (Boes, 2008). Karl Morgenstern (the inventor) was a German philologist and professor of the University of Dorpat. He recognized a new kind of hero in a protagonist that was representative for a new literary genre. First of all, Morgenstern criticized Wilhelm Meister for his lack of masculinity and therefore his heroic features. He was aware of the fact that the protagonist as a hero of the *Bildungsroman* embodies both masculine and feminine features. For that reason, the protagonist diverged from the traditional image of a hero. This is also one of the traditional characteristics of the *Bildungsroman*; the presence of both masculine and feminine features. The *Bildungsroman* manifests in various ways that these features unite with one another. The presence of the feminine and the masculine dimension is one of the constitutive factors of the novel (Minden, 1997). Furthermore the protagonist differs from the traditional hero because of his youthfulness, whereas the *Bildungsroman* emphasizes youth as the most meaningful part of life (Moretti, 2000).

1.3 German Romanticism and the rise of the Bildungsroman

The *Bildungsroman* emerged as an exponent of early *German Romanticism*, the period known as *Frühromantik* (Mahoney, 2004). German Romanticism or *Frühromantik* flourished as a period within European cultural history between 1797 and 1802 as a reaction on *die Aufklärung*, the German Enlightenment (Breiser, 1996). It is known to have its own philosophy, epistemology and ethics that influenced the period's literature and aesthetics (Breiser, 2003). This can be explained by the period's connection with the emergence of the novel as a distinctive cultural genre.

German Romanticism was at the base of the rise of the novel. According to Giddens (n.d.), the increasing notion and ideal of romantic love at the time of *German Romanticism*,

was entwined with this phenomenon. He states that the content of the novels emerging at that time, reflected romantic life narratives (Giddens, n.d.). One can say that this corresponds with the content of the *Bildungsroman*, which emphasizes the protagonist as a rather sensitive person, searching his or her vocation in life (Jeffers, 2005).

One of the dominant factors with regard to the increasing notion of romantic love can also be linked to the concept of narrative identity (a concept that will be discussed in the next chapters). The concept of narrative identity, namely, partly arrived from the ideas of romantic love (Giddens, n.d.).

Giddens links the idea of the narrative self to the emergence of the romantic perception of love. According to Giddens (n.d.), romantic love brought the idea of narratives into a person's life, because it introduced the sense of a story about two persons getting together and developing a relationship. The romantic love narrative, with its long term orientation, established a common history for two individuals. It made sense of two lives coming together and gave an important role to the individuals' relationship with each other. The rise of this romantic love narrative resulted in the phenomenon that individuals construct coherence of their lives due to narratives, also apart from their love relations. According to this theory, the construction of narrative identity (just as the *Bildungsroman* itself) has its origins at the time of Romanticism. In the next chapter, more theory on narrative identity will follow, but, as the *Bildungsroman* takes an important place in the literary legacy of German Romanticism, it is useful to further describe the context of the movement first (Giddens, n.d.).

The role of the early German Romanticism in relation to the spirit of the age was to nuance both the sovereignty of the sensibility of *Sturm und Drang* and the rationalism of the Enlightenment by emphasizing the equal importance of both. The Romantic commitment appealed to a holistic ideal, which emphasized the opportunity for the right of reason as well as for the right of sensibility. It opposed the sovereignty of the Enlightenment by attempting to replace rationalism with aestheticism in order to set the ultimate standard of truth. It did so by giving feelings embedded in art a higher authority than reason (Beiser, 2003). This demonstrates the importance of the symbolic value of beauty or aesthetics for the Romantic movement.

One of the fundamental concepts of the early German Romanticism was *Bildung*, a term often considered and used as a synonym to education or formation. *Bildung* more specifically than (traditional) education incorporates processes of learning and personal growth in an interdependent manner. *Bildung* or the education of humanity was a major goal

and one of the ultimate virtues of the German romantics. According to their vision *Bildung* played the essential role for the redemption of humanity and therefore it was the highest principle in their hierarchy of values. At the time of early German Romanticism, the French Revolution (1789) took place. As the French Revolution led to much bloodshed and chaos, Romantic thinkers thought that the people needed to be prepared for the ideals of a republic. The French philosophers had taught the people the principles of reason. So, in contrast to the French philosophers of the Enlightenment such as Rousseau and Montaigne, German Romantics aspired to prepare the people for the moral ideals of a republic in terms of (aesthetic) *Bildung* rather than reason. They considered the chaos in France as a lesson to establish the ideal of a republic differently. German Romantics saw the Revolution as a failure of the Enlightenment and as a lesson to be learned. To them, it underlined the importance of *Bildung* (Breiser, 2003).

As it has been argued, the early German Romantics emphasized the superior role of aesthetics and art. Therefore art played an important role for the education of people especially after the French Revolution ending in terror. The German Romantics shared strong beliefs in the value of art for several significant reasons. According to Breiser, as a consequence of that, the vision of the German Romantics on the role of art, has always been charged of naivety. However, he argues that the role of art was not simply assigned to the art's effects on people's moral behaviors. The value of aesthetic education, he explains by referring to Schiller's *Letters on the education of man*. According to Schiller, the function of aesthetics was embedded in its liberating strength, because new vision was needed to challenge the status quo of the time. Schiller indicates the value of art in relation to *Bildung* by raising the question, whether beauty is a fundamental component of human perfection. He states, that if people live up to a standard of human perfection, they will become as works of art themselves. In order to achieve this state of human perfection he argues that people need to unify the form of reason with the content of sensibility (as in arts). This unity he describes as true beauty. To illustrate his idea, he used the metaphor of constructing our characters as a work of art (Beiser, 2003).

Schiller (1794-1795) continues on this kind of philosophy in his work by discussing a viable way to achieve this human state of perfection that he considers similar to art. Therefore he states that a person truly becomes a work of art if all of his or her actions are reflecting grace. A graceful action, he defines to be free of constraints. It reveals rather spontaneity and harmony as a reflection of a person's whole character. The beautiful soul as a piece of art, according to Schiller does not emerge from a choice of acting just sensitive or

reasonable, but from the unity of both. This philosophy gave a sovereign function according to the German Romantics to the role of art (Beiser, 2003).

To conclude, one can say that the German Romantics cherished strong beliefs in the power of aesthetics. They considered it to have a valid function for the manifestation of *Bildung*, which was placed at the top of their hierarchy of values. The influence of *German Romanticism* on the emergence of the *Bildungsroman* is evident, because of its emphasis on *Bildung* and art. Yet, the relation between the ideals of (aesthetic) *Bildung* of *German Romanticism* and the *Bildungsroman* will further be cleared, by examining the *Bildungsroman*.

As mentioned, the genre of the *Bildungsroman* was invented during the early *German Romanticism*, somewhere between the end of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. Both ends of this period (end of eighteenth century and early nineteenth century) are marked by striking events for the emergence of the *Bildungsroman*. The event during the end of the eighteenth century represented the first publishing of the genre's novel. The event during the early nineteenth century implies the introduction of the literary term (*Bildungsroman*) for the genre within academic discourse (Engel, 2008).

1.4 *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*

The first appearance of a *Bildungsroman* dates from the year 1795 or 1796, when Goethe's (1749-1832) novel series *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* was published. The ideal of a perfect balance of the ratio and sensibility, which was so typical for German Romanticism, reflected through the characters of the protagonists of the *Bildungsroman*, starting from the moment that *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* was published. Retrospectively, one can consider more *Bildungsromane* emerging around the same time (at the end of the eighteenth century), such as *Candide* by Voltaire or *Emile, or On Education* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Bloom, 1978). The protagonists of the *Bildungsroman* were sensitive to ethic matters and obtuse towards economic, material or political matters and so the *Bildungsroman* appealed to the ideals of German Romanticism. (Jeffers, 2005). Goethe was one of Germany's most important writers at that time and he would be known as the father of the *Bildungsroman*.

The narratives of his first *Bildungsroman* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*) contain a series of eight books, which can be summarized as followed. The first five books of the series cover the earliest years of the protagonist called Wilhelm Meister, a son coming from a wealthy family in the eighteenth century. The character of Wilhelm Meister has much affinity with the production of theatre and after a problematic love affair with an actress he decides to

join a theatre group. In the first five books of the series, the story is told about the development of his career in theatre and his experiences from youth to maturity. The culmination of the story implicates the stage in which the protagonist participates in a production of *Hamlet*. After his career in theatre, Wilhelm's life takes a new direction that leads him to the open arms of a noble family of which some are members of a secret society, called *the Society of the Tower*. During the final books of the series Wilhelm's involvement with the family increases and he becomes a member of *the Society of the Tower*, that apparently watched over him for a long period of time as they were his helpers and guardians. At the end of the seventh volume, Wilhelm gains access to the sanctuary of the secret society. There he discovers the society's bureaucratic apparatus, storing the scrolls that recorded his life and the lives of the people he encountered (Boes, 2003). The plot ends with the protagonist's engagement to the most beautiful and intellectual daughter of the noble family (Minden, 1997).

What makes the novel a classic example of a *Bildungsroman* is the exclusive focus on Wilhelm's *Bildung* and the external powers that interrupt it. The interruptions are both subordinated in form and content, but the general line of the narrative covers the socialization and self-discovery of the protagonist. Furthermore, an important part of the story is the chapter named *The Confessions of a beautiful soul* as it serves the ultimate purpose of advancing the protagonist's development (Boes, 2003). The emphasis on the virtue of a beautiful soul in the novel appeals to the associations of the *Bildungsroman* with *German Romanticism*, because the beautiful soul is considered to be the highest virtue of human condition (Breiser, 2003). However, even though an identical form of a novel emerged by the publishing of Goethe's novel, the term *Bildungsroman* as a name for the genre it represented only emerged several years later (Engel, 2008).

1.5 Evolution *Bildungsroman*

One can say it is evident that developments took place within the literary field that affected the profile of the *Bildungsroman* over the ages (since the time it emerged in the eighteenth century). Throughout all ages *Bildung* (as a theme as explained before) remained the dominant theme, but in the early twentieth century the novel was strongly influenced by the *Lebensphilosophie* of Dilthey, Nietzsche and Bergson. This kind of philosophy emphasizes that reason is not the right way to understand the complexities of life with all its layers (Engel, 2008). This can be explained by the fact that the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* is characterized as a rather sensitive person that seeks to overcome emotional struggle (Jeffers,

2005) and (Nordlén, 2009). One has to take account of the fact that after all, any cultural good is produced within a particular context and for that reason it remains to some extent (just as any cultural genre or product) a reflection of the time (Rebold Benton & DiYanni, 2012). Since the emergence of the *Bildungsroman* after the publishing of *Wilhelm Meister's apprenticeship*, it has been subject to evolution, due to several factors.

First of all at the reception side, the popularity of the novel inaugurated during the first half of the twentieth century, but mainly on the production side some prominent changes took place. Some important stages in the evolution of the *Bildungsroman* can be marked in terms of different ages or movements during the past centuries. During the nineteenth century all German novels, known as *Bildungsromane* referred back to *Wilhelm Meister's apprenticeship* as their common inspiration. This inter-textual relation of these novels with Goethe's novel resulted in a variety of corresponding themes, characters and plots of novels. Major differences occurred when different streams (Realism and Enlightenment movements) approached the novel differently. This resulted in an unclear definition of the genre, according to Engel (2008). The difficulties that emerged as a result of this, led to a growing discontent with the genre among German theorists and finally to a crucial doubt about the usefulness of the technical term of the *Bildungsroman* as it became more and more ambiguous (Engel, 2008).

At the time that the novel reached its all-time low on the German market and in its literary discourse, it started to get popular on the Anglo-American market. The successful export and globalization of the novel increased its vague definition. The number of potential *Bildungsromane* increased when one applied the term's traditional scope on non-German novels (Engel, 2008). When one takes account of the *Bildungsroman* today, one can see it globalized beyond the borders of the Anglo-American market (see Ranker, n.d. or Goodreads, n.d.). This implicates that the *Bildungsroman* in the twentieth century plausibly reflects different cultures and events of a different nature in order to attract a broader audience. To illustrate this idea, a description will be given of an often highly ranked (see previous websites), bestselling novel and modern *Bildungsroman* of the late twentieth century, namely *Norwegian Wood* by the Japanese author Haruki Murakami.

Norwegian wood is a modern *Bildungsroman* as it tells the story of a protagonist on the verge of maturity. He gets confronted with the hard realities of life by losing his best friend because of suicide, his hurtful love affair with the former girlfriend of this death. Her life is also troubled as she ends up in a mental institution and besides her, he encounters other people that all carry melancholic ballast. After processing his lost and grief, he eventually

finds love and harmony. This story is set against the background of modern Japan (Murakami, 1987).

Based on the previous, one can say that the *Bildungsroman* is still a distinctive genre and that the term also refers to more contemporary novels, such as the one that is previously mentioned. This can be explained by a statement by contemporary theorists, saying that the coming of age story is a universal beloved story as it often implies a reflection of secular life and individualistic characters that are dealing with matters of emancipation (Bauer, McAdams & Pals, 2008). More about this will be discussed in the next chapters.

As it has been stated previously, there is not much empirical knowledge about the role of fiction for the construction of narrative identity. Therefore, this study examines the potential role of the *Bildungsroman*, as a novel of formation, for the construction of narrative identity. This also implies that this study, pre-dominantly focusses on the reception of the *Bildungsroman*. For that reason, reception theories and theories on (narrative) identity will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2. EVOLUTION OF THE VIEW ON THE SELF

As this study focusses on the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* as (partly) a potential form of identity construction, it is worth examining theories that embed the concept of identity formation in the context of interaction with the other. One could say, we do not have a complete image of who we are without the narratives of others. In other words, these narratives of others also appeal to the question of who we are (Cavarero, 2014) Several theories that have a common origin in the sociological stream of pragmatism, state that we need the other and more specifically, the interaction with the other, for the construction of identity. In that sense, the other helps us to construct meanings from the world around us (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). In this chapter, the evolution of the self as a subject to the other will be examined in order to generate insight on the impact of the other on the self.

2.1 Pragmatism

The story about the evolution of the theoretical view on the self (with regard to this study), begins with the pragmatic view that is constructed by pragmatists such as James (1842-1910), Cooley (1864-1929) and Mead (1863-1931). They emphasized the practice of everyday life at the base of constructing the self. Hence, according to them, the self was pre-dominantly cultivated as a result of external impulses (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). In this chapter, the evolution of a theory on the self will be examined, starting with the important theorists of pragmatism that are mentioned previously.

One of the founders of pragmatism was William James. According to James, the self is a complex concept that implies rather something that needs experience before it is established. In other words, it is not something that comes complete with birth, but it needs to be constructed. He emphasized the idea that we can think of ourselves and that we become for that reason objects to ourselves due to which we are able to evolve a personal identity. This also happens when we talk about ourselves to others as it makes us reflect on who we are. He described the self and its referential facets (I, me, mine, et cetera) to be elements of communication due to which we generate a sense of self-awareness. One can say that James argued that the self cannot exist separate from communication or in other words, without the other (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

In line with James, Cooley introduced the concept of the looking glass self, which implies that the self is rooted in self-feeling, but that it does operate in the imagination, where it is actively reflecting on the experiences of real- and imagined others (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). The term of the *Looking glass self* is basically a metaphor for the idea that you see

yourself reflected in the behavior of the other. The major argument of this theory is that everyone needs the other in order to define the self. That is, the other is considered to be fundamentally needed to get a sense of the self. Similar to how we learn the meanings of objects in our environment, we learn about who we are due to the interaction with others. According to Cooley, we get information about who we are based on our ideas of what other people think about us (Cooley, 1902).

In addition, Mead argues that there is an important role for interaction with regard to the formation of the self. According to Mead (1934), the inner life and the external communication are both significant forms of communication. This underlines the idea that the self is both socially constructed as a result of what Mead calls an inner conversation with the self. Mead embedded the concept of the self within the concept of communicative action. According to Mead the sense of self emerges from communication as it demands the individual to reflect on the self and the self as a coherent unity thus derives from the patterns of experience with others (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

In line with Cooley, Cavarero (a contemporary theorist) argues that every person is also narratable by the other and that everyone is to some extent depending upon the other for the narration of our life-stories. From the date of birth, the self is exposed to an interactive world and because of this constant exhibition of the self, derives the desire to narrate a life-story to tell to another (Cavarero, 2014). If one considers, the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* of fans as a possible way of narrative identity construction, then the interaction with others might play an important role for fans in their socialization with the genre. In the light of this, interacting about novels might be an additional activity of defining meaning from the novels, also because reading is to some extent considered to be an act of reflection (Sumara, 2002). However, this is a modern view on the self, that will be further discussed later.

2.2 *Symbolic interactionism*

Based on the early works of pragmatists like James, Cooley and Mead about the self as a *social structure* (Mead, 1934), the theory of symbolic interactionism emerged during the first half of the twentieth century. It established the concept of identity within the field of sociology. The central idea of symbolic interactionism is that individuals construct attitudes and behavior, based on the meanings they construct from the interaction with others. The theory of symbolic interactionism in that sense, appeals to the individual's agency, which makes them able not only to be influenced, but also to be instrumental in producing culture

and society, because people shape behavior based on meanings they get from what they encounter. This is inherent in social participation and the social participation of people, constitutes culture (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

According to the Chicago school (one of the two streams within symbolic interactionism), people act towards things, based on the meanings that they have for them. This meaning that is derived from those things is influenced by the social interaction that we have with others, with regard to the objects or subjects we encounter. Those meanings are however modified by an interpretive practice of the individual in the process of dealing with whatever he encounters. This explains that symbolic interactionism describes how we determine and revise what is meaningful to us. Those meanings and what we value also define who we are (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). In other words, the meaning of something for an individual is constructed due to the ways in which other people act toward the individual in relation to both objects and subjects. Their actions are meaningful to the individual and to the process of signification in the sense that they help to define things and subjects for the individual. It underlines the fact that the theory of symbolic interactionism considers meanings as social constructs, the results of the interactive, defining activities of people (Blumer, 1986).

Moreover, the theory of symbolic interactionism emphasizes the idea that the use of meaning by an individual, involves a subjective interpretation. One should definitely take account of this, because it implicates an important addition to the influence of others in the construction of meaning. This process of interpretation is based on two acts. First, the individual needs to point out the things that have meaning. The construction of such indications is a process in which the individual is interacting with himself (which stands in line with the pragmatic view of Mead). Secondly, due to the previous, the actual interpretation is based on the individual's way of handling meanings. The individual selects, groups and transforms meanings with regard to the situation and in order to determine his actions and behavior (Blumer, 1986).

2.3 The dark side

Based on the previous, one can say that the self essentially is considered to be subject to the other and the social world around it. For this reason, and at the same time, the social self could be subject to (social) forces that have a negative influence with regard to the individual. Those negative effects can (partly) be explained by looking at the meritocratic world we are immersed in. It underlines the potential dark side that the discourse on the self, encountered

following World War II. This potential dark side implies that the awareness of the self in relation to the other is determined by the approval of the other. What is good or virtuous is depending on opinions of others. This means that during an early age, a child learns that none of its efforts, characteristics or talents is valued apart from its effects on others and its ability to be compatible in a meritocracy. Based on this, one can speak of the *other directed person*, which indicates that we get overwhelmed by external forces that determine who we are and what we can be (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

The view on the dark side of the self would become even darker in the 1960s when the discourse emphasized that social circumstances could produce the antisocial. It argued that the structures of society became structures of each individual's consciousness. In other words, society would produce the individuals that populate it and in that sense individuals would become no more than conformists. This manifests even to an extent of commodification of emotions as social circumstances demand us to manage our emotions, even under pressure or stress. People were expected to control their emotions, regardless of the situation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

This stands in line with the concept of the one dimensional man, stating that we are immersed in a rational and commercial world where we cannot escape from. This results in what Marcuse calls the one dimensional man, which refers to the idea that society has a flattening effect on individuals. With this concept, Marcuse argues that everyone is forced to acknowledge that the rational action of the authorized apparatus serves general interests (Marcuse, 1964). Based on those fatalistic ideas about the social actor, the self became reduced to be no more than a conformist entity. At this phase in the evolution of the story on the self, it was in its major crisis.

2.4 Declaration of death and the revival of the self

However, this evolving view of the self as something existing and for which it was subject to the experience of the other, is very much criticized by the sociological school of postmodernism. In the postmodern era, the self has been declared to be death. It has been argued that the self is lacking the necessary coherence as the postmodern era is predominantly characterized by forces, such as electronically mediated imagery (hyper reality) and hyper consumerism, that substitute individuals with a fragmented, incoherent construct of the self. As such, it vanishes the sense of a central point for the self from which to evaluate experience. In the postmodern era, the self, became considered to be a desultory entity (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

In contrary, a more optimistic postmodern signal is given by Holstein and Gubrium (2000), stating that the self is something that is narratively constructed. They argue that the self is ubiquitously communicated. This postmodern approach of the self emphasizes new insights in who we are and what we can be. According to them the self is not a puppet of social interaction, but the construction of the self is also determined by the individual's agency. Referring to Lyotard, they explain that the self is constructed at the intersections of specific domains of communication such as interpretative communities (a potential environment of fans) or any kind of institution. These intersections of domains are as a post trough which different types of messages pass. However, those messages irrefutably appeal to a person's agency. In other words, at these intersections or what Lotyard calls *nodal points*, emerges self-awareness. He further explains his idea by stating that no self is an island because the variety of social domains (under which one can consider art) mediate who we are and what we can be. For this reason, Holstein and Gubrium explain that the self still remains to be a *practical project of everyday life* (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

Based on this, one may ask what remains of authenticity, because in most of those domains we show socially approved representations of the self. It are the interpretive communities in which, one can be authentic. In other words, the authenticity of the self is locally recognized and accountable (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

According to Holstein and Gubrium, we are now more than ever individualized selves as a result of our subjectivity that manifests due to interpretive practices. For this reason, one can say that a self is at the same time able to challenge the demands that are implicit to social participation. The interpretation of the self is partly shaped by social input, but it is at the same time a result of interpretive practice. It is always under construction, it is lived and shaped at the intersections. In the light of this, the self can be considered to be the representational horizon of who we are, which is based on personal agency. In the (personal) experience it exists to the extent that it can be communicated in an interpretive community. (Holstein & Gubrium 2000).

2.5 Cultural goods as social stimuli

In line with the previous, Solomon (1983) emphasizes the role of cultural goods as a social stimulus or (in line with the previous context) objects for interpretative practices. He considers consumption to be a subjective experience and argues that this experience that is imparted by the consumption of cultural goods, very much contributes to the consumer's structuring of his or her social reality and behavior. More specifically, he states that

consumers rely on the meanings they gain from products as a guidance for their performances of social roles. In the light of this, he states that cultural goods are a stimulus to behavior and that the symbolism that is inherent in cultural goods, functions as a mediator of defining the self and of the performances of social roles (Solomon, 1983). This emphasizes the idea that not only the other, but also cultural goods can be of influence on the individual's way of defining the self.

One can say that many cultural goods are implicitly cultural symbols and so it can be embedded in the theory of symbolic interactionism as the previous paragraph has clarified. Cultural symbols acquire meaning due to the socialization that begins during the early years of childhood. This means that people with a common history of enculturation should share similarities in their interpretation of symbolic meanings. It also means, that to a large extent, the ascribed meanings of those cultural symbols are based on consensual validation. Those cultural symbols are very much of influence on the individual's perception of social reality. In other words, they assist the individual in processes of assigning meaning to the world (Solomon, 1983). As it has been stated previously, cultural goods are potential social stimuli. The cultural goods that are consumed by the individual can be an information source as well as a potential reference to base action and behavior on (Solomon, 1983). When the consumption of cultural goods becomes an internalized stimulus to social behavior, one can speak of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2011 [1986]).

CHAPTER 3. RECEPTION AND NARRATIVE IDENTITY

In this chapter, the function of the previous chapter will become more clear, as one will notice that so-called reception studies (which are discussed in this chapter) elaborate on the legacy of pragmatism, symbolic interactionism and the postmodern theory of Holstein and Gubrium (2000) on the self as a construction of interpretative practices. This chapter emphasizes the concept of a narrative identity and the idea that it is narratable by a significant other, which is possibly the *Bildungsroman*.

3.1 Cultural capital

The idea that consumption of cultural goods is a way of defining the self, an interpretive practice of ascribing meaning to the world around us and of constructing our social behavior, corresponds with the theoretical concept of what Bourdieu refers to as *embodied cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 2011 [1986]). The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state is associated with what one may call a process of *Bildung*. It implies labor of assimilation (of a variety of cultural goods). The accumulation of cultural capital costs time and for this reason it demands an investment of the individual. The embodied cultural capital refers to the external wealth converted into a person's habitus (Bourdieu, 2011 [1986]). The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state, starts during the early childhood and due to pedagogic action of close relatives or hired professionals. It demands an investment of parents to sensitize the child to cultural distinctions. The consumption of culture over the years is inevitably connected to increasing cultural capital. The same could be said about arts participation (especially highbrow) in the sense that it increases cultural capital (Reay, 2004).

3.2 Art

This study examines questions such as how do people and in particularly fans consume the *Bildungsroman*, what aesthetic disposition do they have and how do they experience the product or in other words, how does the product becomes a significant other to the individual. Such questions are addressed by answering the major research question of this study, which implies: how is the *Bildungsroman* consumed by contemporary fans and how and to what extent is the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* linked to the process of *narrative identity* construction?.

The aesthetic disposition stands very much in line with the idea of cultural capital as it implicates the way that one perceives art (Bourdieu, 1987). Alexander (2008) argues that meanings are created from art and that the creation of meaning depends also on the

consumers, rather than on the creators. Even the how cultural products are used, is determined by the consumers. It stands in line with reception theories that state that art must be understood in relation to the people who consume it and it moreover stands in line with theories on symbolic interactionism as discussed previously. The particular products or art forms they consume and what aesthetic disposition they have, depends on their social backgrounds and the social worlds they are immersed in (Alexander, 2003). As the *Bildungsroman* often reflects the transformation of youth or adolescence to maturity and consumers and especially fans (the most devoted consumers) identify with a product through their social background, it is plausible that fans are pre-dominantly adolescents or young adults themselves with a potentially large volume of cultural capital. For previous studies, being involved in literature (high art) is considered to be an indicator for a large volume of cultural capital of adolescents (DiMaggio, 1982).

The unequal distribution of cultural capital is of influence on the reproduction of other inequalities. Cultural capital is partly measured by people's involvement in literature as stated before. Literature is considered to be one of the most prestigious art forms. Reading literature, especially in the case of girls, is strongly related to cultural attitudes, their interests for other cultural phenomena. Several studies have demonstrated that a large volume of cultural capital in its embodied state, constitutes better school performances and school success (DiMaggio, 1982). This also demonstrates that cultural capital in the embodied state is important to the individual's social performances.

The theory of reception of aesthetics argues that consumers or readers play an active role in the interpretation and creation of meaning from a particular text. Furthermore it states that readers have a *horizon of expectations* (Alexander, 2003), that is formed by their backgrounds. They read a novel, while comparing the narrative with their expectations (Alexander, 2003). It corresponds with the idea of symbolic interactionism, saying that meaning arises from the interaction between the individual and the object (Blumer, 1986). This implicates that an interpretation or a bond of especially a fan with a particular novel, can be, although socially mediated, very personally felt. The ability to create meaning is called *semiotic power* and it implicates the potential of an *active audience*, that creates meaning from the interaction of texts and their reception (Alexander, 2003). As a great admirer and fanatic consumer, one can say that a fan is a representative of an active audience.

3.4 Fans

According to Boes, the *Bildungsroman* represents for the reader, “*the image of Man in the process of becoming*” (Boes, 2006). Moratti argues that the *Bildungsroman* is the symbolic form of modernity. The presence of youth represents according to Moratti, modernity’s essence; it search for meaning in the future rather than in the past (Moratti, 2000). This may appeal to a certain audience of fans (most probably adolescents).

It has been discussed previously that this study focusses on the reception of fans. The importance of fan studies relies in the purpose to rationalize the continuing investigation of consumption in order to understand how people relate to media that have an increasing impact on our lives. However they also represent the consumer group that are most sensitive towards the product into question. (Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2007). With regard to this study, fans represent the best possible case to study the influence of reception on consumers, because of their intensity of consuming and their potential sensitivity towards the product. Fans are the most visible and dedicated audiences and for this reason they can be considered to be experts of the study in question (Lewis, 1992). Jenkins describes fans as prominent users of media content and for this reason we can consider them to be experts just as well (Jenkins, 2007).

Furthermore, one can say that fans of the *Bildungsroman* are at the same time part of so called *interpretative communities* (Alexander, 2003), especially when they are fans of particular literature. These communities are formed by people with similar interests and horizons of expectations. It is plausible that fans are engaged in *interpretative communities* as they share a particular interest or passion for the same or similar cultural products. As stated before, these interpretative communities represent the main social environment, where the authentic self can manifest (Holstein & Gubrium 2000). The idea of an interpretative community is that it shares a cognitive style and (practical) knowledge of a set of conventions in approaching cultural disciplines as for instance literature (Alexander, 2003).

3.5 Mimesis

Another component of contemporary reception regarding the *Bildungsroman* can be found in the concept of *mimesis*. The concept of *mimesis* was introduced by Aristotle, but it was also used in theory by Gadamer and it is worth discussing its relevance for the subject of this study (Postma, 2002)

First of all, Gadamer brought the theory of *Verstehen* in relation with the question of the validity of art (Warnke, 1987). With this, he emphasized the active task of the recipient in

his or her role to interpret art (Postma, 2002). Again, this underlines the validity of symbolic interactionism as it emphasizes the subjective interpretation of the individual (Blumer, 1986). Mimesis implicates that the subject reconstructs the object (for instance a novel) according to his or her own imagination. He or she puts emphasis on some elements of a work, more than on the other. This implicates a personal process of recognizing and identification and it corresponds with the idea of interpretive practices (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

The narratives of a novel can accumulate meaning in the world of recipients as they can internalize it by reconstructing it according to their own imagination. According to Gadamer, the meaning of art must be found in the recognition of values and truth by the recipient. Gadamer describes this as *Im fremden das eigene zu herkenne* (Postma, 2002). In this way a novel can have a very lively function for the reader. According to Gadamer there are processes of alienation and discovering involved with consuming art. For this reason, consuming art can be seen as a constitutive act of identity construction (Postma, 2002).

3.6 Narrative identity

The French philosopher Ricoeur developed a theory on the *narrative identity* (see De Mul, 2000). According to this theory, people do not only use narratives as a metaphor to express their identities, but more importantly it argues that narratives constitute to the construction of people's identities. Ricoeur argues that we do not immediately know ourselves and in order to answer the question who we are, we are constantly relying on narratives. Through the stories people tell about their selves, they articulate their identity.

According to Ricoeur this happens through a three dimensional act of mimesis. The first dimension of mimesis implicates the whole of practical knowledge regarding the consistence of life. Ricoeur states that people are actively searching for their stories. He conceptualized this with the term pre-narrative structure. If one wants to construct a story from experiences, one needs to have a sense of logics. This is based on the knowledge of intentions, motives, consequences, circumstances, et cetera that are inherent to action and experience. The actual expression of our lives in the form of a story is the second dimension of mimesis, where a plot involving all components and links of human experiences form a coherent whole. The third dimension is the construction of the narrative identity through the application of all the narrative configuration to the self. Metaphorically speaking, one can say that the horizon of the reader comes together with the story at the second stage of mimesis (de Mul, 2000).

3.7 Fictional narratives and the narratable self

Ricoeur exclusively emphasizes the role of fictional narratives for the construction of narrative identity, because they expose us to variations of our own experiences and further imaginations. Fictional narratives appeal to our imagination and so they make us able to explore more than we can in our day-to-day lives. The identification with literary characters makes us able to explore new opportunities that we can possibly exploit (De Mul, 2000).

McAdams (2001) continues on Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity by arguing that people in modern societies adapt unity and purpose to their lives by internalizing narratives on the self. Especially during the late adolescent years people attempt to reconstruct the story of their autobiographical past. They perceive the present and anticipate on the future by an integrative narrative of the self. According to McAdams, people in late adolescence and early adulthood, explore ideologies and options available in society in order to shape their beliefs and values and to eventually construct their own personal ideology. He also emphasizes the influence of culture, by arguing that the cultural context in which a person is embedded, determines how a person gives meaning to his or her life (McAdams, 2001).

As fans are obviously devoted consumers of the *Bildungsroman*, it is plausible that they identify with the content and that they adapt its values and beliefs. Based on the previously discussed theories, one could assume that fans of the *Bildungsroman* create meaning both individually and socially from consuming those novels. They have an active role in the creation of meaning (Alexander, 2008). The creation of meaning by consuming *Bildungsromane* is plausibly interdependent with processes of narrative identity formation.

Based on the previous, one can say that reading literature is a way of accumulating cultural capital and narrative identity. Sumara (2002) argues that people's engagement in literature and in practices of interpreting literature can develop what he calls *personal coherence* and it can expand on their perception of possibilities. In order to bring to words, the value of reading, he refers to a metaphor from a novel, saying "If you know one landscape well, you will look at all landscapes differently. And if you learn to love one place, sometimes you can also learn to love another" (Sumara, 2002). Sumara uses this metaphor when he argues that literary experience is such a place. By engaging in literature, he states, readers can improve the quality of their lived experiences (Sumara, 2002). According to this idea, one can find connections between fans' reading experiences and their real lives, as the one enriches the other according to Sumara. This stands in line with the idea introduced by Solomon, saying that the consumption of cultural goods is a form of structuring social reality and behavior (Solomon, 1983).

The most meaningful facts to this study that Sumara describes are (in random order) that the consumption of many novels and the insights they provide can constitute shifts in thinking of the reader. He argues that it might not be one novel that can change a person, but that the variety of novels, providing different insights, may constitute those shifts in thinking. He also states that the reflection of literary relations are important instruments for learning processes as they generate empathy and understanding for reflections of real life people and relations. Furthermore, he considers literary engagements to be valuable in a sense that they interrupt what he calls the cultural commonsense and the routines of everyday life. With regard to this he states that the interruption of someone's perception is needed in order for it to grow into a better one. For these reasons and more, the engagement in narrative practices constitute the construction of identity according to Sumara. He argues that closely reading a novel is a practice of mindfulness and that this can help an individual to create loving attachments to ideas. With this he means the metaphoric landscapes as mentioned before and those can be other people or practices besides reading (Sumara, 2002).

According to Sumara, those effects and influences on the reader can be conceptualized as *embodied reading* (Sumara, 2002). This concept refers to a possible subcategory of Bourdieu's concept of embodied cultural capital and it is of influence on the individual's social behavior and perceptions in a way plausibly similar to cultural capital. It also illustrates the influence of reading on narrative identity construction.

Taking account of other theories, one could expand on the concept of embodied reading. Hakemulder emphasizes the fact that it is especially the narrative nature of literature that has been associated with those effects and influences as mentioned before. Narratives in particular are considered to be an important instrument for socialization. Stories are often reflecting cultural norms and values. To illustrate this, Hakemulder gives the example of a newcomer at work who gets to know the company and its culture due to the stories that are told by his colleagues (Hakemulder, 2000).

However, there are also other ways through which socialization based on narratives takes place, for instance in a way more closely related to narrative identity construction. The stories people tell in their daily conversations function in order to explore common ground. The form in which we narrate our experiences exposes what we think that is important. Implicitly, these stories are about who we are and who we are not or who we (do not) want to be. Moreover, we select the specific events we want to tell about ourselves, because we consider them worth it. Usually, the stories we consider worth telling, are related to events where human values are at stake (Hakemulder, 2000). One can say that a person is made

through his actions and speech. They construct the life-story of a person. Who a person is, one can know due to the narration of the life-story of the person, in which he or she is the protagonist (Cavarero, 2014).

Furthermore, Hakemulder (2000) states that our experiences are filtered through what he calls *already seen images* (provided by usually fictional stories). In this sense, real life is already lived to some extent due to the images derived from stories. Real life events are sometimes imitations that are not as dramatic or romantic, especially after adolescence, but it is a common phenomenon that readers want to imitate their narrative heroes. The explicit power of narratives is that it has more influence on beliefs than other discourses. Traditionally, stories were used to tell about heroes, explorers and inventors in order to teach the virtues they reflected. These narrative representations are sometimes able to affect the reader's norms, desires and expectations (Hakemulder, 2000).

According to Cavarero, narration appeals to the question of who someone is, in contrast to philosophy that questions what someone is (what is man). However, the narrative self is (even though it is not distinguishable from the life story), a subject to be reduced to exclusively the content of this story. In other words, the narrated story that tells about a person does not fully produce or expose the identity of the person. Thus, Cavarero considers us to have a narratable self (rather than a narrative self) and she states that our identities exist in the unreflective sense that the life stories we know are identical. For this reason the narratable self, reveals the unicity of a person (Cavarero, 2014).

Furthermore Cavarero states that the sense of self, from knowing it to be narratable involves the desire for narration. As it has been stated previously, one has to take account of the fact that the content of the narrative life story alone, does not confer identity. As one knows himself to be unique and narratable, he desires for what Cavarero calls *unity*. According to Cavarero every person is born unique and one and this implicates the unity she means. This unity is however lost as a person gets alienated through the passage of time. The narrative life story, does, however needs to include the story of birth and childhood, which of course an individual cannot retrospectively recall sufficiently. We need for instance parents, close relatives and friends to have a coherent image of who we are. By empathizing this, Cavarero attempts to demonstrate that the sense of unity can only arrive from the other. This is what Cavarero means with the desire for narration and it demands that every person is narratable by the other. It implies that every person entrusts to some extent his unity and identity to the other's narration (Cavarero, 2014). Through the theory of the narratable self by Cavarero, the theories of symbolic interactionism and the narrative identity come together as

it emphasizes the fundamental roles of both the other and narratives for the construction of identity.

Today, the concept of narratives and identity has also reached the field of psychology. Stories of individual's lives are more and more investigated. There is an increasing attention for therapeutic and clinical methods and psychological interventions related to narratives. According to McAdams, identity itself takes the shape of a story. McAdams describes it to be a form of shaping coherence in the personal life. Remarkable is that this can be achieved by reading literature as an activity of mindfulness according to Sumara (2002). It underlines the idea that the consumption of literature can contribute to the construction of narrative identity. Especially during late adolescence and early adulthood, people are actively reconstructing their past, perceiving their present and shaping their future by the use of an internalized life story about the self that exhibits a narrative identity. Those life stories are based on a selective way of filtering life events. They are constructed by the person himself and by the cultural context in which he is embedded as stated before. In line with Hakemulder (2000) and with regard to narratives, McAdams states that life stories contain a reflection of values and symbolic meanings (McAdams, 2001). This may again serve to express the self.

As mentioned previously, people are selective with regard to the events they pick of the personal past in order to construct identity. We choose events that together make our lives containing unity and meaning. We endow those events with symbolic meanings that make sense to us and to use in the present. Interesting with regard to this study is that previous research has demonstrated that people usually tend to recall memories from their adolescence and young adulthood (15-25). Those events are more intensively loaded with emotional content than others. At the same time this implicates the phase of life, during which people are most actively engaged in the process of identity formation. It also represents the time during which people are formulating life stories to address the challenges they encounter. As a result of this, McAdams (2001) states that it is plausible that most symbolic messages that construct identity arrive from this period. It seems to be collectively validated that those events are like anchors, self-defining and potentially good stories. For this reason, McAdams (2001) emphasizes the fact that the coming of age story (According to many people synonymous to the *Bildungsroman*) is a timeless and universal beloved cultural exponent.

One of the most important arguments coming from the psychological field with regard to the previous discussion, is the statement that says that the active engagement of the individual in practices of narrative identity construction, constitutes emotional well-being. They even argue that the *growth narrative* that is inherent in a particular high level of

emotional well-being, constitutes health. The *growth narrative* is a narrative that people use in order to emphasize personal growth (Bauer, McAdams & Pals, 2008).

As has been demonstrated, the concept of narrative identity refers to the internalized life story (based on particular events of the personal past) that an individual constructs in order to shape coherence and meaning with regard to his or her life. The phenomenon of narrative identity is closely linked to the individual's consideration of the self as being happy. Bauer, McAdams and Pals (2008) use the term *eudaimonic well-being* to indicate a sense of happiness, greater than the experience of joy. It refers to what Aristotle considered to be the greatest good of humankind, that is *Eudaimonia*, which implicates a form of happiness based on both pleasure and virtue. The human state of *Eudaimonia* was considered to be what one would call the good-life and others would call a state of enlightenment. However, this state was not only based on the feelings of people about their lives consisting meaning, but it refers also to the matter in which people cultivated more richness, depths and complexity in that meaning. The authors introduce Aristotle's term to argue that the construction of narrative identity, constitutes the experience of *eudaimonic well-being*. They discovered that people with a large volume of *eudaimonic well-being* emphasize the personal experience of growth in their internalized life-stories. They also demonstrate that people experience difficult events to be useful in the sense that they gained from it in terms of getting to know more about the self. Besides that, they argue that the consumption of culture (as announced previously) enriches their personal lives and well-being (Bauer, McAdams & Pals, 2008).

Furthermore, the authors emphasize an important role for culture and more specifically an important role for narratives about protagonists that grow (potential *Bildungsroman*' characters). The authors state that the contemporary American society as an exponent of a western, modern society, admires characters that overcome obstacles only to grow or to intergrade at the end of the story. Often these stories are based on ideas arriving from secular life. The protagonists of such stories are individualists, growing and developing in particular due to overcoming obstacles. The most popular themes of narratives, traditionally in American society (as an exponent of modern, western society) are stories that emphasize upwards social mobility, growth from immaturity to an expression of a better self, liberation and self-actualization according to the authors (Bauer, McAdams & Pals, 2008). It is clear that those themes show strong kinship with *Bildungsroman*' themes such as (trans)formation, growth, finding vocation and self-discovery and maturity (Minden, 1997). It emphasizes that growth is an important theme for the construction of narrative identity corresponding with eudaimonic well-being. Furthermore the authors state that a person's life

story and narrative identity with emphasis on growth surely reflects cultural narratives (Bauer, McAdams & Pals, 2008). This demonstrates that cultural narratives and with regard to this study, the *Bildungsroman* is possibly of influence on narrative identities of its fans.

In following of the study previously discussed, McAdams and McLean (2013) discuss that people with narrative identities that contain themes of personal agency and exploration are likely to gain higher levels of mental health, well-being and maturity. This emphasizes the importance of a narrative identity to a person's well-being. For this reason it is important to gain insights in this process of narrative identity formation. Previous study by McAdams (2013) came to the conclusion that a narrative identity develops itself during late adolescence and early adulthood as a response to society's expectations and the development of a mature way of thinking. He considered it to be a mechanism that emerged during the transformation to maturity as it appeals to the needs of the individual to find out about who he is and what he wants. However, the authors are not ignorant towards other studies, (of which explicitly that of Habermas and Bluck (2000) is mentioned) that argue that the formation of a narrative identity starts during late childhood (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

The development of narrative identity is considered to be a slow process. It happens through the interaction with others in which personal experiences are discussed and exhibited, reinterpreted and subjected to a variety of social influences. The process of this constitutes an increasing internalized narrative identity. In particular conversations with parents about personal experiences are determinant to the development of children's skills in telling narratives. The greater the parents role is in challenging a child to elaborate on past events, the stronger the ability to narrate stories of the person gets. The conversations between parents and child also contribute to the child's ability to gain meaning out of personal events (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Besides that, the authors state that there is a relation between the ability to make meaning out of personal events and a person's age during his or her adolescence. The adolescence is the phase in which individuals in particular learn how to manage the contradictions in their personal life stories. One has to take account of the fact that boys during early adolescence who have greater skills of making meaning out of autobiographical events, converted into stories, have lower levels of psychological well-being than boys that are less capable (at that point) at meaning making from past events. This phenomenon restores itself during late adolescence, as the meaning that boys make from past events get entwined with higher levels of psychological well-being and an increased capability to understand the self (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

CHAPTER 4. METHODS

4.1 Hypothesis

The purpose of this study is to generate insights in motives, experiences and identification of people with the literary genre of the *Bildungsroman*. For this reason this study appeals to qualitative research methods. The contribution of qualitative research to the academic discourse is fruitful as it creates a greater depth of understanding (Berg, 2004). The contribution to social understanding from qualitative research has been proven to be significant, because it is essential to understand the nature of phenomena. It is evident that certain experiences cannot be meaningful expressed in terms of numbers (Berg, 2004). That is certainly the case of this study that attempts to create insight in processes of identification and the creation of meaning. This demands a more qualitative contribution of respondents. Furthermore, qualitative research methods can recall certain half-forgotten or complex insights or memories of people (Berg, 2004).

The major research question of this study is; how is the *Bildungsroman* consumed by contemporary fans and how and to what extent is the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* linked to the process of *narrative identity* construction? This research question cannot be answered in terms of numbers. The insights, emerging from engaging with this research question need to be illustrated in words as they are more meaningful in relation to the research question. Based on the insights of the previously discussed reception studies and the potential influence of the factor indicated by the theory of the *narrative identity* on the reception of the *Bildungsroman* of contemporary fans, a hypothesis can be defined. The hypothesis of this research is that the *Bildungsroman* is constitutive of the narrative identity formation of contemporary fans. This means that the individual experience of reading is an interpretative practice that constitutes identity formation (Holstein & Gubrium ,2000). These contemporary fans of the *Bildungsroman* are plausibly adolescents or young adults that are actively engaged in practices of identity formation.

4.2 Sample

Interactive media had a vital function for the construction of the sample. The media that was used to generate a sample was the website *Goodreads*, an interactive website where readers of any book(s) can communicate about their reading experiences. It also offers the opportunity to search for particular books to see what has been written about it by its readers. Every member of *Goodreads* is allowed to comment on certain topics with regard to a book

or to open a new topic. A *Goodreads* account has been made in order to post comments that generated attention for this research. This is how calls for respondents (fans) were published on topics that were related to *Bildungsromane*, such as *Harry Potter*, *the Perks of Being a Wallflower*, *Nowegian wood* and *the Catcher and the Rye*.

The purposeful sampling technique was used for this study in order to establish a valid sample of contemporary fans of the *Bildungsroman*. This is a relatively selective form of sampling, which is commonly used in social scientific, qualitative research (Coyne, 1997). According to Patton, purposeful sampling is relevant to studies that demand information-rich respondents, because of its in-depth nature. This type of respondents are people from which the researcher can learn about the topics that are essential to the purpose of the study (Patton, 2005).

The sample was constructed, based on three steps that appeal to the sampling technique of purposeful sampling. First a call was placed on digital fora in order to attract respondents. The image on the following page illustrates the interactive, fan-related mechanisms of an example of such an online location.

Norwegian Wood Book Discussion

[see all book discussions »](#)
[post a new topic »](#)



Norwegian Wood (Paperback)
 by Haruki Murakami

topics about this book

topics that mention this book

topics (showing 1-26 of 32)	started by	posts	views	last activity▲
Naoko	Orenda	8	110	Jan 16, 2015 05:01PM
Turkish Reading C....: Murakami - "İmkansızın Şarkısı" ile ilgili tartışma	Aahupinar	29	39	Jan 16, 2015 02:55PM
Is Reiko evil?	J	3	133	Jan 08, 2015 04:54PM
World Travel thro....: January - February 2015: Norwegian Wood	Traveling Div...	1	5	Jan 01, 2015 07:02AM
Writers of Color: Norwegian Wood Discussion Chps 10-11	Adira	7	28	Dec 05, 2014 09:49AM
Midori & Toru	Most Ardently	2	59	Dec 02, 2014 12:01PM
Writers of Color: Norwegian Wood Discussion Chps 7-9	Adira	8	20	Dec 01, 2014 03:42PM
Writers of Color: Norwegian Wood Discussion Chps 1-4	Adira	15	37	Nov 27, 2014 10:00AM
can someone please tell me why was the sex scene at the end necessary?	Genoveva	14	386	Nov 21, 2014 06:04PM
Movie vs. Book?	Michelle	11	254	Nov 20, 2014 06:33AM
Fiction Fanatics: October 2014 - Norwegian Wood	Teneal	7	19	Oct 21, 2014 11:15PM

(Goodreads, n.d.)

The validity of the people who reacted to this call was verified due to several questions. One of the conditions to verify their comments (saying they were fans of the *Bildungsroman*) was that respondents had to be able to refer to at least 3-5 *Bildungsromane* listed on the *Goodreads* forum.

Furthermore the construction of the sample of this study relied on a subcategory of purposeful sampling, which is snowball sampling (Coyne, 1997). Some of the respondents that were engaged in a network of *Bildungsroman* fandom, were asked to introduce other fans as potential respondents. The validity of their participation was verified confirm to the same criteria as mentioned before. The people that participated in this study are listed in the following table.

4.3 Overview respondents

Name	Age	Gender	Place of origin	Educational level	Educational level parents
Rebeka	24	Female	Budapest (Hungary)	High education level (MA)	Both high educational level
Julia	24	Female	Budapest (Hungary)	High education level (MA)	Both high educational level
Adriana	21	Female	Morelio (Mexico)	High education level (BA)	High educational level (father)
Tiziano	41	Male	New Jersey (United States)	High education level (PhD)	Low educational level
Martin	32	Male	Tokyo (Japan)	High education level (BA)	Average educational level
Carolina	22	Female	Madeira (Portugal)	High education level (BA)	High educational level
Flavia	20	Female	Bucharest (Bulgaria)	High education level (BA)	High educational level
Franchesco	24	Male	Petropolis (Brazil)	High education level (BA)	High educational level
Emma	20	Female	Rotterdam (The Netherlands)	High education level (BA)	High educational level
Valeria	18	Female	Caracas (Venezuela)	High education level (BA)	High educational level (father)

4.4 Active interviewing

In order to test the validity of this hypothesis, this study relies on semi-structured in-depth interviews with contemporary fans of the *Bildungsroman*. A representative amount of interviews will be conducted in order to make some generalizing statements. This research attempts to find connections between the reception of the *Bildungsroman* of contemporary fans with their lives and more specifically with the formation of their narrative identities. In other words, it is in search for a justification of the respondents. This demands an open, trusting and engaging attitude of the interviewee. This attitude plausibly needs to be evoked by showing integrity, by building trust and more practically by the ability of asking further,

deepening questions. At the root of in-depth interviewing as a method for qualitative research is the (academic) interest in understanding a certain experience of other people and the meaning they create from that experience. This method of interviewing combines life-history interviewing with a focused, in-depth interviewing component, determined by insights drawn from literature studies. The interviewer uses primarily open-ended questions. Within the topics of the interview, the interviewer's task is to explore and build upon the interviewee's responses to the questions. The aim is to reconstruct the interviewee's experience in relation to the topic of study. By asking respondents to reflect on- and to reconstruct particular experiences, such as the experience of certain novels, they are engaged in that act of attention that stimulates them to determine the meaning of that experience. This method of interviewing, emphasizes the exploration of the meaning that people created due to their experience with X in the context of their lives (Seidman, 2012). In the case of this study the meaning of the fans' experience is very much embedded in the context of their lives (according to the hypothesis) and the aim of this study implicates to explore how this is embedded

Interviewing is a way of generating empirical data about any kind of social phenomenon. It implicates a methodological form of conversation, varying from highly structured and standardized interviews to semi-formal conversations. They always have an interactive nature in order to generate narratives and to find out about information. For this reason, the interview is an instrument to transport knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004).

The role of the interviewer with regard to this study is based on the approach of active interviewing (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). This epistemology stands somewhat in contrast with traditional perceptions of interviewing, where the interviewer's involvement is kept to a minimum. In the case of active interviewing (as the term states), a more active role of the interviewer can be recognized. According to Holstein and Gubrium (2004), the interview is a social encounter due to which knowledge is actively constructed. This underlines the idea that the interview is a site of producing demanded knowledge. Based on this, one can say that interviews are instruments to create meaning from what is expected to be known by the respondent. This can be achieved due to the active involvement of both respondent and interviewer. Rather than a storage of knowledge, the respondents are constructors of knowledge together with the interviewer. This means that the interview demands an active role of the interviewer in order to constitute contributions to the production of interview data (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004).

Based on the previous, one can say that interviews are social productions that are

developing due to interaction and for which respondents are narrators and researchers are participants. Thus, the interaction between both, constructs a meaningful story. The development of the plot of the interview is subject to both, the interviewer and the respondent. This is a reflection of the idea that reality is constantly in the making and for this reason a matter of practice. According to Holstein and Gubrium (2004), active interviewing is a form of interpretive practices in which the interviewer and the respondent are engaged as they point out interpretative structures and orientations due to practical reasoning. The role of the active interviewer is the inspiration to the role of the interviewer with regard to this study.

4.5 The active interviewer

The successful execution of interviews relies to some extent on the influence of the interviewer as it has been demonstrated. One of the important preparations that an interviewer may need to accumulate is to get to know his or her audience. In this case the respondents/fans embody the expertise that is needed for this study. In order to know the audience it is fruitful to explore the data that is published on the consulted fora. Berg emphasizes the importance of understanding the background of respondents. Therefore one has to take account of the language and the nature of the questions (Berg, 2004). One of the ways by which this research will appeal to this is by the use of proxies that refer to the content of the novel(s) in question. At the same time this may recall certain memories or insights of experiences of identification or evaluation.

In order to appeal to the idea of active interviewing, the active interviewer needs to activate the narrative production of the respondent. The active interviewer provokes answers by indicating, suggesting (using proxies) narrative positions, directions and orientations for the respondent in order to address research questions. It is the active interviewer's task to offer the respondent ways to conceptualize and to make connections and to direct the respondent's narratives (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). This study appeals to this role of the active interviewer as illustrated in the following interview fragment:

“Interviewer: Uhm I am wondering what caused your desire to find out about that?”

Interviewee: Uhm, well the book characters with an extreme view on life; I think you cannot really experience their extreme views, without practicing them yourself, without undertaking related action. I think it is the best way to try it, to discover what you think of it, because I think it is very easy to judge something. Without trying it yourself, it remains no more than theory.

Interviewer: So you mean it is basically a full displacement in those book characters?

Interviewee: Yes, you could say it was.”

The interviewer’s question list functions as a catalyst for answers of the respondent, but the interviewer needs to be aware of the fact that other interactional gestures can possibly evoke answers. A high level of participation in the interview of the interviewer is sometimes a profitable incitement for the respondent. It can stimulate the respondent to elaborate more and more spontaneously on the content of the answer (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Besides the tasks of the active interviewer that are earlier discussed, the interviewer needs to condition stories. The following fragment from the introduction of the interviews, illustrates how the interviewer with regard to this study, appeals to the need to condition the respondent’s stories.

“This study focusses on fans of the *Bildungsroman* and their reception of the genre. In particular I am curious about the role of this type of literature in the day to day life of people and what meaning it contains to them. Because you have stated to be a fan of the genre and to have much affinity and experience with the genre, you can have a valid function for this study”.

In line with the tasks of the active interviewer described by Holstein, this fragment of the introduction, gives direction to the distinctive perspective from which the respondent is needed to respond (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Furthermore, the active interviewer is using background knowledge. The interviewer needs to know to some extent about the cultural context in which the interview is embedded. This background knowledge can be useful, because it makes the interviewer able to assist the respondent to explore their relations, circumstances, thoughts and feelings (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The following interview question demonstrates (based on the proxies that are used) the cultural background knowledge of the interviewer with regard to this study.

“What specific characters in the literature, appeal to you the most?

Coming of age element?

Transformation/Bildung?

Obstacles/Drama?

Sensitive protagonist?”

With regard to this study, the interviewer demonstrates to be aware of what possibilities there are for the respondent to refer to in order to address the question and this background knowledge possibly assists the respondents to formulate their answers.

The active interviewer needs to offer the respondents some narrative guidance. One always needs to be aware of the purpose and the focus of the study. This implicates that the respondents need to be guided in order to address relevant experiences (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

The major advantage of active interviewing in comparison to other forms of interviewing (looking at what has been previously discussed) is that it generates specific responses that imply content that corresponds to the specific purpose of this study. The participation and guidance of the interviewer, safeguards the direction and the orientation of responses. It constitutes the relevance of answers and the ability to relate responses to the purpose of the study. A possible disadvantage is that the relatively high level of participation of the interviewer is an intervention in the authenticity of responses with regard to the interview questions.

4.6 The interview

Because of the online dimension of this study due to the digital call for respondents, the sample is formed by an international group of fans. For this reason most of the interviews are executed through the use of *Skype*. The interviews took place over the period February-April. Because of the different time zones, the planning of the interviews took some time.

The interview is based on 5 major topics that together constitute all the necessary and relevant interview data. The difficulty of the questions depends on the matter of complexity and the demand for the respondents to reflect. Hence, the interview questions were slowly working towards the more difficult questions. The first interview topic refers to personal details. Respondents were asked about their age, their level of education, but also their parents' highest level of education and the parents' role in their socialization in order to get a sense of their profile and their potential cultural capital and socialization with culture. Secondly the respondents were asked about their encounter with their first *Bildungsroman*, their evaluation of it and their socialization. The third topic elaborates on the respondents' experiences of the *Bildungsromane* that were most important to them personally. The interview questions with regard to this topic vary from those focusing on the characteristics that appeal to them the most to meanings they gained from them. The explicit focus of this

topic regards the relation between reception and personal development and narrative identity construction. The fourth topic contains questions about interaction. It addresses questions in order to gain insights in the respondents' interaction with regard to the *Bildungsroman*. The last topic focusses on the respondents' values, their ambitions, their personal issues and public issues of attention in order to expand on the profiles of the respondents.

4.7 Data analysis

Contradicting the positivist tradition, this study implies a form of qualitative research. It relies on the idea to contribute to the academic discourse on narrative identity, by emphasizing a potential role for art. The purpose of this study is to gain new insights in order to establish new theory as a contribution to the solution of relatively unanswered questions.

First, the 10 interviews (lengths varying of 60-90 minutes) were transcribed. The transcripts of the interviews were imported in the software program *Atlas.ti*. This software program was used to code the interview transcripts. One of the steps in research following the grounded theory in qualitative research is the coding process. The transcripts of the interviews of this study were used for the process of coding. The transcripts of this study were processed through coding, using the guidelines of Charmaz saying to first name each relevant fragment, followed by a selective phase that represents the most significant and/or frequent code (Charmaz, 2014). First the process of open coding was executed in which the distinct concepts in the interview data were categorized. Secondly the process of axial coding was executed in which representative phrases of the transcripts with regard to the concepts were highlighted.

Based on the codes as representatives of the identified concepts, the results were defined and illustrated by the use of fragments from the interviews.

4.8 Units

The units of analysis for this study are in the first place contemporary fans of the *Bildungsroman*. Besides those, the novels that are published on the top ranking list of the *Bildungsroman* are units of analysis. A fan within the context of this study, is a person who is actively engaging with interactive media that is essentially related to the *Bildungsroman*. This characteristic exclusively has a pragmatic reason, namely that it makes a fan more efficiently approachable. Substantively speaking, the person (a fan) is a devotee to a novel of the *Bildungsroman* and expresses it by being an enthusiast admirer of the novel after

responding to the call for respondents. This description of a fan is in line with the descriptions given by the theories of both Lewis (1992) and of Jenkins (2007). Besides the expression of affinity with a particular novel of the *Bildungsroman* in relation to the online location where the fan is active, he or she has to be an enthusiast admirer of at least 3-5 novels that are published on either one of the *Bildungsroman* ranking sites (see Ranker, n.d. or Goodreads, n.d.). These novels will be examined on their nature in order to determine if they are true examples of a *Bildungsroman*. This means a fan is an enthusiast admirer of at least 3-5 novels that expose to be a *Bildungsroman*. The definitions given by both dictionaries, will function as a scope. The amount of 3-5 is chosen, because one does not have to be a fanatic or a very experienced reader in order to have great affinity with a particular novel. Yet, he or she has enough experience to express meaningful experiences with the cultural genre and for the researcher to explore associations between the novels as exponents of the *Bildungsroman*.

4.9 Operationalization

The rather broad concept of reception will be operationalized by- and in order of the formation of interview topics. These interview topics are related to the reception of the *Bildungsroman* of contemporary fans. In line with the hypothesis those topics are in the spectrum of *evaluation* and *identification*. The 10 interviews will take at least one hour, each. They will be recorded in agreement with the respondents. The respondents will prior to the interview, be informed about the context of their participation.

4.10 Results discussion

The next chapter of the results demonstrates that the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* by its fans is indeed constitutive of the construction of narrative identity. The consumption of the *Bildungsroman* seems to be an interpretive practice, as it has a mediating function to the respondents for the construction of meanings, values and identity. This will be illustrated in the next chapter in which fragments of interviews will form an answer to the research question.

The most remarkable results of this study with regard to the research question, will be discussed under the following topics: (i) Attraction of the *Bildungsroman* and (ii) Influence of the *Bildungsroman*, in which, respectively, the value and the meaning of the genre for the interviewees will be estimated and its role for the construction of narrative identity.

The results are charted by referring to the original data very frequently. Thereby the original data is the leitmotif in the results section of this study, in order to provide authentic insights. The quotes that are used to demonstrate the results, also cover the diversity within the results of this study and in conjunction with each other, they are representative of all respondents.

CHAPTER 5. RESULTS

In this chapter, an overview will be given of the results of this study. First of all, a profile will be constructed of the respondents, based on similarities and common background features. Frequently occurring features of respondents, besides their shared interest for the *Bildungsroman* will be discussed in order to expose some possible connections between their backgrounds. Secondly, a definition of the *Bildungsroman* will be constructed, based on the perception of the respondents and the terms they use in order to define the genre as a distinctive exponent of literary fiction. The other paragraphs address the experiences of the respondents with regard to their consumption of *Bildungsromane*.

5.1 Respondents' background

Due to the digital approach of sampling, this study emphasizes the international construction of fandom within the domain of reception of the *Bildungsroman*. Respondents from four continents and nine countries, were actively involved with this study, because of their contribution in the form of an interview. The sample exists of 10 respondents, of which 7 were female, against 3 male respondents. In random order, they are from Budapest, Tokyo, New Jersey, Madeira, Caracas, Rio de Janeiro, Rotterdam, Bucharest and Morelia (Mexico). Despite of the variety of differences in places of origin, a comprehensive overview of similarities can be made. Eight of the respondents were of varying ages within the age category of the early twenties, one male respondent is 32 and another respondent is 41 (and is currently doing a PhD on the *Bildungsroman*). One has to take account of the fact that the age similarity of the largest part of the sample is a result of sampling, rather than a significant correlation between age and fans of the *Bildungsroman*. With regard to many topics on the *Goodreads* forum, where calls for respondents were published, most of the participants were adolescents. However, one may take account of the fact that it is during adolescence and early adulthood that people mostly explore ideologies available in society, in cultural goods, such as the *Bildungsroman* in order to shape values and beliefs (McAdams, 2001). It is not surprising that many people in this phase of life are consuming the *Bildungsroman* as they are actively constructing their identities.

Looking at the data in further detail, several similarities between the respondents manifest as it is previously announced. This may be of possible influence on the establishment of a shared interest for the *Bildungsroman*. Despite of potential differences between respondents, it is possible to make a general profile of the respondents based on similar characteristics regarding their backgrounds. The background features they have in

common will be discussed briefly in order to construct a potential profile.

One of the most remarkable similarities between respondents is their potential large volume of cultural capital, which is indicated by the high education level of the respondents' parents. With exception of one of the respondents (whose parents did respectively the police academy and a study for administration management), all of the respondents have at least one parent (but frequently two), who has a bachelor or a master degree. As it has been stated previously, the parents' educational level is an indicator for the cultural capital of the respondents. This means that one of the remarkable similarities of fans of the *Bildungsroman* is their potential large volume of cultural capital. Most of the respondents' parents or other close relatives such as grandparents, also had an active role in the socialization process of the respondents with regard to arts and culture. This will be illustrated with an example later. It emphasizes the fact that is indicated by symbolic interactionism, saying that people need the other in order to define the self and to create meaning with regard to the world around us (Cooley, 1902). At an early age, the respondents were brought to museums, stimulated to read or to engage in other cultural activities, such as playing an instrument. This also emphasizes the potential large volume of cultural capital of the respondents. This stands in line with the idea that the cultural consumption of people depends on their social backgrounds (Alexander, 2003). In this case, the respondents had parents with high education levels, who played an important role for their socialization with art and culture. Mostly, they grew up in families that very much valued arts and culture.

Besides the high education level of the respondents' parents, the respondents themselves have finished- or are engaged in a high education program too. Without an exception, all the respondents have a background in bachelor or master studies, varying from the art academy or literature studies to engineering or communication and media. However, this is partly caused by sampling. This indicates that the respondents have in common, that they value education. It also emphasizes the relation between a large volume of cultural capital and school success as illustrated by DiMaggio (1982).

Looking at the respondents' values, it is remarkable that most of them mention to have, what one may call, soft values and ambitions, such as love and respect or the ambition to help others. A representative fragment of an interview will demonstrate this:

“Interviewer: Ok uhm what are your most important values in life, can you think of three?”

Interviewee: Uhm values... Uhm, I feel like, honesty, being humble, like not letting things get to your head too much, like your successes or anything. Let me see, humble... Uhm, I’m trying to think about values here haha. Uhm, I can’t think of a third one but basically pfff, yeah charity. I feel like humbleness is quiet the same, it goes hand in hand you know”.

(Valeria, 18, Caracas)

Two aberrant ambitions of respondents (aberrant from helping others and being happy), refer to a professional career that are both artistic (working for Disney and writing a novel).

Personal issues that they have in common are usually able to be summarized as stress (related to study or work) and to a lesser extent insecurities in relation to their social lives. Again, one has to take account of the fact that there might not be a significant relation, between the stress they have and other characteristics of the respondents being a fan of the *Bildungsroman*. Other issues of attention, beyond the personal sphere that frequently occurs is the news. The issues they pay attention to from within the news, vary from national political issues to the international highlights and topics about human tragedies.

Further characteristics that they have in common and that do have a possible relation with their admiration for the *Bildungsroman* is their great appreciation for art in general, the varying degrees to which they are consumers of other cultural institutions, such as museums, music and cinema and their political preference which is usually based on left-wing political values. Remarkable is that the east-European respondents use the term liberal to describe their political preference as it has a somewhat different connotation in comparison to other parts of the world. Two of the south-American respondents are controversial towards the politics in their country because of corruption. What most respondents seem to have in common is that they value social equality. The following quote will illustrate this;

“Interviewee: I think, the issues that are mostly interesting for me in politics are education and I think education is very entwined with equality. If everyone would get a good education, equality would be a lot more achievable, so I don’t know if that answers your question.

Interviewer: So you stand for equality?

Interviewee: Yeah”.

(Julia, 24, Budapest)

The interests of the respondents are clearly similar. They all value art and share some similar political values. Most of them have parents with high educational levels and also the respondents have a high educational level themselves. Based on this one can say, that fans are part of interpretative communities (Alexander, 2003).

When the respondents are asked to mention similarities between them and other fans of the *Bildungsroman*, they use a variety of terms from the same spectrums of themes to describe it. An overview of the words that are used to describe their similarities is the following: adventurous, social, being fond of traveling, curios, wandering, excited about life, sensitive towards others, young, optimistic, open-minded, interested in literature, eager to develop and philosophical. Fragments of two different interviews regarding this topic are the following:

“Interviewer: But you share the same values?”

Interviewee: Yeah because I think that Paulo Coelho really helped my friend to overcome her fears of life and she became more philosophical because of that and since I’m also very philosophical we connected much more because of that.

Interviewer: So you’re both philosophical and you share the same values?”

Interviewee: Yeah”

(Flavia, 20, Bucharest)

Interviewee: “People that have many different interests and who are always willing to develop and to learn about any area of life, people that are interested in everything, uhm, who don’t hold on to a specific view on life, but who can adjust their view, for instance when they are reading a book”.

(Martin, 32, Tokyo)

This indicates that the respondents recognize some similarities between each other as being fans of the *Bildungsroman*. It corresponds with the theory of Solomon saying that people with a common history of enculturation share similarities in their interpretation of symbolic symbols and that cultural goods function as a mediator of defining the self (Solomon, 1983). With regard to the *Bildungsroman*, the respondents consume the same type of cultural goods, so one can say that to some extent the respondents use the same mediator of defining the self. This might also result in the fact that the respondents have similar descriptions of their selves as fans of the *Bildungsroman*.

To summarize, one can state that the respondents have in common a potential large volume of cultural capital, a strong socialization with art and culture (mostly from a young age due to the involvement of close relatives and mostly parents). It emphasizes the idea that people need the other in order to construct meaning from the world around us (Cooley, 1902). Looking at their high educational level and their ambition to study, they seem to value education and personal development. It is also clear that they have in common that they value a variety of art forms. This may stand in line with the fact that their values and ambitions are rather soft and humane than hard or competitive. When they are asked to describe themselves based on similarities with other fans, they use terms that indicate that they are potentially adventurous, open minded, interested in other people and literature and eager to develop.

5.2 Definition of the Bildungsroman

As the theory section of this study has demonstrated, the *Bildungsroman* is rather an ambiguous genre. One of the goals of the interviews was to find out about descriptions and definitions of the *Bildungsroman* according to the perception of its fans. Looking at the books they have read and where they refer to, when they recall the *Bildungsromane* they have read, they also mention for instance novels from categories such as spiritual, fantasy, transgressive fiction and dirty realism (see overview *Bildungsromane*). However, their descriptions of the novels show strong kinship with the *Bildungsroman*. This means that it seems to be that literary genres can overlap with each other and that there is an expansion of the genre of the *Bildungsroman* according to the perceptions of the respondents due to which their choice of *Bildungsromane* sometimes departs from traditional, populist lists of *Bildungsromane*. A novel is not an absolute and exclusive part of one genre at the expense of another according to the perceptions of the respondents and their descriptions of the novels they refer to which substantiates this argument.

The terms that respondents use to define the *Bildungsroman* can be brought together under the concepts of growth (6 times), development (2 times), (positive) transformation (4 times), overcoming obstacles, finding out about life and a personal quest. Those terms are used to describe (a part of) the life path of the protagonist that is reflected in the novels. Examples of distinctive, coherent (with regard to theory) and representative (with regard to the other definitions given by other respondents) definitions given by two respondents are the following:

“Interviewee: Uhm basically I first learned it in high school. I was in the ninth grade and I would describe it as, not as a type of, as a genre, but as a type of narrative, because basically the main character develops him or herself throughout the novel and discovers his inner motivation and how he can evolve to, both help himself and the people around him”

(Flavia, 20, Bucharest)

“Interviewee: The bildungsroman... The simple way to describe it, it's a process, it's going through stages, an individual who is growing up individually obviously and finding out, what life is about, whether the experiences that he or she makes are good or bad uhm that's a different story, but the important thing is finding out uhm what life is about”.

(Tiziano, 41, New Jersey)

Definitions and descriptions given by respondents put emphasis on the growth of the protagonist and they correspond to varying extents with the theoretical descriptions. Moretti (2000) for instance states that the story of the *Bildungsroman* follows a protagonist from childhood or adolescence into maturity. The obstacles that the protagonist encounters on its way to maturity or to a better self, form the necessary stages of his development. Engel states that the *Bildungsroman* is a story about a young individual. This character stands in life as a wanderer, searching for related souls in friendship and love. In the meantime he or she is confronted with the hard realities of life that one encounters while growing up. The protagonist grows into maturity or to a higher plan of being and the protagonist discovers the self and finds his vocation in life (Engel, 2008). None of the definitions given by the respondents deviates significantly from such theoretical descriptions. It also emphasizes the theory of Solomon, saying that people with a common history of enculturation (as it has been demonstrated by drawing the profile) share similarities in their interpretation of symbolic symbols. Those cultural symbols are of influence on individuals perception of social reality (Solomon, 1983). Looking at the respondents' values, ambitions and other aspects that determine their position in life and their perception of social reality, one can say there are similarities. Furthermore Bauer, McAdams and Pals (2008) demonstrate that people in American society as an exponent of the modern, western world, admire characters that overcome obstacles. One can say that also goes for members of other western societies. It for sure goes for the respondents.

5.3 Overview of *Bildungsromane*

The following table implies an overview of novels that are considered to be *Bildungsromane* (according to the respondents). These are the novels they referred to during the interviews. One has to take account of the fact that some of them were mentioned several times by different persons.

Novel	Author
On the road	Jack Kerouac
Julia and the wolves	Jean Craighead George
A swiftly tilting planet	Madeleine l'Engle
The outsiders	S.E. Hinton
The secret garden	Francis Burnett
Harry Potter	J.K. Rowling
The Catcher and the rye	Sallinger
Percy Jackson	Riordan
The Perks of being a wallflower	Chbosky
Pinocchio	Carlo Collodi
Jane Eyre	Charlotte Bronte
La Chatreuse de Parma	Stendhal
The name of the wind	Patrick Rothfuss
The Game of thrones	George R.R. Martin
David Copperfield	Charles Dickens
Pride and prejudice	Jane Austen
The Red and the black	Stendhal
Enigma Otiliei	George Calinescu
Harab Alb	Unknown author
Motorcycle diaries	Ernesto Che Guevara
Norwegian wood	Haruki Murakami
Stoner	John Williams
The Hitchhikers' guide to the galaxy	Douglas Adams
American psycho	Bret Easton Ellis
Bright lights, big city	Jay McInerney
Thousand autumns of Jacob de Zoet	David Mitchell

Voyage au bout de la nuit	Celine
Paaz	Myrthe van der Meer
Mijn allerliefste vijand	Milou van der Horst
Looking for Alaska	John Green
Extremely loud and incredibly close	Jonathan Safran Foer
The Alchemist	Paulo Coelho
To kill a mockingbird	Harper Lee

5.4 First encounter with *Bildungsroman*

The first encounter with the *Bildungsroman* of the respondents according to their own reflection can be spread over two age categories. For some of the respondents, the socialization with the *Bildungsroman* took place during an early age (before they were 10 years old), due to the introduction of fairy tales (like for instance Pinocchio), folklore tales that show a lot of kinship with the *Bildungsroman* and popular children' books such as Harry Potter. Mostly, parents were involved with the socialization with the *Bildungsroman* of the respondents at an early age.

Interviewee: "I don't remember which one was first because my mom would always read to me and my brother every single night and there were a lot of Bildungsromans among those as well and probably I would consider Narnia a Bildungsroman, I guess. It depends on your definition, but maybe that was one of the earlier ones but also there were a lot of stories about kids growing up, just American books, all kind of different stories, a lot of them like slave stories and things like that".

(Rebeka, 24, Budapest)

As it has been stated previously, Harry Potter is often a novel that represents one of the first encounters of the respondents with the *Bildungsroman*.

"Interviewee: Ok so uhm my dad and my mom always said "you have to read", because my writing in Portuguese is full of mistakes, so they said "you have to read" to not make all those mistakes in writing and I was like I don't like to read, let me do my things, but my friend, he's my best friend now too and he said to me oh you have to read that book, it's so awesome. I was like 10 years old and it was Harry Potter so I was like I don't like to read

and he was like; try it try it, you're going to like it! And I thought ok let's see it then and then I started seeing what reading was all about and I was like addicted".

(Carolina, 22, Madeira)

As Bourdieu (1986 [2011]) has demonstrated that the volume of cultural capital is very much entwined with the aesthetic disposition of people. The respondents were people with a potential large volume of cultural capital, which is according to Bourdieu of influence on the way they perceive art (Bourdieu, 1986 [2011]). This means that their positive evaluations of their earliest *Bildungsroman* is potentially affected by their volume of cultural capital and the aesthetic dispositions they have.

The previous quotes also demonstrate that not only the parents or close relatives have an important role in the socialization process of the respondents with the *Bildungsroman*. The other age category during which the respondents have their first encounter with the *Bildungsroman* is during their teenage years. Within this age category, friends, school and media in that order, have a dominant role for the first encounter of the respondents with the *Bildungsroman*. It emphasizes the importance of the subjective interpretation of meaning created from objects, such as cultural goods. This is also indicated by the theory of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986). The respondents themselves had an active role in their creation of meaning with regard to the *Bildungsroman*. The evaluation of the *Bildungsroman* is to some extent determined by subjective interpretations and their agency. Another respondent's first *Bildungsroman* was *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, a book about growing up during the late teenage years. This respondent encountered the *Bildungsroman* during a later, teenage phase of life. More of the respondents encountered the *Bildungsroman* during a similar life phase.

“Interviewer: (...) you told me that you came into contact with it through Youtube video’s?”

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: How did you get at the Youtube video’s?

Interviewee: Because my friends uhm at college looked at it, so they said that I should look at the video’s.

Interviewer: Ah so your college friends suggested you to look at those Youtube video’s?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, I think, before I was in college, I don’t read a lot. I think it’s because, here in Porondio we don’t have libraries or bookstores, but when I was in college, when I knew all these new friends. They were always reading so they involved me in literature things”.

(Adriana, 21, Morelia)

The previous examples demonstrate that especially parents were involved with the first encounter of the respondents with the *Bildungsroman*. At an older age, for some of the respondents, friends, school and to a lesser extent media, have an important role with regard to the first encounter of the respondents.

As has been announced previously, the first encounter with the *Bildungsroman* is often positively evaluated and it may have functioned as a stimulus to read more from the same genre. The following fragment is of a respondent who mentioned a Romanian fairytale to be the first *Bildungsroman* she has read. It was introduced to her by her parents during her childhood. Eventually she gives an evaluation of her experience of her first *Bildungsroman* and it illustrates the positivity of the first encounter, which is representative for most of the first encounters of respondents.

“Interviewer: (...) what did you think of it?”

Interviewee: Uhm I think it was actually very well structured, very well build and you could really understand it and it’s also very good for adaptation, for example for theatre for kids. It is very popular and uhm yeah I really liked it and it’s good that it has a very different style from other fairytales, because most fairytales have a witch or fairies or something, but this was very different. It shows the enemies of the main hero, it shows the bad things about society and how, what people can be tricked, so it’s not like always nice and the hero wins without any difficulties so that’s why it was maybe a bit different”.

(Flavia, 20, Bucharest)

Obviously not all of the respondents give a substantive evaluation of their first *Bildungsroman*. The following quote is an evaluation of a Hungarian folklore tale that is called *Sicha*.

“Interviewer: (...) did you like it?”

Interviewee: Yeah, I loved it, I read it many times actually and it was such a good thing. I also knew that my grandfather read it and then my mom read it and then I read it so it’s also like that and uhm yeah I remember how it looks and I still have it somewhere”.

(Julia, 24, Budapest)

As mentioned, the positive evaluation of the first *Bildungsroman* of the respondents can plausibly be a stimulus due to which the respondents, discover other novels of the *Bildungsroman* and eventually those, they consider the most meaningful to them. Plausibly sentiments of childhood and family relations can be traced as the previous quote illustrates, referring to the respondent’s socialization with the *Bildungsroman*.

Regarding the encounter with the most important *Bildungsromane* of the respondents it were also close family members, friends, school and media (also film adaptations) who were involved. One of the respondents illustrates the variety of possibilities due to which the respondents encountered the *Bildungsroman*.

“Interviewer: (...) Can you tell me for each one of them how did you come across them?”

Interviewee: Uhm so for David Copperfield, I came across him when I watched the hallmark movie and then I read the book and it’s also because Charles Dickens is given as one of the writers who influenced the development of the British society in terms of how people used to fight for their rights. He was, he was not only a writer but a social activist mostly.

Interviewer: So you also had him at school or? Yeah with history lessons, so yeah that’s basically how I came across it. For pride and prejudice by Jane Austen, uhm we had BBC at the TV and it was a hugely popular TV series with Colin Firth, in his male role so that’s why I watched Pride and prejudice. And afterwards I read the book. Uhm The red and the black, same thing, it was a TV series. It was on an Italian channel and they made an adaptation of the book and I read it. Uhm Oteilia, I studied it on high school since we had it for the Romanian national exam and with Harab Alb the fairytale, I just came across it in my parents’ library but otherwise it’s also mandatory for the Romanian national exam”.

(Flavia, 20, Bucharest)

She refers to the role of family, media and school for the encounter with the most important *Bildungsromane*, but in other cases friends are often involved.

To summarize, one can make a distinction, between two periods during which the respondents encountered the *Bildungsroman*. One of them is the early childhood, for which close relatives are involved with the encounter of respondents with a *Bildungsroman*, usually due to the introduction of fairytales, folkloric tales or popular children's books. The other one is during the teenage years of respondents. Then it are friends, school and media (including film adaptations) that are involved with the introduction of the *Bildungsroman* to the respondents. For this period, respondents refer to young adult books, such as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* or novels from the English literature such as *Jane Eyre*.

5.5 Interaction

The respondents as representatives of fans of the *Bildungsroman*, seem not to be so much aware of their engagement in activities of interaction about the novels they have read, even though they were approached about the *Bildungsromane* through interactive social media, such as *Goodreads*: a digital network that is concerned with reading and novels. According to the respondents, they express themselves about the novels they have read incidentally. In some cases, they talk about it with friends or family for a variety of reasons.

Sometimes, expressing about a novel is just a way of revealing enthusiasm. In this case, respondents feel enthusiast and they want to express their feelings about what they have read, but this very much differs per person. Some say that consuming a book is very personal:

“Interviewee: (...) they're not going to hear the cricket, they're not going to have that smell, they're not going to know you exactly... and with a book as well, like you can say, like yeah it was a great book and it was so fantastic but even the person you were talking with, they are not going to have the same imagination of that same story”.

(Rebeka, 24, Budapest)

It underlines the idea that consumption is a very subjective experience (Solomon, 1983).

Whereas there are others that consider interaction about a novel more meaningful:

“Interviewee: (...) if I read a book and I'm very enthusiast about it then I'm like; I have to talk about it with someone... But it's very hard when they haven't read the book, so I try to

make them read the book, what I think not a lot of people like haha I'm just pushing books on them, but a lot of times it's also good, because me and my mom kind of read the same books some times and we read these back and forth and I read a chapter and I'm like I just read a chapter and I really have to talk about it!"

(Julia, 24, Budapest)

In some cases, the respondents do not only express themselves about a novel, because of their enthusiasm, but moreover for their beliefs that others could relate to it as much as they do themselves. They recommend the *Bildungsromane* they have read to others, especially friends, when they feel like they would appreciate it and that it can even help them. Therefore, recommendation is one of the major reasons for which respondents express themselves about the novels towards others.

Sometimes, respondents express themselves about a novel to make a point towards another person or in order to get a sense of the other due to his or her reaction. This has been mentioned by different respondents a couple of times. One fragment that illustrates this is the following:

"Interviewee: (...) I usually talk about it when I want to make a point haha. It's like a subtle thing, but sometimes it's too subtle for people. I have that from my dad haha, who read so many novels and learned stuff through books, not only novels but also historical articles about war and all that and he likes to say things such as 'history repeats itself' and people can understand or don't understand, but sometimes they only understand what they want. I use it in conversations when I want to make like a parallel (...)"

(Flavia, 20, Bucharest)

5.6 Reading and everyday life

The most common time to read for the respondents during their everyday lives is at night. Some of them explicitly say that they like to read at night, before they go to sleep. The following quotes illustrate this, as well as it emphasizes the frequently mentioned role of escapism. Reading is often mentioned as a break or an escape from reality.

"Interviewer: You read at night?"

Interviewee: And always right before I go to sleep.

Interviewer: Ok, at that time of day you have the most time to read?"

Interviewee: Uhm, because uhm, I don't know at the end of the day I want to live other things, you know. It is the time that all the uhm, when all the things are quietly, I transport myself to another world or time or whatever I am reading.

Interviewer: Cool, haha, so then you escape from reality?

Interviewee: Yeah, and at night it's easier.

Interviewer: Ok, and do you feel like you need it at the end of the day, that you need to escape a bit?

Interviewee: Yeah and I think it's like your dreaming and... having a dream and you can cut it and you sleep and dream the same things and, yeah it's an escape".

(Adriana, 21, Morelio)

The night time is the most frequently occurring time for the respondents to read. Other explicit times that are mentioned by the respondents are during the holidays and in transit. It also illustrates that fiction and fictional characters expose us to variations to our own experiences and that it explores other realities for us as stated by Ricoeur (see De Mul, 2000).

It is also quiet common that respondents bring books with them, whenever they go out:

“Interviewer: Ok uhm what are the most typical times you read during the day?”

Interviewee: Well... At night and uhm I always carry around books with me, like three.

Interviewer: Really?

Interviewee: Yeah, like three because whenever I go out and I find a nice place and I feel like yeah this is a good place to read so I'm gonna read haha so basically whenever I find such a place over the day and before sleeping".

(Valeria, 18, Caracas)

It also demonstrates that reading can be seen as an activity of taking a break during the day. This is also emphasized by Sumara, who argues that reading to people is as an interruption of everyday life (Sumara, 2002).

Most of the respondents do not recognize a specific emotional state of mind, that makes them want to read a *Bildungsroman*. Apart from the need for escapism that often seems to be an effect of reading, they state that picking out a *Bildungsroman*, happens randomly:

“Interviewee: I don’t know, I really read a whole bunch of them during the last years but I guess I just happen to find those books or I’m just yeah, that’s just how, kind of randomly I guess. I don’t specifically look for them but that’s what I end up reading anyway”.

(Rebeka, 24, Budapest)

The previous quote illustrates the case for the majority of the respondents, but there are some remarkable other examples too, which indicate that choosing a *Bildungsroman* connects to an emotional mood described as inspirational:

“Interviewee: (...) whenever I feel like, inspirational, like I’m, I’m a little bit deeper and I want... Like sometimes I read uhm I don’t know, like Game of thrones which is not like deep or you know, you don’t think a lot, it’s mostly like war and battles you know and relations and you know... This one I feel more like, ok I wanna read something that I wanna think a little bit more about, that makes me go a little bit deeper or something”.

(Valeria, 18, Caracas)

Just as the majority of the respondents, this girl is in her adolescence or young adulthood. Again, one has to take account of the fact that people in their late adolescence or early adulthood are actively exploring ideologies in the world around them in order to shape values and beliefs (McAdams, 2001).

5.7 Life periods and the Bildungsroman

Looking at the definitions and descriptions of the *Bildungsroman*, given by the respondents, one can say that the *Bildungsroman* is a novel of transformation and growth. Those concepts are relatable for people of all ages, so the appreciation of the genre is not necessarily bound to a certain age. Bauer, McAdams & Pals (2008) have already demonstrated that people admire characters that overcome obstacles and that exhibit the virtues of growth. This is also demonstrated by the participation in this study of two respondents who were in their 30s and 40s. Most of the respondents seem to feel that it is not only about youth growing up, but about growth as a phenomenon of a life-long process. One has to take account of the fact that most symbolic messages that construct identity arrive from adolescence and young adulthood. For this reason, coming of age stories are universal beloved (McAdams, 2001).

“Interviewer: [Talking about the Bildungsroman] I think it does not really, uhm only appeal to people during their adolescence.

Interviewee: Yeah I agree, so that was what I was saying in the beginning that I think it’s not always only the teenager growing into an adult but maybe an adult growing into a better adult or something like that”.

(Julia, 24, Budapest)

At the same time, most of the respondents say that the *Bildungsroman* is their constant pick of a novel, so according to the perception of the respondents, the *Bildungsroman* is not particular for readers of a certain age. However, one has to take account of the fact that most of the respondents (except for 2) were young adults.

A minority of the respondents states that they read most *Bildungsromane* when they were in their adolescence.

“Interviewer: (...) were there certain periods in your life during which you read most Bildungsromans?

Interviewee: Yes I think my teenage years and during my BA when I had time, I read several, what I like about them is I read a lot from different cultures. So I think maybe through my high school, I read, I don’t know maybe less of a variety but when I was in my BA, I read a bunch from like all over the world, from china or India, more different and more uhm bigger, more selective I guess”.

(Rebeka, 24, Budapest)

However, this quote does not state that the respondent had most of her affinity with the *Bildungsroman* during a certain age, she rather gives pragmatic reasons for which she was during a certain period more able to read from the genre.

Furthermore, some respondents got very much involved with certain *Bildungsromane*, because they related to it to particular events or periods in their lives. In these cases there seems to be a significant relation between their consumption of particular *Bildungsromane* (during the interview referred to as the most important *Bildungsromane* and specific periods or meaningful events in the lives of the respondents. Sometimes the particular *Bildungsroman* also had influence on the respondents’ ways of coping with the situations. In the following fragment, one of the respondents speaks about a book she got, because of her eating disorder:

“Interviewer: what was it about the book about Anorexia that caught you, because you told me you were dealing with a similar problem? Then how did you experience the book? You told me that it helped you and that it at the same time didn’t help you?”

Interviewee: Well I think that the book helped me so far that it showed me how bad it actually is. You obviously know that it’s bad, but... It helped me seeing how other people are sad about it, how they try to help and it showed me that everything will be all right eventually, but that it will never fully disappears. That confirmation I got from that book”.

(Emma, 20, Rotterdam)

It emphasizes the fact that is indicated by Sumara (2002), saying that reading implies an interruption of someone’s perception and that this interruption can be needed for it to get better. The respondent also states to have more empathy for others in real life as a result of the book, which is also indicated by Sumara (2002).

It is evident that identification is an important process and condition for respondents in order to relate to a novel and to increase the ability to feel somehow subject to it. Further on in this chapter, more elaboration will follow on how the *Bildungsroman* is an important object of identification for the respondents and how the consumption of the novel contributes to the personal development and potential construction of narrative identity.

5.8 Attraction of the Bildungsroman

Obviously, the respondents feel attracted to the *Bildungsroman* for a variety of reasons. Some of them feel pre-dominantly attracted to a particular writing style of authors from within the genre of the *Bildungsroman*. The respondents prefer the writing style sometimes to be beautiful or poetic, for its use of extraordinary words. It also underlines the fact that the respondents have a particular taste also with regard to distinctions from within the genre of the *Bildungsroman*:

“Interviewee: (...) for me it’s very important to have a good writing. Not beautiful in a conventional sense I guess, but it has to have its distinct style.

Interviewer: How would you describe this style?

Interviewee: Well it’s not one style, but it needs to have a distinct style, it has to be genuine, it has to be, yeah, beautiful in a not, you know, sunset kind of way, but just using words that are beautiful words and that are nice to say and, like, you know the Kite runner. That’s also a Bildungsroman. I read it and I read it because it’s a good story but to be quiet honest some of

the writings, I felt like it was not all that amazing and that was a disappointment to me and the Dreamer it has, sometimes there is a lot of uhm drawings, sometimes there is just poetry, because It's about an actual poet who lives and sometimes the poems are integrated and sometimes there is no text at all in the page and sometimes it is just text and it's very, it's very thought about and it's very amazingly written. It has to be exiting language, like, like the word pandemonium. That's an awesome word or equilibrium. These are great words and if someone uses words that are, what I read them and they're like wow this is...".

(Rebeka, 24, Budapest)

This fragment emphasizes the differences in writing styles from within the genre of the *Bildungsroman*. The respondents give an evaluation of taste with regard to writing styles. This is influenced by her cultural capital and through the aesthetic disposition (Bourdieu, 1986 [2011])

Among the respondents, significant taste differences manifest with regard to the writing style. There are other respondents that state to feel attracted to the *Bildungsroman* for other distinct style characteristics of writing. Some of the respondents explain that they feel attracted to the *Bildungsroman*, because they can relate to it very much. Later on, this chapter will elaborate on the phenomenon and depths of identification of the respondents with the *Bildungsroman*. In the following fragment, one of the respondents explains that the ability to relate to a novel increases when the writing style includes a convincing way of storytelling:

“Interviewer: How is the Bildungsroman so convincing to you? How do they take you into this fictional world?”

Interviewee: Uhm whenever the writer does not try to explain too much. Whenever the writer is explaining a lot about characters and about situations then it starts to stagnate for me, uhm I mean, the writer in that sense needs to have trust in the reader, that the reader has its imagination and does not need to have every detail or every motivation written for him, uhm yes that is convincing to me, if the writer follows his own course and does not pay attention to what attracts the reader

Interviewer: Ok and do you also have a preference for how it is written? For example from the perspective of the main character?

Interviewee: No not at all, not at all. That's what I want to leave up to the writer and if that works out convincingly, then it will all work out just fine for me”.

(Martin, 33, Tokyo)

Just as other examples given by respondents, the previous fragment illustrates the attraction of authenticity to respondents. They state that they want the writing style to be authentic as a reflection of the writers' spontaneous thoughts.

There are also other characteristics that appeal to the interests of the respondents. More so than the writing style, the book characters are mentioned by the respondents, while they give a positive aesthetic evaluation of the *Bildungsromane* they refer to. A majority of quotes in relation to the evaluations of respondents is related to the characters. One has to take account of the fact that the respondents seem to be attracted to different dimensions in relation to the characters. Obviously it also depends on the particular *Bildungsroman*, what about its characters is fascinating or interesting to the respondents. Distinctions can be made among positive evaluations with regard to the character's development, their relations, their virtues, their obstacles, their individuality and authenticity, their irony, their layers, their realistic presentation, et cetera. Some fragments of different interviews will follow in order to give an impression of the variety of characteristics of *Bildungsroman* characters that appeal to the interests of the respondents.

The following fragment comes from a respondents evaluation of the book *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. It is representative for other respondents, because it reflects the attraction that *Bildungsroman* characters can have. They express their individuality in contrast with the context of the book, which is often seen as a reflection of society. It also illustrates how a *Bildungsroman* novel can appeal to the experience world of fans. It is therefore worth to quote it at length:

“Interviewee: I could also relate so much to this book, because I feel like, society now, wants to make you believe that you can almost not achieve your dreams. You're almost like, yeah, you have your dreams, but yeah I'm not gonna pursue them because it's too difficult right. Uhm yeah. And then, for example art. People who like art, uhm tend to be like yeah I want to study art because that's what I love and then people start telling them like yeah you're gonna have problems because you're not gonna have money and probably you're not gonna be famous and it's really difficult to succeed in this world and then you go along with them and you just study finance to appeal to what they say and to make money and then you just study finance and get money and get stable, so that's what you do but are you really happy with what you do. So this, he Santiago, the character from the book, he has to go through the Sahara desert twice to find his love and it's someone that he only met once and he was trying to pursue his dreams you know, like to be someone who is not a shepherd, he wanted to find

out, right. He knew the risks and he still did it so I feel like that's you know, it's not impossible to achieve your dreams. If you have the motivation enough and if you, if you are focused enough then you can achieve them, that is what I feel.

Interviewer: And the book, that was the message of the book and it convinced you or what would you say?

Interviewee: It did, yeah, like the message, have you read it?

Interviewer: No.

Interviewee: Ok so it's about this guy who is a shepherd, his name is Santiago and then uhm his dad wants him to be a priest but he doesn't want to, because he wants to travel and go to Egypt to find a treasure or something like that. So he has to travel the world to find this and everyone tells him you can be killed and some else things might happen to you on the way, but he is brave enough to go and do it you know. And then he... One of this days he is somewhere and he sees this girl and they look at each other and he is like yeah this is the love of my life. Haha it's pretty dramatic in the book but you can, yeah well ok. And he decides to go for her and... yeah he goes to Egypt and he gets into this uhm house of crystals and he helps this guy so he can earn a little bit of money but he can still go on a trip and he likes the place but.. and he settles and he has money there but he still wants to go for his dreams so he puts that away and goes. So yeah it's basically about the struggles of going through steps in your life and finding what you really like and going for your dreams, that's how I feel".

(Valeria, 18, Caracas)

As a representative of many others, this fragment illustrates how the consumption of a *Bildungsroman* is experienced as an interruption of cultural commonsense and how it constitutes perceptual change and personal coherence (Sumara, 1983). It also demonstrates how narrative representations are able to affect the readers' norms, desires and expectations (Hakemulder, 2000). It also underlines the idea that people's lives are narratable. The previous fragment specifically illustrates how the consumption of a *Bildungsroman* can be a form of narration due to which an individual appeals to the question who he or she is (Cavarero, 2014). The appreciation for the novel as a form of art, can be explained by the theory of Gadamer in which he argues for an active task of the recipient. It demonstrates that the meaning of art must be found in the recognition of values and truth or, in other words; "*im fremden das eigene zu herkenne*" (Postma, 2002).

Some of the respondents make comparisons with fictional characters of other literary genres in order to explain why they feel attracted to the *Bildungsroman* in particular, because of its characters:

“Interviewer: (...) what makes the Bildungsroman so much better for you?”

Interviewee: Well, that there are things happening. I think, crime books usually, even though there is a lot of mystery and stuff involved, but they are very stagnant like the characters do not evolve, they are very flat and the story itself would be more interesting but I don't know, I like people more than stories. I like the characters more and I think that if I like the characters then I will automatically like the book, even if the story or the plot itself is not that fascinating or interesting.

Interviewer: Ok so you think the Bildungsroman provides more layers also in the characters?

Interviewee: Yeah, definitely!

Interviewer: And why do you like that about the Bildungsroman? Why do you like these layers in a character?

Interviewee: Because they are more human and more relatable, I would guess”.

(Julia, 24, Budapest)

The previous fragments are just a few examples from what the respondents said to elaborate on how they value the *Bildungsroman* for its aspects that have to do with the characters. The examples given, emphasize the importance of *Bildungsroman* characters to the respondents. One can say, that they are relatable to them and they reflect on those characters in order to explain why the *Bildungsroman* appeals to them so strong. This also explains the potential influence of reading *Bildungsromane* on the respondents.

Some of the respondents value particularly *Bildungsromane* for the inspiration it generates. Many times, the inspiration that they receive from the novels, functions as an important stimulus for personal experiences:

“Interviewee: it inspires me always to do and go out and to do more and sometimes it just inspires you to put down the book and to go out in the world and do stuff, so...”

Interviewer: Can you give an example of such a situation?

Interviewee: Uhm, like maybe with The secret garden because that is the most recent one. It is a lot about being out in nature and experiencing nature and doing physical things to get better emotionally and also physically just to get better and less sick or something and it

made me a lot to just walk around, like go on a hike, or just walk my dog for a very long time and stuff like that”.

(Julia, 24, Budapest)

This phenomenon is also indicated by Solomon, who argues, as mentioned, that cultural goods are potential social stimuli (Solomon, 1983).

In line with the previous, some respondents state that they feel attracted to the *Bildungsroman*, because of the need they feel to engage in profound activities. They consume *Bildungsromane* in the hope to find inspiration or for the desire for escapism:

“Interviewee: (...) I think I hope it helps me or it will help me deal with like superficial things on a day to day base you know. I feel like I want to be inspired or uhm yeah that kind of goes with uhm discovering new things you know.

Interviewer: What do you mean? Can you think of an example?

Interviewee: Pfff, uhm, I mean any book I pick, I hope it will bring me something, I hope it will fill a gap or that it will broaden my consciousness”.

(Franchesco, 24, Rio de Janeiro)

Again, it emphasizes the need for respondents to interrupt their day-to-day lives (Sumara, 2002). It also emphasizes their need for fiction in order to expose them to variations to their own experiences and the aspiration to explore new opportunities (De Mul, 2000)

The attraction of the *Bildungsroman* to its fans also seems to be determined by the respondents’ recognition of friends in the characters they read about. In other words, the respondents sometimes relate to them as if they are their friends. It is a common phenomenon that respondents have (seemingly) feelings of affection for the characters due to which they describe them as friends. This is because the characters very much appeal to the imagination of the respondents and to their sentiments of friendship. It demonstrates how narrative representations are able to affect the readers desires and expectations (Hakemulder, 2000). This seems to be the result of the fact that respondents feel involved with the story to an extent that they feel as if they are living at the side of the characters, while they are reading a *Bildungsroman*. There are several fragments of interviews that illustrate this. In the following fragment, a respondent talks about the protagonist of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*:

“Interviewer: You were telling me about uhm how you felt very personal involved with the

story, because of Charly talking to you basically?

Interviewee: Uhm, yeah, I remember, I said that at the end of the book all I wanted to do was to hug Charly and I could picture myself doing it but after the final end was something like don't worry I'll be ok and I hope you'll be ok too and so I couldn't stop crying haha, because I wanted to help him but he was brave enough and I don't know, it's like a friend of you being very strong and you felt so proud. Yeah I think I felt proud of Charly".

(Adriana, 21, Morelio)

Another example, very much illustrates the realness of the presentation of book characters due to which they truly come alive in the respondents' imagination. It makes them able to relate to the characters to an extent that they are in such a way involved with them that they recognize those characters as friends. This seems to be another common phenomenon that manifests among *Bildungsroman* fans. The following fragment illustrates this striking:

"Interviewee: (...) for instance when I finished Harry Potter, it was as if I had to say goodbye to people that didn't exist hahaha. So, I kind of felt sad because in this way, when I was in the first book, I was kind of thinking that I knew those people and they were growing with me you know, I grew with Harry Potter so, I think I define this as something keeping me company, you know that you have always, like; I'm going outside always with a book. For instance I'm reading Game of thrones right now and I feel like I'm always with someone that I know and I prefer to read books that have a long story. For instance I read a book that was called the Name of the wind (...) and I think that I have to read it all again, to know the persons, the characters again. You know, because they are like friends that you don't see for a long time and you want to know them again".

(Carolina, 22, Madeira)

To conclude one can say that the attraction of the *Bildungsroman* is on one hand based on aesthetic evaluations with regard to the writing styles and narratives, and on the other hand to the different characteristics of the genre (mostly the characters) to which the respondents can relate to in order to have a meaningful experience when reading. Sometimes, respondents state to value the writing style as an aspect of attraction, but in most of the cases, respondents feel attracted to the book characters for a variety of different reasons that can be brought together under a single denominator. They are objects of identification and in that sense they are potential objects of narration as they appeal to the respondents' questions of who they are

and to their desires to find out about the self (Cavarero, 2014). It is frequently noticeable that respondents can relate to the characters in a sense that they appeal to their imagination and that it makes them reflect. Sometimes, respondents relate to the books in such an intense way, because the presentation of the characters seems so real to them. In these cases respondents feel as if they relate to the characters as if they are their friends.

On a more general level, one can say that respondents feel attracted to consume a *Bildungsroman* to get inspired or to get engaged in profound activities. They often implicitly mention that they consider reading a *Bildungsroman* to be a profound activity and a way of escaping from the ordinary life. This escape seems to be equal to experiencing other lives, because they feel involved with the stories so much that they consider characters to be meaningful and personal relations.

Under the following theme, information will follow in order to elaborate on how these effects of escapism and identification are considered to be of influence on the respondents according to themselves. It implicates the most meaningful category of results with regard to the research question of this study, as it elaborates on the influence of all the aspects that are discussed, on the identities of the respondents.

5.9 Influence of Bildungsroman

In the previous sections it has been demonstrated that fans of the *Bildungsroman* relate to the novels intensively, because of a variety of reasons. In the following section, insights will be given with regard to the question of how this identification processes are of actual influence on the respondents and more specifically on their identities. The potential influence of the *Bildungsroman* as a result of its strongly given ability to relate to it can be categorized in a variety of effects that manifest according to the respondents.

First of all, it is very common that the *Bildungsromane* are of influence on its fans, because it makes them reflect. The *Bildungsromane* that were most important to the respondents, made them reflect, not just on the book, but more importantly on reality, on society, on their selves, on personal issues and relations. There are several examples that illustrate this:

“Interviewee: (...) the Bildungsroman books, make me reflect on my own life, my own decisions, the way I grew up or how I’m growing up because sometimes I think we forget that we are always growing up and it’s not really an age topic but more like a mental thing, goals and perspectives about life. These stories make you remember feelings, but more than that it

is more like remembering where you've been, where you want to be and where you are".
(Tiziano, 41, New Jersey)

McAdams states that narrative identity construction is entwined with people's reconstruction of their past, the way they perceive their present and shape their future (McAdams, 2001). This means that connections can be found between fans' consumption of the *Bildungsroman* and narrative identity construction. Other respondents give very specific examples of how a particular novel, made them reflect on real life issues or personal relations. One of the respondents illustrates this, when she refers to the influence that *Harry Potter* had on her state of mind:

"Interviewee: (...) it always makes you like appreciate your friends more and appreciate the relationships that you have with them and think of them as your, like you know back up or I don't know how you say it or that they will help you when you have a problem and you can turn to them.

Interviewer: But how does a story like Harry Potter do that, because it draws a bit of an ideal image of friendship? Or how does it work?

Interviewee: I think if you look at their scenario's, they also go or do all these very hard and big challenges together and then you think of your life, well you don't have these challenges but your friends are still there to help you and you should turn to them if you have a problem and you should also be that friend to other people, you should also help them through hard parts of their lives".

(Julia, 24, Budapest)

This emphasizes the fact that the *Bildungsroman* constitutes shifts in thinking (Sumara, 2002). The *Bildungsromane* make the respondents reflect and the effects of this reflection contains potential changes with regard to how people perceive the social world around them. The previous fragments are representative for many other respondents.

They clearly demonstrate that the novels they consume, provide them with remarkable situations of reflection. This reflective awareness seems to be a stimulus for the respondents to refine themselves on several aspects, to re-position themselves towards their personal relations or to have a more critical attitude towards real life issues. Again, it emphasizes the fact that cultural goods, in this case novels, function as social stimuli (Solomon, 1983).

The follow fragment shows how this reflection can also be decisive with regard to someone's attitude or behavior:

“Interviewee: (...) it was one of the lessons from David Copperfield for example that you need to stand up for yourself and be your own person and because of that I took up debating and I'm like more confident because of that so yeah I can see some comparisons with my life. I also like, I admire not only the novels but the authors too basically, because all of them were people that saw that the society need to change and that wanted to put some questions into the minds of their readers so I think the Bildungsroman makes the readers be very reflective of their selves and very critical about their selves and the society. I think that's the main reason why they attract people”.

(Flavia, 20, Bucharest)

The previous quote is representative of many others. It illustrates how consumers rely on meaning that they gained from cultural goods as a guide for their performances of social roles and that cultural goods function as a mediator of defining the self (Solomon, 1983).

The previous fragment(s) show(s) how much reflection as a result of consuming a *Bildungsroman* can be, to a large degree, intertwined with a learning process. Many respondents make similar statements in which they refer to a learning process or a reflection that changed the respondents' perspectives on certain cases as a result of reading one of their most important *Bildungsromane*. Reflection is often accompanied by a learning process. One of the respondents for instance mentions a book (*The Name of the Wind*) and explains how it was of influence on her perception of love:

“Interviewer: (...) can you maybe give a concrete example of something you learned due to a certain book?”

Interviewee: Uhm yeah, for instance in the Name of the wind, uhm. The story is about a boy and he... It's not magical, but it had to do with physics and something like that. He really likes a girl, but his love is so genuine, that you see; he gives love in a way without putting pressure on her to be whatever for him. He just feels happy with whatever she can give him. In that book I kind of see a different type of love and it made me thinking that love is not just about princess and stuff like that.

Interviewer: And how did you learn from that and how did you use that in your own life?

Interviewee: Not creating expectations about everyone but you have to except the whole

package and not just choose whatever you like from a person”.

(Carolina, 22, Madeira)

In line with Sumara (2002), respondents argue how the consumption of the *Bildungsromane* generated empathy and understanding for real life people and relations.

However, the potential influence of the *Bildungsroman* on its fans goes further than this. Sometimes, when it comes to the respondents’ most important *Bildungsromane*, the consumption of the novel is equal to internalizing parts of it, parts that are meaningful to them, according to the fans. They consider their most important books as an inherent part of their frames of reference. One of the respondents refers to her most important *Bildungsromane* as follows:

“Interviewee: (...) the way I could probably imagine it in a lot of ways is if you think about... There is yourself and then you have your parents and you know some of their stories from their lives and you have your grandparents and you know their stories and if you imagine them all of them behind you, you kind of, you can always reflect on them, you always know how maybe what they would think about this and you can always try to see how they would see a certain situation, what their perspectives are and they are always there for you to fall back on a little bit. Does this make sense?

Interviewer: Yeah it does.

Interviewee: And then if you read these stories and you really get involved with these stories it’s like an additional person that you can put around you or next to you, that you can reach out to and try to think about and try to touch and see how they would handle a certain situation”.

(Rebeka, 24, Budapest)

In this fragment, she states that she considers the most important *Bildungsromane* she read as an expansion of her references and this is representative to other fans as well. It underlines the idea that the respondents are narratable (Cavarero, 2014). In other words, the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* in many cases is a form of discovering and recognizing more about the self. The narratable self is an instrument for narrative identity construction, when people discover more about the self as it expands on their references. As a reference (based on values and beliefs), novels become of influence on a person’s behavior or decision making processes, as the previous fragment suggests.

Often the respondents recognize role models in the novels that were most important to them personally. This stands in line with the idea that people want to imitate their narrative heroes (Hakemulder, 2000). This is a very common phenomenon with regard to the respondents. The following example is a fragment of an interview with a respondent, who moved from Italy to the United States during his adolescence. He moved far away from his family to achieve what he wanted:

“Interviewee: (...) everyone knows where Pinocchio’s about, but the main thing about Pinocchio is that he is a very stubborn character. In other words he has a vision, he wants to do what he wants to do. People tell him what to do right. Gepetto tells him to go to school. The blue fairy tells him to be a good boy, but what does he do at the end. He does the total opposite of what people tell him, that’s because he’s an individual, he has his own vision of life. Yes he listens to what people tell him but he is not necessarily going to do what they tell him to do. So that’s something I’ve always liked about Pinocchio, the character Pinocchio, because he is someone who is going after his desires, you know, he’s going after his dreams.

Interviewer: So he was like an example for you?

Interviewee: He was an example for me! I’m like, you know it’s uhm, here is someone who is not influenced about what society, what family expects of him. You know, he is just going after whatever he wants to do.

Interviewer: Maybe you did the same by going to the United States or?

Interviewee: Yeah definitely, it could be, it could be, there could be some connection with that, with my passion for Pinocchio. There could be a connection between this and the dream that I had to come to the US, you know to just uhm, experience life, you know to get on this adventure and see where it was taking me”.

(Tiziano, 41, New Jersey)

Apart from the fact that many of the respondents, recognize role models in their most important *Bildungsromane*, which inspire them to be somewhat like them, the novels have an important exploratory value for the respondents. This has already been demonstrated previously, as it also has been linked to Ricoeur’s statement about the value of fictional characters as they explore new opportunities (De Mul, 2000) It gives them not only the opportunity to live or to experience different lives, as demonstrated previously, but at the same time it generates new aspirations, new goals and new experiences the respondents wish to have in order to come close to the experiences of book characters. They aspire often to

imitate their heroes (Hakemulder, 2000). This means that besides the characters also the contexts of the stories appeal to the imagination of the respondents:

“Interviewee: (...) as I said, it definitely gave me different ways of looking at the world, that’s for sure. It uhm, I mean it gave me stories to imagine and to think about and to when I’m bored or when I want to just step out of what is going on, it develops my imagination. I think it gives me alternative lives to live or alternative experiences to have, it gives me, of course it gives me...”

Interviewer: Does it make you do certain experiences?

Interviewee: Yea, that’s exactly what I was trying to say, it makes me want to have certain experiences, like with Julia of the wolves, ever since that book I have always wanted and will at some point of my life go to Alaska. We’ll see, it’s not a set thing, it’s not like I’m gonna do it now, but in my life I will go to Alaska and that’s a fact!”

(Rebeka, 24, Budapest)

In this case, as in many others, the respondents’ desires are affected by narrative representations (Hakemulder, 2000).

It is clear that respondents are to varying degrees attempting to apply the contents of their most important *Bildungsromane* on themselves. They seem to be actively engaged in activities of constructing or finding identity, the self, while they consume those novels. It underlines the fact that respondents are narratable with regard to the *Bildungsroman*. An important condition for the application of book contents on the self is the ability to relate to the novels.

This phenomenon of applying contents of novels on the self, happens in various ways. This happens from using them as role models or references to construct choices or behaviors with to engaging in similar activities as the book characters. The respondents do so in order to challenge personal values and to draw parallel experiences between themselves and book characters, while reflecting on the past. Hence, potential processes of narrative identity construction take place as the experiences of book characters, become personal experiences (McAdams, 2001) .

One of respondents themselves illustrate this process. A respondent explains (and is representative to other respondents) how he moved into the skin of book characters in real life, due to engaging in similar activities. It is a way of challenging and reconstructing personal values. He explains how the extremes of books inspired him to shift his boundaries.

One of the ways through which he shifted his boundaries was by stealing in order to execute a personal experiment. In the following fragment, he elaborates on these activities:

“Interviewer: Can you explain, what it was exactly, that you wanted to test?”

Interviewee: Uhm the idea that uhm young people without money... What I had stolen for example was a book and I still remember exactly what book it was. It was Bright lights, big city and I had this thoughts about... If a young person, a young student without money that wants to develop, fort hat person a book is something like bread. So if you're hungry and you can steal bread, then why would it not be accepted if you steal a book because you're hungry to develop. I wanted to experience how that feels.

Interviewer: And that desire is caused by the novels you have just mentioned, of Bukowski and so on?

Interviewee: Uhm, yes among others. I think this desire was always part of me to try such things, but I do think that those novels stimulated me to do it.

Interviewer: Ok nice, because I think it is remarkable that you did such an experiment and what did you eventually conclude from the experiment?

Interviewee: Uhm it's basically what I just said, so uhm, I wouldn't really mind if one would steal from big supermarkets or if we are talking about books, I wouldn't mind if one would steal from Amazone for instance. If it would be such a case, I wouldn't mind, but when it gets smaller, more personal, then I would have problems with it.

“Interviewer: Uhm I am wandering what caused your desire to find out about that?”

Interviewee: Uhm, well the book characters with an extreme view on life; I think you cannot really experience their extreme views, without practicing them yourself, without undertaking related action. I think it is the best way to try it, to discover what you think of it, because I think it is very easy to judge something. Without trying it yourself, it remains no more than theory.

Interviewer: So you mean it is basically a full displacement in those book characters?

Interviewee: Yes, you could say it was”.

(Martin, 32, Tokyo)

It is clear that some of the respondents draw parallels between the experiences of book characters and their own personal experiences. Sometimes they are connected to each other, because the book experiences are a stimulus to the respondents. They do not only want to agree with the values of a book just by reading about them, but they rather want to experience

similar events and activities in person in order to fully challenge their personal values.

The contents of novels can also be applied on the self in order to change an attitude towards several aspects of life. In some cases, the most important *Bildungsromane* of the respondents broadened their consciousness, because they relate to them and internalize insights from the novels. This is also linked to what Bourdieu calls embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986 [2011]) or to what Sumara calls embodied reading (Sumara, 2002). With regard to the *Bildungsroman*, both theories (especially the theory of embodied reading) emphasize that the respondents are narratable (Cavarero, 2014). To varying extents this can be of influence on the construction of identity as it can be seen as a never ending process.

The following fragment illustrates how embodied cultural capital is intertwined with identity construction:

“Interviewee (...) The Hitchhiker’s guide to the galaxy, I have a tattoo of that book.

Interviewer: Can you tell what is so special about that book?

Interviewee: Well there is, actually the humor and the big message of the book in a few words is that you should not take life too seriously, because maybe that is useless. And well, it’s about a character that takes life way too serious and who is very much worrying about small things, but in the meanwhile the whole universe is moving on very stupid and banal reasons, that have nothing to do with how he lives his life and well that message is presented with a lot of humor. And yes that had a very big impact on me, because I also take things very serious and I’m also very much thinking about things even when it makes no point.

Interviewer: And then when you tend to take things too serious, when it makes no sense, you think about that book for instance?

Interviewee: Uhm yes, that’s right, but I have the tattoo on my back, so I can’t see it and it’s not like i’m gonna stand in front of the mirror or something, but I took the tattoo yes, to remind me of that message.

Interviewer: Yes, because people in general take tattoo’s for very special reasons usually and otherwise you would not put it on your body I guess?

Interviewee: No that’s right, it has an important message where I like to remind myself of, even when the book is not on my bookshelf. So yes, that is an important thing.

Interviewer: So that book has helped you a lot with your view on life basically?

Interviewee: Yes that’s right, so I would not always take things too seriously”.

(Martin, 32, Tokyo)

The previous fragment clearly illustrates the narratable self of respondents. Due to the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* they appeal to the human desire for narration, which addresses the question who someone is (Cavarero, 2014).

The influence of the *Bildungsroman* on its fans (according to the respondents' input) stretches over a few categories. One of the effects is that it encourages reflection. The consumption of the *Bildungsroman* of its fans is a way of refining the self, of repositioning the self towards real life issues, such as personal relationships, society's expectations and so on. These processes of reflection in some cases generate an awareness of how to grow as an individual, because it stimulates a critical attitude among respondents towards themselves in relation to the real life interdependences they are involved in. The focus on the concept of growth, while narrating the self, results in a sense of eudaimonic well-being according to Bauer, McAdams and Pals (2008). This makes the reflective effect of the *Bildungsroman* to its fans, intertwined with learning and individual growth and it stands to some extent in line with what Gadamer refers to as: *im fremden das eigene zu erkennen*, as also discussed previously (Postma, 2002).

According to some *Bildungsroman* fans, the novels they consume, expand on their personal references. They consider them of influence on the way they behave with regard to real life situations and on how they make their choices. The comparisons of the influence of the *Bildungsroman* on the respondents is even made with the influence of parenting and education by some of the respondents. This again corresponds to some extent with the concept of embodied cultural capital, which is referred to by Bourdieu.

There are also important role models recognized by the respondents in the *Bildungsromane* they have read. The role model characters embody the ideals of the respondents and who they want to become in some cases. Readers want to imitate their narrative heroes according to Hakemulder (2000) They are a stimulus to grow and to become a completer person, according to the respondents. In this sense a lot of theories fall together as they constitute the concept of the narratable self.

Another effect, according to respondents is the exploratory value of the novels. The novels are to some extent an exploration of different realities, cultures and it gives the respondents an endless amount of possibilities to live other lives. It is a stimulus with regard to the personal life of respondents in the sense that the exploratory value stimulates them to explore the world and the layers of life. It emphasizes the fact that they describe themselves to be adventurous, eager to develop and interested in others. They are actively cultivating richness, depths and complexity of meaning in life (Bauer, McAdams & Pals, 2008).

It has also been demonstrated that the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* can be equal to challenging values and that in some cases this process shifts boundaries of the respondents. They relate to the novels to an extent that they want to live the lives (or parts of it) of the characters. In their lives, the respondents actively appeal to values of their most important novels due to undertaking activities and sometimes the paths they cross differ from society's expectations and from what is considered to be virtuously. This is how the cultural commonsense gets interrupted and how perceptions change (Sumara, 2002). It implicates another way of refining personal values that is according to the respondents to some extent affected by their consumption of the *Bildungsroman*.

Furthermore, due to all of the previous effects that are discussed, some of the respondents recognize, a personal and in some cases even a life-changing message from the most important novels they consumed. Some of the respondents state to be permanently influenced by something they read from the *Bildungsromane* they have consumed. This was clearly demonstrated by the respondent, who has put a tattoo on his back to remind him of an important message. As the tattoo indicates very well, those important messages can become part of the self of respondents. This all demonstrates that there is a variety of ways through which respondents apply the contents of *Bildungsromane* on the construction of the self.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, one can say there is a potential relation in the case of fans, between their consumption of the *Bildungsroman* and narrative identity construction. This idea is based on three integral concepts that constitute a process of narrative identity construction.

The first concept implies the phenomenon that one may call *embodied reading* (Sumara, 2002). It has been demonstrated that the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* has affected the respondents in various ways. The effects entailed and that occurred with regard to the respondents are the following. First of all, one can say that it constitutes personal coherence (Sumara, 2002). It has been demonstrated that the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* makes the respondents reflect and this causes insights as well as self-discovery. In line with Solomon, one can say that it functions to some extent as a mediator of defining the self (Solomon, 1983). Furthermore, the consumption leads to interruptions of what one may call the cultural commonsense and routines of everyday life (Sumara, 2002). These interruptions were at the root of shifts in thinking and perceptions of respondents. Several examples demonstrate how the *Bildungsroman* made the respondents reflect and how they gained new insights throughout that activity. They also gained empathy and understanding for people and relations, because they had related to their narrative representations. In some cases, narrative representations function as role models to the respondents. The role model characters challenged the respondents in many cases to reposition themselves towards real life issues. It demonstrates that there are several parallels between the reading experiences of respondents and other personal experiences. Respondents imitated and wanted to imitate the experiences of their narrative heroes in order to put their values at stake. It all may demonstrate that the respondents of which most of them were adolescents and young adults are exploring ideologies available in society (in this particular case especially in the *Bildungsroman*) in order to shape or to refine their values and beliefs (McAdams, 2001).

The second concept is based on the narratable self (Cavarero, 2014). This concept emphasizes the idea that one cannot narrate the self individually, but that he or she is also depending on the other to some extent. Narration appeals to the question of who someone is (Cavarero, 2014). The consumption of the *Bildungsroman* by its fans is to some extent entwined with a desire for narration. In other words, the respondents want to learn about the self and they want to grow as a human being. It has been demonstrated that in many cases this desire has been answered. For this reason, respondents are narratable with regard to the consumption of the *Bildungsroman*.

The second concept demonstrates that the self of the respondents is truly narratable with regard to the consumption of the *Bildungsroman*. This also emphasizes that the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* by its fans is a narrative- and interpretive practice (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). It implies the condition for the third concept, which is narrative identity construction. Most symbolic messages that construct identity arrive from adolescence and young adulthood (McAdams, 2001). One can say that the *Bildungsromane* are symbolic messages that usually imply the concept of growth (Moretti, 2000). The concept of growth is important for identity construction as it cultivates richness, depths and complexity of meaning in life. For this reason it constitutes to eudaimonic well-being (Bauer, McAdams & Pals, 2008). One has to take account of the fact that this is not really confirmed by this study. This study does however provide evidence that there is a potential relation between the consumption of the *Bildungsroman* as a form of fiction and construction of narrative identity. The consumption of the *Bildungsroman* by its fans is therefore a form of narrative practice that appeals to the question of who they are.

DISCUSSION

There are some limitations of this research, which at the same time, may indicate direction for future research. This study has demonstrated that there is a potential link, between the consumption of a cultural product (the *Bildungsroman*) and the construction of a narrative identity. However, one has to take account of the fact that the outcome of this research is based on relatively little empirical data. Only 10 interviews were executed with contemporary fans of the *Bildungsroman*. In order to have a significant contribution to the debate on the consumption of cultural goods and the construction of narrative identity, it would be useful to execute research on a larger scale. A larger volume of empirical data, increases the validity and the thoroughness of this study. This can be achieved by executing more interviews or by executing quantitative research as a follow up to this qualitative and more exploratory study. The combination of in-depth insights through qualitative research and quantitative scope, will generate clear understanding for the dynamic of the consumption of fiction and narrative identity construction.

However, this study focused exclusively on one literary genre. It has been demonstrated that there is a potential significant relation between the consumption of fans and the construction of narrative identity. This study did not consider other forms of fiction or even other art disciplines in relation to the construction of narrative identity. Based on this, a suggestion for future research would be to execute similar research on the consumption of other forms of fiction and art. If the outcomes of such studies would be similar to the outcomes of this study, than one can enhance the significance of the consumption of arts.

Moreover, this study emphasized a niche market of fans, which are somehow the most devoted consumers. It did not consider other types of consumers or people of particular age categories, other than adolescence. Some studies already indicate that identity formation, happens most significantly during the adolescence (McAdams, 2001). It would be valuable for the academic discourse, if future studies would emphasize different target groups in order to analyze potential differences and similarities.

Furthermore, this study used an international scope, but it did not really go into the analysis of potential differences in the experiences of people with different cultural and/or national backgrounds. Therefore it is lacking insights in potential differences in the experiences of people that may be constituted by the culture they are immersed in.

The previous discussion of the limitations of this research, may indicate direction for future research. The relevance of this study is based on a lack of empirical knowledge on the role of arts for the construction of narrative identity. This study indicates that arts have a potential role, but this idea, which is very much linked to theoretical research within the humanities,, needs to be supported by more empirical studies.

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APPENDIX

1. Interview topic list

Introduction

First of all, thank you very much for your participation within this study.

As you may know, this study focusses on fans of the *Bildungsroman* and their reception of the genre. In particular I am curious about what role and meaning the experiences of reading *Bildungsromane* have in your day to day life. Because you have stated to be a fan of the genre and to have much affinity and experience with it during our previous correspondence, you can have a valid function for this study. I would like to emphasize that the information provided by you will be processed confidential. Furthermore, I can send you the results of my study when it is finished, if you are interested. I hope I have informed you sufficiently so far. If you have remaining questions regarding your role, the function of this study or anything else, please let me know and I will answer your questions before we start with the interview. The interview will start with some questions about your personal background. After that some questions will follow about your first contact with the *Bildungsroman* to go eventually more into depth about your experiences of the most important 3-5 *Bildungsromane* you have read. The interview will end with some questions about your talks with friends, family or others about your reading experiences and about your personal interests. It will take about 75 minutes.

Personal details

How many years old are you?

What study and/or profession do you practice?

Where are you from?

What is your parents' highest level of education?

What is their profession?

First contact

How would you personally define the *Bildungsroman*?

What was the first *Bildungsroman* you have read?

How did you come into contact with the novel?

Who were involved with this?

friends?

family?

role models?

What did you think of it?

Relation

What are the most typical times you read during the day?

Were there certain periods in your life during which you read most *Bildungsromane*?

Is there a certain emotional state which makes you read a *Bildungsroman*?

Can you give some other examples of *Bildungsromane*, you have read?

Can you please think of 3-5 *Bildungsromane* that were most important to you personally?

Could you refer to those while answering the following questions.

How did you come across them?

Friends?

Family?

Internet?

Library?

Other?

What is it about *Bildungsromane* that attracts you?

Characters?

Narratives?

Writing style?

Subjects?

Why do you like these specific characteristics?

Can you tell what effects reading a *Bildungsroman* in general has on you?

Is it relaxing?

instructive/informative?

and/or shaping?

Can you elaborate on this?

Do you like to read other genres? Why (not)?

Are there any particular literature genres that you do not like? Why do you not like them?

Do you like any other cultural genres in a similar way as you like the *Bildungsroman*? Why (not)?

Identity

How did they contribute to your personal development?

Reflection?

Inspiration?

Made you do certain experiences?

Changed or generated perspectives?

Something else?

Did *Bildungsromane* influence the way you see the world?

How?

Did it contribute to your norms and values?

How?

Did it contribute to your attitude towards life?

views?

perspectives on others, et cetera?

Can you give some specific examples for any of the answers you just gave?

What specific characters of the literature, appeal to you the most?

Coming of age element?

Transformation/Bildung?

Obstacles/Drama?

Sensitive protagonist?

Why and how do they appeal to you?

Did they have influence on you?

How did they have influence on you? If they did not have any influence on you than how did they appeal to you?

Interaction

How do you exchange your thoughts about the novels with like-minded persons?

Friends?

Family?

Internet?

When do you talk about a novel?

Why do you want to express yourself about a novel?

Do you recognize similarities between you and other admirers of *Bildungsromane*?

If yes, what are these similarities?

Do you think that these similarities somehow establish a common interest for the genre?

Person

How would you describe your political preference?

How important do you consider art and culture?

Can you give an impression of your day to day life in general?

What issues do you pay attention to?

Actualities? What kind?

News?

Events?

What personal issue is currently the most on your mind?

What are your most important values in life? (Can you think of three?)

What is your major ambition in life?

Thank you for your participation. Do you have something to add or do you think I missed a question?

Closing of the interview.

2. Overview respondents

Name	Age	Gender	Place of origin	Education level	Education level parents
Rebeka	24	Female	Budapest (Hungary)	High education level (MA)	Both high education level
Julia	24	Female	Budapest (Hungary)	High education level (MA)	Both high education level
Adriana	21	Female	Morelio (Mexico)	High education level (BA)	High education level (father)
Tiziano	41	Male	New Jersey (United States)	High education level (PhD)	Low education level
Martin	32	Male	Tokyo (Japan)	High education level (BA)	Average education level
Carolina	22	Female	Madeira (Portugal)	High education level (BA)	High education level
Flavia	20	Female	Bucharest (Bulgaria)	High education level (BA)	High education level
Franchesco	24	Male	Petropolis (Brazil)	High education level (BA)	High education level
Emma	20	Female	Rotterdam (The Netherlands)	High education level (BA)	High education level
Valeria	18	Female	Caracas (Venezuela)	High education level (BA)	High education level (father)