

Postadolescent Novels in Contemporary German and Canadian Literature:

Defining Features and Character Development of

*In Plüschgewittern's* and *The Flying Troutmans'* Protagonists

by

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## Abstract

Postadolescence is a relatively new sociological and psychological phenomenon. While previous research has primarily read the postadolescent novel as an adolescent novel, this thesis seeks to contribute to existing scholarship by broadening the scope of analysis; it will remove the postadolescent novel from its limited confinement within the genre of adolescent fiction and examine it from the lens of the novel of formation instead. This is not to say, however, that the postadolescent novel should be read as a Bildungsroman; this term merely serves as a tool for interpreting novels of postadolescence with emphasis on their protagonists' crucial life stages. This thesis also considers postmodernism as a key concept to the emergence of postadolescence and proposes that there is indeed a critical need for a perspective that examines cultural and literary studies as well as sociological and psychological approaches in order to more fully comprehend this term. Sociological postadolescents have largely completed the development of their social, emotional, intellectual and physical faculties, but refuse or are unable to integrate themselves into society's institutional structure. Therefore, they are not, as sometimes suggested, legal adults who behave and live like adolescents. A narrow focus on such psychological and sociological developmental traits can be widened through an analysis of the specific characteristics that postadolescents display in fictional works, such as postmaterial values, a high regard for self-actualization, and the lasting possibility of personal development as well as a change of direction of that development. This thesis thus applies postadolescent theory to fiction in order to identify postadolescent protagonists, distinguish them from adolescent characters, and situate them in relation to their personal development throughout the novel. Miriam Toews' novel *The Flying Troutmans* and Wolfgang Herrndorf's *In Plüschgewittern* will serve as examples for texts centered on the life stage of postadolescence.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper was originally intended to compare a German and a Canadian Bildungsroman of the twenty-first century. During my research, however, I learned that the classic Bildungsroman modeled on Johann Wolfgang von Goethes *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* does not play a significant role in the literatures of the two cultures today.<sup>1</sup> Instead, I discovered texts whose characters, mostly in their mid-twenties to early thirties, seemed to be trapped in an adolescent-like stage of development; neither were they leading an independent life complete with individual goals and aspirations for their private and/or professional future, nor were they pursuing any sort of higher education as students living with their parents. This stage of life in which (young) adults do not display the behaviour generally expected of people their age is called postadolescence. Sociologist Peter Kastner described this phenomenon as follows: “Gemeint ist damit, dass sich in der spätbürgerlichen Gesellschaft das Entstehen einer Lebensphase abzeichnet, die traditionell weder als Jugendphase, noch als Erwachsenenzeit beschreibbar ist” (168). From a literary perspective, these stories resemble the popular coming-of-age stories, a genre especially present in American fiction. One major difference, however, is that the protagonists of coming-of-age stories are usually adolescents on the verge of becoming adults, while postadolescent characters have already legally entered adulthood and in many cases have even been included in this group for some time.

It is already obvious that there is a lack of appropriate vocabulary to describe the group in question. Although age is of crucial importance in this matter, none of the terms puberty, adolescence, adulthood or youth refer to a clear age range. Additionally, the conditions of being classified as a grown-up largely depend on differing notions of maturity, which

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that there were no novels portraying the protagonist’s life from childhood to old age. Such books, however, are exceptionally rare.

are not bound to any certain age, let alone nationally and culturally variant expectations and conditions (cf. Kastner 18-19 and Millar 4). Clear characteristics that separate postadolescents from adolescents thus seem to be rare. Surprisingly, neither cultural nor literary studies have investigated the subject in any detail; at least, there is barely any research to be found, and the only studies which acknowledge the postadolescent nature of a novel's characters read them just like novels of adolescence, which does not do these texts justice.<sup>2</sup> The only fields concerned with this topic seem to be sociology and, to some extent, psychology.

Along with authors' decreasing interest in the prototype of the formative fiction genre, the Bildungsroman, these circumstances demand critical attention. I argue that the postadolescent novel can be seen as a contemporary, postmodern relative of the Bildungsroman and that it is a logical result of western societies' current state. To illustrate this point, I compare two novels, one Canadian and one German, both with protagonists who fit the category of postadolescents. The goal of this thesis is to take the postadolescent novel out of the realm of adolescent novels it has been confined to and read it under the lens of the novel of formation instead. This is not to say that the postadolescent novel should be read as a Bildungsroman; the latter merely serves as a tool for interpreting novels of postadolescence in terms of their protagonists' crucial life stage.

As mentioned above, most of the theoretical background comes from the social sciences. After presenting my approach to interpreting the two postadolescent texts, the third

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<sup>2</sup> During my research I could only find two articles containing the term: Joanna Firaza's "Grenzgängertum eines (Post)Adoleszenten in Sven Regeners ‚Herr Lehmann‘ (2001) und ‚Der kleine Bruder‘ (2008)" and Burkhard Meyer-Sickendiek's "Der Prototyp des Berufsjugendlichen – Gottfried Kellers Postadoleszenzroman ‚Der grüne Heinrich‘," and the former does not even hint at the fact that there is a difference between adolescence and postadolescence. Instead, she treats the latter as if it was simply a prolonged adolescence, which in turns leads to a reading of postadolescent novels on the premise that they were basically the same as adolescent novels. I will have more to say about Meyer-Sickendiek's problematic understanding of postadolescence in chapter 4.2.

chapter will look at various characteristics and attempts at a definition of postadolescence in order to get a better understanding of the concept. Relating actual postadolescents to fictitious characters naturally demands a healthy amount of caution as literature does not produce an exact mirror image of the non-literary world. A certain degree of mimesis, however, is undeniable: According to Benedict Anderson's much-cited work *Imagined Communities*, societies are reflected in their respective newspapers and novels, i.e. they represent „the *kind of* imagined community that is the nation“ (25). Thus, the topics dealt with in novels allow for assumptions about issues and lifestyles with which the people of a country identify. Annette Wagner, for example, observed that those features relevant for psychologists and sociologists also play a dominant role in contemporary adolescent novels in Germany and the USA. Cohen-Pfister and Veas-Gulani also contend that “[w]riters and filmmakers often see themselves not only as part of a specific generation but frequently even as its representative. With their works widely read, watched, and reviewed, a reciprocal effect takes place between the creators and their audience . . . “ (3).

The roots of postadolescence are another topic to pursue in more detail. With postmodernism as a key concept to the emergence of postadolescence, a more holistic viewpoint that incorporates cultural and literary studies' understandings of the term is in order as well. The results of such an investigation may explain the classic Bildungsroman's decline in importance and relevance for society and, hence, its presence in literature, whereas postadolescence has come to be a widespread theme, even if it has not yet received the scholarly attention it deserves.

In the fourth chapter, I will analyze the relationship between the Bildungsroman and the postadolescent novel in more detail. I believe that the latter can be read as a sort of excerpt of a Bildungsroman or, more generally speaking, a novel of formation. Instead of an entire lifetime, we only witness a comparatively short part of the protagonist's life, a crucial one

nonetheless. To fully comprehend what the postadolescent novel and the Bildungsroman have in common as well as what separates them, I will provide an overview of the characteristics, emergence and development of the Bildungsroman.

The last two parts of my paper consist of an analysis and comparison of Miriam Toews' *The Flying Troutmans* and Wolfgang Herrndorf's *In Plüschgewittern*. I have chosen these two novels for the following reasons: postadolescence is obviously not a nationally limited but a global phenomenon, which, for example, is also very present in North America (Keniston; Gillis; Wagner). Hence, initial research should not only focus on a few isolated cases, but rather attempt to situate them in a larger context. Several works may complement one another or emphasize aspects which otherwise are at risk of going unnoticed. In addition, cultural differences and commonalities become clear, possibly bringing universal motifs of postadolescent novels to light.

I have selected *The Flying Troutmans* and *In Plüschgewittern* because they share several characteristics: the protagonists are of nearly the same age; they have a complicated relationship with their respective families, even if it is quite different in nature; they are confronted with mental illness in various ways; they happen, at times, to be in problematic love affairs; and they do not pursue any professional or private goals. Both stories are permeated by memories from childhood and adolescence, which aid in a fuller reconstruction of the protagonists' development in my analysis. Additionally, a comparison of these two novels enables the consideration of both a male and female perspective. The protagonists also fulfill several of the criteria for postadolescents, and it will be interesting to see the similarities and differences between the depiction and understanding of postadolescence in novels and in sociology.

Finally, I will summarize and evaluate the findings as well as suggest directions for further studies on postadolescent literature. An in-depth analysis of all features that may be

considered relevant for postadolescent novels is not feasible within the scope of this thesis; the most crucial ones which were also part of the sociological research shall be explored in detail while others, which were discovered in the texts, can only be mentioned.

## 2. Methodology

To avoid misunderstandings and to properly view the subject from a different angle, the reading of a postadolescent novel should be informed by a sociological background on postadolescence and the Bildungsroman. As there are no previous studies on postadolescent novels that treat them as such, the best way to understand the concept is to look at how and why this life stage has emerged as well as its characterizations in the social sciences. The first part of this chapter consists of an explanation of life stages and a sociological and psychological model of development. Postadolescence is a phase which has only recently come into being, and it is necessary to understand what exactly life stages are, what differentiates them from one other and how people move from one stage to another. The second part deals with different sociological descriptions and definitions of postadolescence, whereas the third and last subchapter traces the origins of postadolescence in order to discover what influences led to its emergence and how they compare to the conditions of the twenty-first century. When interpreting the novels, this overview will serve as a guideline to understanding the characters' development and their postadolescent features.

The reasons for the manifestation of postadolescence are helpful for detecting the social changes that caused the Bildungsroman to lose much of its earlier popularity. The main motive for including a synopsis of this genre is that adolescent as well as postadolescent fiction are closely related to it. Contemporary Bildungsromane, which are sometimes even considered not to be Bildungsromane at all, have been subject to major modifications since the first classic versions, and investigating those changes may support my argument that today's postadolescent novel can be read in the tradition of the Bildungsroman – again, without suggesting that the two should be regarded as one and the same. Furthermore, the literary description of development forms a useful counterweight to the sociological

perspective, and an analysis of postadolescence in literature will benefit from a fusion of the two.

Typical adolescent features will also play a significant role in analyzing and comparing *Troutmans* and *Plüschgewitter*. These characteristics shall be singled out with the help of actual adolescent characters within the respective novels, including the protagonists' younger selves. Based on my insights from the previous sections, I will identify the first-person narrator and protagonist Hattie's postadolescent characteristics, behavioural patterns and personal development. The latter focus is where the idea of formation and development as realized in the Bildungs- and Entwicklungsroman is the most crucial. I will repeat this strategy when looking at *In Plüschgewittern*, except that similarities and differences between Herrndorf's and Toews' protagonists will be included as well. As this paper is dealing with fiction, deviations from the more factual social sciences in picturing (post)adolescence can be expected and should be compensated for by those accounts available in literary fiction.

### 3. Sociological Research

#### 3.1. Life Stages and Developmental Tasks

In the following, I will provide an overview of different perspectives on (post)adolescence and outline their differences and similarities. As a starting point, I have chosen Klaus Hurrelmann’s *Lebensphase Jugend*, in which he describes youth as a phenomenon distinct from both childhood and adulthood. Partially caused by people’s rising life expectancy over time, though mostly by changing cultural and economic conditions, a person’s life span is divided into an increasing amount of different, relatively autonomous life phases: While in 1910, the only two phases were childhood and adulthood due to an average life expectancy of only 65 years, there were already six phases to be distinguished by 1990, namely early and late childhood, adolescence, postadolescence, adulthood, late adulthood and retirement (22-23). The table below is modelled after a graphic of Hurrelmann’s, illustrating “Lebensphasen während der Lebensspanne im historischen Vergleich” (23).

Table 1

Historic comparison of life phases and life spans according to Hurrelmann

1910	1-14 childhood		15-65 adulthood			(66+) (death)
1990	1-12 early & late child- hood	12-17 adoles- cence	18-28 post- adoles- cence	29-53 adulthood	54-65 late adult- hood	66-75 retire- ment

For the sake of consistency and understanding, I have translated *Jugendalter* and *Nach-Jugendalter* with adolescence and postadolescence respectively, although the literal

translations are youth and post-youth. However, the term *Nach-Jugend* is already a translation of the word postadolescence (Gillis). The vocabulary used to describe the different stages of development varies and usage of the terminology changes frequently, but there is indeed a consistent lack of clear definitions to describe and differentiate the stages. I will talk about this in more detail when introducing Kastner's dissertation on adolescence and postadolescence. For now, adolescence and youth can be considered to correspond to the same stage of development.

According to Hurrelmann, it is likely that the amount of divisions and subdivisions will continue to grow. He draws three conclusions from this: Firstly, the more life phases there are, the less important each of them is for the individual's development, which also means that one's self-definition is open to changes and reconceptualization with each new phase. Secondly, the more freedom a person has to define him- or herself according to their own wishes, the less orientation is offered by each phase, and the lines between the different stages become blurred. The last point is of little significance for the current project as it refers to the addition of phases to a life's later stage, which might be accompanied by a new rise of essential doubts in the elderly (24-25).<sup>3</sup>

Hurrelmann notes that when the concept of youth as a life phase first received attention in the first half of the twentieth century it was only given a time span of about four to five years, supposedly beginning with puberty and ending together with one's secondary education (26). Life span division began in the period of industrialization when the workplace was no longer at home and life began to take place elsewhere according to political and cultural interests. With the institutionalizing of education in the form of schools, this

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<sup>3</sup> Even though I will not pursue this suggestion further in my thesis, it is worth looking into. The reception of novels like Sten Nadolny's *Weitling's Frische* or Neil Bissoondath's *Doing the Heart Good* may benefit from this sort of background knowledge.

development was further enhanced, meaning that adults and children spent their time at different places among people of their own age group instead of having to join a children's labour force (27). Of course, this process took place over several decades and did not affect people in the towns to the same degree as those in the country. Class also played an important role in whether or not children received an education. When work became more complex and requiring certain skills and training, youth began to establish itself – first and foremost among the bourgeoisie, who could afford their children to stay in school longer. The spread of compulsory schooling finally allowed a certain amount of youth for every member of society (30).

When Hurrelmann determines how to draw the line between childhood, youth, and adulthood, he mentions several developmental tasks – *Entwicklungsaufgaben* – both from a psychological and sociological point of view which a person must complete in order to progress from one life phase to the next. The psychological tasks are not made explicit for children, who have a close-knit relationship to their parents characterized by imitation and identification; there is a list of proficiencies they have to acquire during this time, including motor skills, basic verbal and nonverbal communication, learning how to build mental concepts and gain knowledge, morals and values as well as social behaviour with peers (33). The end of childhood is also defined biologically with the beginning of puberty.

The psychological tasks for adolescents are the following: development of intellectual and social competence required for successfully finishing school and taking up a career; development of a gender role, which shapes a person's behaviour towards peers of their own and the opposite sex, and having a heterosexual relationship;<sup>4</sup> creating sensible patterns for

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<sup>4</sup> The original German wording is "Entwicklung der eigenen Geschlechtsrolle und des sozialen Bindungsverhaltens zu Gleichaltrigen des eigenen und des anderen Geschlechts, Aufbau einer heterosexuellen Partnerbeziehung, die langfristig die Basis für eine Familiengründung und die Geburt und Erziehung eigener Kinder bilden kann"

the consumption of commodities and media as well as the pursuit of hobbies in order to establish an individual lifestyle; and development of a system of norms and values as well as awareness for ethnic and political issues (33-34). One of the most significant markers of adulthood is mental and social independence from the parents (35). Youth is thus an important phase for the development of an individual's personality, and for most of the western, industrialized countries, this process is assumed to be complete between ages eighteen and twenty-one; however, the amount of people who need much longer than that appears to be increasing.

Sociology has nearly the same requirements for the passage from one phase to another as psychology. One of the major differences between the two views is that sociology does not regard the biological changes during puberty as a factor distinguishing childhood from youth; to put it simply, the sociological tasks are concerned with the visible, institutionalized practice of the acquired psychological skills. In correspondence with the psychological development tasks, Hurrelmann differentiates four areas of change: performance in school, family and peers, consumption and hobbies, and political participation. In terms of school, the change from child to adolescent is fluid and progresses step by step over several years. The more independently a person is able to learn, study and work with increasingly complex topics, the more he or she becomes and adolescent and, finally, an adult. The realm of family and friends, one of the most important factors, is marked by reorientation from the former to the latter; this is to say that parents serve as role models and the most trusted people during childhood, whereas adolescents shift their attention away from the family towards people of their own age group. This is accompanied by the adolescent choosing his or her own circle of

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(33-34). From a contemporary gender studies perspective, this definition is highly problematic as it leaves no room, for example, for homosexuals or transgendered people. For literary analyses, I suggest this point be replaced by the development of an awareness of gender roles and sexuality as well as finding a comfortable place within this system.

friends instead of the parents deciding who their child is allowed to spend time with (40). Closely connected is the orientation towards peers with regard to spending leisure time and the consumption of commodities. The adolescent focuses on friends and schoolmates, who are experiencing the same changes and challenges as they do and, therefore, offer one another support and understanding (40-41). Lastly, there is a political dimension: More so than during childhood, adolescents are able to participate in social gatherings and groupings and help shape public spaces without parental guidance (41).

As for the end of adolescence, there are several roles to be performed in order to be considered an adult. An individual needs to have an occupation granting him or her economic independence and a relationship that offers the option of starting a family; the person should also consume (cultural) goods and commodities as well as fulfill their political duties as citizens (42). Most societies conceive of a certain age range when the “youth” life stage should be completed. Indicators of the successful uptake of one of the aforementioned roles are, for instance, marriage, having a household of one’s own and a professional career. If these markers are not achieved within the time rough frame determined by society, other members of this society are likely to discipline such “altersunangepasste[s] Verhalten” one way or another (43). Adherence to these norms is often supported by the legal system, which grants certain rights and duties such as the right to vote, to hold a driver’s license, to drink alcohol and to marry, to a specific age. It is striking that Hurrelmann repeatedly points to people’s relationship status: It seems as if marrying and having children was not only a right, it was a social obligation to reproduce and maintain the population (43-45).

Hurrelmann’s description of the passage from child to adolescent to adult can be summarized as follows: Children have to develop a basic form of emotional trust in people, their intelligence and motor skills, and basic social skills. Once they are capable of independently fulfilling their tasks and duties in school and maintain social contacts themselves, they

can be considered adolescents. The realms of the four development tasks are still roughly the same as before; they only differ in their degree of preciseness, intensity and responsibility. Adolescents must work on their social and intellectual competences, perform their gender role and demonstrate an ability to form and maintain relationships, use commercial goods and establish a norm and value system. In order for them to reach adulthood, they need to become economically self-sufficient and capable of starting and supporting a family, participate in the commercial and culture market and adequately perform their political citizenship (47).

Hurrelmann also mentions the division of youth in three subphases according to age, which he bases Bernhard Schäfers' work (Schäfers 22-23): Puberty (ages 13-18), postpuberty (ages 18-21), and postadolescence (ages 21-25 and beyond). The latter phase is described as "junge[] Erwachsene[], die aber ihrem sozialen Status und ihrem Verhalten nach zum großen Teil noch als Jugendliche anzusehen sind" (23). This can be used as a first definition of postadolescence: a phase in which young adults have not yet reached the social status or behavioural patterns of "full" adults. Admittedly, this is a very vague description as it is unclear why adulthood is supposed to begin at the age of twenty-one, what exactly defines a social status and in what way their behavior deviates from that of "real" adults. Furthermore, Schäfers refers to Gillis' understanding of postadolescence, which will be discussed in the upcoming section, and he highlights economic independence as the only factor distinguishing postadolescent from adults (ibid.).

I have outlined the steps of development from childhood to adulthood according to Hurrelmann in order to find out what classifies a person as an adolescent or adult, which psychological and sociological aspects have an impact on the developmental process and how society associates the different life phases with a person's age. The following research is more closely linked to postadolescence, but it is necessary to comprehend the meaning of develop-

mental tasks and their implications both for society and the individual in order to understand the foundational principles of the postadolescence phenomenon.

### **3.2. Descriptions of Postadolescence**

Kenneth Keniston, in his 1968 publication *Young Radicals*, was probably the first person to use the term “post-adolescence.” He had conducted several surveys among youths who were politically active during the time of the Vietnam War or partially withdrew from society to focus on their own personal lives in a more or less spiritual way. The two groups he focused on are members of the New Left, the new New Left and hippies, but Keniston also mentioned dropouts and other youths actively involved in social movements. His findings included “the emergence of . . . a post-modern style” in the attitude and philosophy of these people who Keniston saw in “a curious position between adolescence and adulthood” (259). They had processed the psychological identity crises of adolescence but did not conform to the sociological requirements:

Although capable of extended intimacy, they rarely have spouses or children.

Although they work, and work hard, they have avoided all occupational commitments and possess few of the academic degrees or technical skills required by the professions for which their talents suit them. Although committed to a movement, they remain deliberately uninvolved with the institutions, guilds, and organizations of their society. In a word, they lack the prime sociological characteristic of adulthood: “integration” into the institutional structures of society. (260)

In other words, postadolescence presupposes that the individual already sees him- or herself as a “whole” person with a more or less stable identity. Postadolescents no longer need to find themselves – they wish to explore themselves; what they are yet unsure of is their

“relationship to the structures of the established society” (Keniston 268-69; emphasis in original). The issues they are primarily faced with during adolescence, thus, are no longer of major concern to them. Neither do they show the same behavioural patterns as adolescents, for instance, defining “basic contours of the individual’s outlook on the world,” “com[ing] to terms with his [sic] own sexuality,” and finishing the “rebellion against his [sic] parents” (268). Elsewhere, he offered the following, shortened definition: “Dieses Stadium wird soziologisch gekennzeichnet durch die Distanzierung der Postadoleszenten von der Gesellschaft der Erwachsenen, entwicklungstheoretisch durch die Fortdauer der Möglichkeiten psychologischen Wachstums, und psychologisch durch das Befassen mit der Beziehung des eigenen Selbst zu der Gesellschaft” (“Entwicklung” 295). All these aspects were discussed in more detail in his previous account *Young Radicals*.

In terms of vocabulary, Keniston spoke of “the stage of youth” when referring to people between adolescence and adulthood (*Radicals* 264). Hence, in contrast to Hurrelmann, youth and adolescence are not the same; the latter is experienced by nearly everyone, whereas the former is an optional stage. Adolescence refers to the phase in which the individual is working on the psychological development tasks, whereas youth is concerned with, either willingly or unwillingly, refraining from submitting to the social roles of adulthood. This also explains his usage of the expression postadolescence: The prefix “post” implies that the following term is something finished, completed, or overcome but still has some kind of relation to it, as in postindustrial, postcolonialism, or postgraduate. Postadolescents are no longer adolescents as they have solved the respective psychological tasks, but they are not adults either because they do not fulfill the sociological criteria. Keniston’s definition of postadolescents is thus very different from the one given by Schäfers and Hurrelmann, who link postadolescence to technical, possibly legal, adulthood, social status and behaviour. Nevertheless, one purpose of the stage of youth is to explore one’s own personality and come

to terms with one's identity; Keniston acknowledged that the individual's development is not finished just because the psychological development tasks of adolescence are completed (ibid.).

He also explained that members of a generation are products of the historic times in which they live. In his example, someone who grew up during the Depression has a very different world view from someone who grew up in the postwar era (261). Rapid social change, hence, is one of the reasons for the skepticism these youths have towards people who are more than five years older than themselves: They simply have different experiences, ideals and perspectives. Paul B. Baltes and John R. Nesselroade support this claim, which will be relevant again later when discussing the relationship between the Bildungsroman and the postadolescent novel.

One further aspect of postadolescence is its temporality. Although it is natural that every stage of life ends sooner or later, Keniston stressed the relatively short time span his young radicals were actively involved in their respective movements (259). This is not surprising considering the instability that often accompanies the commitment to such a movement: job security is practically nonexistent and marriage is only possible if both partners work for the same organization, which is rarely the case (262). If they do not grow tired of this lifestyle and leave the movement, they eventually end up as comparatively "old" members with whom the younger newcomers cannot identify. Additionally, society will no longer regard them as young radicals but as professional organizers (ibid.). The majority of Keniston's interviewees began pondering a life after the movement after only a few years. This also meant that they needed to find a way to reconcile with the system they had previously criticized and fought against. Presumably, they will experience "another crisis similar to the crisis that occurred at the end of their adolescences" (262).

Based on Keniston's research, John R. Gillis understands students' revolts in the sixties and seventies as a sign of extraordinarily early sexual, intellectual and psychological maturity, which used to appear much later in previous generations (207). From his point of view, the term postadolescence describes a period in which adolescence is maintained in the sense of economic dependency in spite of the respective person having already reached full age: "In contrast to earlier generations whose entry into the world of work was also infinitely postponed, they are already fully adult in every sense but the economic – namely sexual, intellectual, political" (208). It is striking how Gillis emphasizes a strong link between remaining in the stage of adolescence and the lack of a paid job and financial independence. Unlike Hurrelmann and Keniston, he does not distinguish between psychological and social development tasks but claims that physical, mental and social maturity only need to be amended by financial independence to form an adult personality. In this respect, he defines a postadolescent as someone who has solved nearly all psychological tasks – mental capability to work and study, commitment to an intimate relationship and a set of norms and values – but not the sociological task of economic sustenance without ever naming these categories. Gillis' conception about what constitutes a postadolescent, therefore, seems narrow and unclear compared to Keniston or Hurrelmann's complex system of life phases.

Like Keniston, Gillis sees postadolescence primarily as a middle-class phenomenon; however, his perception differs from Keniston's insofar as that he ascribes the political and social activism typical for the postadolescent of the time to the student status and lack of the "discipline of the work-a-day world" (208), whereas Keniston stresses postadolescents' "hard work" (260) and the very circumstance that many postadolescents do not choose to pursue an academic degree. The middle-class factor stems largely from the fact that postadolescents depend on a financial source other than their work, which means that their parents are usually also middle-class.

Kastner, although often referring to Keniston and Gillis, is much more critical of the common terminology as well as the establishment of an age range. Concerning vocabulary, he criticizes the word *Jugend* as not specific enough and laden with popular ideals, claiming *Adoleszenz* to be a more scientific term (6). In contrast to Rousseau's usage of the word for people of ages 18-25, Kastner broadens it to include youths in their earlier teenage years, as indicated by his abandonment of the term "puberty" (ibid.). *Reife* is another concept deemed problematic, as it is uncertain "was 'Reife' eigentlich bedeuten soll, wann sie eintritt, worin sie sich zeigt oder welche Merkmale sie zumindest aufweisen soll" (18). He also mentions the historically different interpretations of behavioural patterns as mature or immature (19). Naturally, it is difficult to find appropriate terms for such significant and complex concepts as youth, maturity, and adulthood, and compromises must be made before scholars can reach agreement on one superior, all-encompassing term, but Kastner's criticism is not a distinction without difference. Every now and then, it is indeed useful to question established assumptions. The sociological criterion of founding a family, for instance, may serve as an example: If being married and having children is a sign of adulthood, then does this also apply to teenage pregnancies? Is a sixteen-year-old couple who owns their own home, works and has a baby more "adult" than a twenty-six-year-old who is single and still living with his or her parents? Obviously, this is where psychological criteria come into play, but it is important to be aware that theoretical ideas and concepts require careful handling, even if there is potentially no way around them.

When attempting to set the age range for adolescence in order to establish more concrete criteria for distinguishing one life stage from another, Kastner concludes that this is impossible. Public opinion of the respective age range has changed over time and is still perceived as different for each social class (24-25). The second statement underlines Keniston's and Gillis' findings, while the first one asserts Hurrelmann's observation concern-

ing the historic changes of length and position of life stages. Ten years after the French sociologist Bianka Zazzo conducted a survey surrounding public opinion on when youth begins and ends for members of the lower, the middle, and the upper class respectively, Kastner replicated that same survey and found that this stage is assumed to start earlier and end later; on average, the duration of youth is assumed to have doubled (approximately five years in 1969 and ten years in 1979) (ibid.). It is also noteworthy that people see a connection between a person's social standing and their entering and moving beyond the stage of youth (24). However, postadolescents are not exclusively part of the well-educated middle class. Although unemployment is another factor deemed to cause adolescent behavior beyond "youth", the popularity of subcultures, rejection of norms and of the parents' generation should not be underestimated, suggests Kastner (168).

Another reason for Kastner's criticism of defining life stages by delimiting age ranges is that if (post)adolescence is a life stage of its own and no longer considered an "in-between" phase, then the mental processes taking place during this time cannot be determined to end at a certain point in life or predetermined age. Specifically, he refers to *Normanvisierung*, which he deems one of the most crucial determinants of adolescence (33). His introduction to post-adolescence is far more general and less bound to the specific circumstances of the late sixties and seventies than that of Keniston and Gillis. Kastner's description focuses on younger people's reorientation from "konventionellen und materialistischen hin zu postmaterialistischen" values (ibid.). It also highlights that potential conflicts and crises of adolescence may resurface due to a critique of social institutions (ibid.). In line with Keniston, he diagnoses "[r]etreatistische und aktivistische Verhaltensbereiche" among postadolescents (404), the former including prostitution, suicidal and criminal tendencies, abuse of drugs and alcohol, mental health issues, sects, and subcultures. Still, for a more universal definition of postadolescence, it is necessary to acknowledge that subcultures as a means of retreating from

or protesting against society have recently lost a significant amount of impact due to the absorption into the mainstream. In other words, the signs specific for many subcultures are explicitly marketed as “cool” and “fashionable” for the broader public, as Carsten Gansel explains for the punk rock scene (“Jugendliteratur” 35-37). Subcultures increasingly merge with coexisting forms of youth culture.

Writing in 2008, Hans-Peter Müller has produced one of the most up-to-date descriptions of postadolescence. Although he only dedicates a few paragraphs to this new stage of life, he offers a detailed account of the causes that led to the emergence of postadolescence, which I will soon return to. Müller defines postadolescence as a phase “zwischen Jugend und Erwachsenenalter, die geprägt ist durch eine frühere soziokulturelle (und auch sexuelle) Selbstständigkeit bei einer längeren ökonomischen Unselbstständigkeit,“ which is more common among people with a higher social standing who have more opportunities to pursue a university education (205-06). The parallels to Gillis are obvious. What is interesting, though, is his reference to a destandardization of life paths and biographies (204-07): The freedom to choose one’s profession, the increase in social mobility and the fact that people do not spend their entire life with one and the same company are achievements of postmaterial values like self-realization; on the other hand, they lead to insecurities, instability and a lack of orientation. The social and political activism prevalent in the sixties and seventies is no longer of much relevance for most postadolescents; instead, they are faced with high requirements in both the realm of work experience – not seldom in the form of unpaid internships – and the aforementioned long and costly education. The outcome is impermanence and uncertainty for the future, which Müller sees as one reason for the rising age at which people marry, if they do so at all (206). The flexibility once desired by Keniston’s young radicals is rigorously demanded and sometimes even enforced by today’s

job market, leaving postadolescents no choice but to abstain from binding commitments like starting a family.

In summary, postadolescence is an optional life stage individuals sometimes go through by choice, sometimes because the markers of full adulthood are withheld from them for reasons beyond their control as, for instance, unemployment. It is characterized by the psychological completion of adolescents' developmental tasks and a simultaneous absence of sociological indicators for an adult's status. Postadolescents perceive of themselves as coherent and complete personalities; yet, they feel the need to further experience and shape their identity according to their own values and ideals. This desire often results in political or social activism or in retreat, possibly accompanied by substance abuse, criminal tendencies, psychological disorders, or other similar conditions. The typical postadolescent, according to the research, is middle-class, intelligent, sexually as well as emotionally mature, and dedicated to a cause which may be of broader public concern or very personal. He or she is unmarried and childless, possibly enrolled in a college or university program without being really committed to it, and financially dependent on some other source than a paid job, usually parents.

### **3.3. Emergence and Influences: Postmodern Society and Education**

Keniston sees the postmodern society as one of the main reasons that led to the formation of the life stage of postadolescence (259). It is important to know what is meant with "postmodern society" and how it may have affected the passage from adolescence to adulthood in order to follow Keniston's argument and to be able to relate to the specific issues attributed to postadolescents. Furthermore, if postadolescence is connected to postmodernism, then it is not unlikely that literary texts about postadolescence reflect this influence in one way or another. As the world has changed since the Vietnam War, the possibility of changing

conditions for postadolescence needs to be taken into account as well. In 1972, Paul B. Baltes and John R. Nesselroade conducted a study in which they had high school students fill out questionnaires about their personality. The results led them to believe that changes in culture and society have such an impact on personality development in youths that its processes cannot be compared to those of previous generations: “environmental conditions are important factors in shaping the nature of adolescence at a given point in time, but it also implies that historical change in cultural conditions may result in marked cohort differences in adolescent behavior” (245). According to these findings, the sequence of development of today’s individuals differs greatly from the one people went through thirty or forty years ago. This, in turn, would explain why postadolescence is a relatively new phenomenon: the generation of 1968 and everything associated with this time – peace movements, environmentalism, emancipation, postmaterialism and much more – have had a major impact on biographies and the sequence of life stations.

As outlined above, the first studies on postadolescence appeared in the late sixties and were mainly concerned with political activism while also considering opposite reactions, namely various forms of retreat from society. It is not without reason that Keniston describes the lifestyle of postadolescents as the “post-modern style” (259): many of the changes that were taking place had to do with a general cultural transition from modernity to postmodernity. Sociology oftentimes uses the term postmodern synonymously with postindustrial, but in literary studies, this expression is much more problematic (see “Postmoderne” and Wagner 123-142). For Keniston, the “post-modern style” is marked by a “fluid, personalistic, anti-technological, and non-violent” “approach to the world” (259). The link to other understandings of postmodernism can be found in its radical pluralism to which the adjective “fluid” could be alluding: the pluralization of styles, world views and concepts of reality allows for a rapid change of direction and definitions as well as personality. This inconsistency is not

necessarily a negative effect; rather, it enables open-mindedness, appropriation of opinions and the opportunity to take new chances. An attitude of this kind may well appear “fluid” compared to more conservative positions. Considering the source, I understand “personalistic” to describe a very personal and private engagement with social and political issues, an aspect that might be peculiar to the generation of postadolescents Keniston investigated. The high degree of involvement characteristic for this group does not necessarily appear in later generations as evidenced by Kastner’s and Müller’s studies. Additionally, the term alludes to postadolescents’ insistence on their individualism.

Postmodernism as a radicalization and advancement of modernism has its roots in the cultural revolutions taking place in the USA during the sixties (“Postmoderne”). Hans-Heino Ewers summarizes the connection between youth and postmodernism with the keywords “Entdramatisierung des Generationenkonflikts, Individualisierung, Pluralisierung, Medialisierung, ‘Ende des Selbst’ bzw. Abkehr von rigiden Identitätskonzepten” (9). The first point of this list is problematic insofar as that it overlooks the origin of postadolescent behavior, for example, in West-Germany, where students were revolting against their parents’ generation’s crimes against humanity during the Second World War as well as their tendency to overlook the past and not atone for their role as perpetrators in the years following the war. On the other hand, those students’ children experienced an upbringing in which little confrontation was possible. Parents who had engaged in protests and students movements in their own youth tend to be much more tolerant and liberal, practicing equality and democracy within their own families (Daubert 49). As a result, the so-called *Generation Golf* did not have, as a matter of fact, the opportunity for a generational conflict. This in turn could have played part in their overall disinterest and apparently lacking awareness of international crises as Florian Illies describes in his well-known autobiographic book *Generation Golf*:

Solchermaßen gut genährt, ansonsten aber völlig orientierungslos, tapste eine ganze Generation der zwischen 1965 und 1975 Geborenen hinein in die achtziger Jahre. Aber irgendwie machte uns das auch nicht viel aus. . . . Wir wußten auf jeden Fall, daß wir uns keine übertriebenen Sorgen machen mußten, weil das unsere älteren Geschwister und die Grundschullehrerinnen mit ihren Atomkriegsängsten für uns erledigten. (18-19)

Two things are interesting about this statement. Firstly, Illies already hints at the downside of not having to worry about anything and knowing that everything will be taken care of eventually, namely, the overall aimlessness in life. With nothing to fight for or against, it is difficult to establish a sense of individual identity; Illies himself recalls the first phase of individualization being the decision of what kind of backpack, briefcase or bag he and his schoolmates carried their school supplies in – a rather shallow understanding of individual personality (12). The items through which this individualization progresses do not change in essence throughout the text, the climax being, of course, driving a Golf. Secondly, while Illies writes about a group of people born within a decade, he also distinguishes between his generation and that of older brothers and sister, who were apparently showing much concern for what happened in the world around them on a social and political level. This can be read as a supporting argument for Keniston's contention that sometimes it only takes a few years between two persons to have completely different world views due to the historical, social and cultural circumstances affecting their upbringing.

Another typical characteristic of postmodernism is the “decentered self” as Wagner calls it, which seems to resemble Ewers' idea of the end of the self: “Dezentrierung meint, dass der Postmodernismus – wie schon Nietzsche und der Poststrukturalismus – mit der tradierten Vorstellung vom stabilen, autonomen Ich aufräumt” (137). In this respect, she also formulates a contrast between modernity, which saw “das Subjekt im Zentrum aller

philosophischen und alltagsmythologischen Weltentwürfe,“ and postmodern deconstruction of the self (ibid.). While she sees this position in conflict with many people’s search for their selves, self-actualization and identity, one might argue that this is only a natural reaction to the experience of finding oneself in a state of unclarity; the dissolving of the self as it was understood decades ago is not the same as its extinction. It merely means people need a new concept of identity and find new ways of constructing it. The pluralism and simultaneity, or, in Kenistonian terms, the fluidity of postmodernism can be taken as a chance instead of a threat. Most of Keniston’s postadolescents made use of this opportunity in deciding that they wanted to spend their time on doing what they believed was necessary at the moment. The temporality inherent in the stage of youth supports this view. For the understanding of the Bildungsroman’s development in the next chapter, it is worth keeping in mind that rejecting the ideal of a stable, coherent, autonomous self contradicts the original intention of the genre to describe the attainment of said self.

Furthermore, postmodernism celebrates ambivalence, polyvalence and multitude, turns away from meta-narratives and the belief in a meaningful, linear evolvement of humanity over the course of history (cf. Boes), and abandons the search for a truth behind a maze of references between copies with no original (Wagner 138-42). For Keniston, this meant that the postmodern society has created the life stage postadolescence as both an opportunity and a necessity: It is “made possible by the affluence of the post-modern world, and made necessary by the ambivalence this world inspires . . . “ (*Radicals* 263). Historical events, like the end of the Second World War, the escalating conflict between capitalism and communism, and rapid technological advancement, provide the backdrop against which these rather abstract ideas emerged, influencing the atmosphere in which the first postadolescents grew up. Keniston primarily follows the postmodernism-as-postindustrialism approach, but other postmodern

influences will become more visible in the discussion of the Bildungsroman, adolescent vs. postadolescent novel and the comparison.

Industrialization, as Hurrelmann pointed out, was the major cause of the schooling of children and, thus, the establishment of youth as stage of life. Similarly, the postindustrial age “permit[s] growing numbers of young men and women the possibility of a postadolescent, preadult stage of psychological development. . . . Technological society also demands increasingly complex and difficult-to-acquire technical and intellectual skills,” requiring longer and more intense education for those with the mental and financial prerequisites while diminishing career options for those who come from a working-class background (Keniston, *Radicals* 264). Therefore, “the high unemployment rate among non-college youth” is less than surprising, as is the observation “that even the less talented and privileged are being forced to postpone entry into the adult labor force” (265). Gillis also ascribes the appearance of postadolescence to the increasing access to education, which involves a longer time spent in universities and colleges. This is likely to have motivated the notion that “young adult” refers to someone in the age range between twenty and thirty, even if most sociologists, especially Kastner, forcefully insist that such a determination is impossible: “Als Folge der Bildungsexpansion verbringen junge Menschen heutzutage nicht nur mehr Jahre im Bildungssystem, sie steigen dementsprechend auch später in das Berufsleben ein und erlangen somit ihre ökonomische Unabhängigkeit mehrheitlich erst jenseits der 25 und nicht selten erst jenseits der 35” (Müller 205; see Copray 7; Gillis 209).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Norbert Copray, however, formulates a four-phase model of adolescence consisting of “Voradoleszenz”, “Adoleszenz”, “Spätadoleszenz” and “Postadoleszenz”. In his understanding, postadolescence begins sometime around age 27 and ends no later than age 35 (26). Late adolescents and postadolescents he subsumes under the headline “Frühes Erwachsenenalter” (29). I am citing this here primarily to allow for a slightly better “detection” of postadolescent characters but also to demonstrate the disparity among social scientists concerning the subject of age and the blurriness of age-related boundaries.

Another influence on the surfacing of postadolescence is a change in values which, according to Keniston, was limited mainly to wealthier families and their sons and daughters. They were taught “to be idealistic, responsible, and serious about the creedal values of our society” (265). When these American youths noticed a gap between how they thought their society should act like and the reality of its violent and destructive tendencies, they refused to go along and enter the system without contradiction (265-66). In other words, the crises they were witnessing were incompatible with the values they held. Müller has found that a similar “Wertewandel” was taking place in the German society after 1968: While the end of the Second World War lay the ground for “die massenhafte Verwirklichung der . . . Werte der Freiheit, Gleichheit und Solidarität,” the student movements opened up discussions that helped foster the change to postmaterial values, individualization and the so-called experience-driven society (190). The fifties and sixties brought the western nations an increase in affluence, better education, less working hours and more leisure time, higher social security and a liberalization of values. In the seventies then, when those needs were saturated, focus was shifted to personal ideals and wishes (193).

“Globalisierung, Europäisierung und die deutsche Wiedervereinigung” led to a new increase in material values and complexity of the job market while the pluralism of lifestyles remained (194-97). In the nineties, the aforementioned opportunity and drive toward flexibility and autonomous design of an individual biography set in and created the circumstances under which postadolescents find themselves today (197).

The most important influences, hence, are: the increasingly complex technology, which requires better training and longer education, thereby postponing the individual’s entrance into the workforce; and postmodern ideas such as pluralism, self-actualization as well as an ever-changing, multidimensional concept of the self. These factors have led to diverse life plans and biographies; while offering more freedom of choice, however, they also

inhibit the possibility of orientation and guidance. Resulting feelings of insecurity are supported by a high demand of flexibility on the job market as well as in many professions.

## 4. The Bildungsroman

### 4.1. Background, Definition and Change

The Bildungsroman is regarded as typical of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German literature. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* is probably the best-known as well as one of the first representatives of its genre (Castle 7, Hardin ix). Karl Morgenstern first used in 1819, deriving it from the protagonist's formation and development of intellect and identity (Boes 1). In the late nineteenth century, Wilhelm Dilthey popularized the expression in academic research, which explains why he is sometimes credited with the concept's discovery (Gohlman 12). The traditional Bildungsroman observes the "Entwicklung der Hauptfigur in Auseinandersetzung mit unterschiedlichen Bereichen der Wirklichkeit, und zwar von Jugend an über verschiedene, meist krisenhaft erlebte Phasen bis hin zum Erreichen einer gefestigten Ich-Identität" ("Bildungsroman"). Interestingly, Wagner uses a similar formulation for adolescent novels when she defines adolescence as a phase which "die psychische Entwicklung bis hin zur Erlangung von Ich-Identität und Integration ausmacht" (26) – a point I will return to when comparing the Bildungsroman to postadolescent fiction.

Further defining features of the Bildungsroman is the interaction between protagonist and the world he<sup>6</sup> lives in (Jacobs, *Wilhelm* 15). Individuals are shaped by their environment, and the tension between the two is a crucial part of the character's formation (ibid.). This

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<sup>6</sup> The classic Bildungsroman's protagonists are almost exclusively male; although this is nowhere postulated as a necessary characteristic, the literature often mentions it as a descriptive feature (Castle 8; Gohlmann 3; Uhsadel 14; Wagner 42). This stance is so overwhelmingly prevalent that the term "female Bildungsroman" has been established for novels of development featuring a female protagonist, whose life career is or used to be dramatically different from that of men (cf. Uhsadel). My understanding of the Bildungsroman, however, is gender-neutral, and I am only using the male pronoun here for the sake of readability.

process is usually narrated chronologically; there seems to be no study clearly stating this as a necessary attribute, but it is often implied and many novels which are considered Bildungsromane – *Wilhelm Meister*, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, *Der grüne Heinrich*, *Demian*, *Der Zauberberg*, to name just a few – follow a chronological order in their presentation of events.

Although the German expression “Bildung” nowadays typically translates to education, or cultivation, Bildungsromane do not primarily refer to (institutional) education; rather, they are about character change, maturity and personality in their relation to the social environment (Castle 1; Hardin xi). English alternatives include novel of formation, novel of development, or formative fiction, though these terms are more general and resemble the closely related Entwicklungsroman, which is sometimes used synonymously with Bildungsroman (“Bildungsroman”). The difference is that the original Bildungsroman follows the humanist ideal typical for classic German literature. In this sense, the Bildungsroman does indeed pursue an educational goal: when protagonists go through crises and doubts, they eventually serve as role models for well-functioning members of the bourgeois society readers should aspire to build (Boes 27; Hardin xiii-xiv; Wagner 42). Bourgeoisie, humanism and idealism were important key words and values of the time which the Bildungsroman was supposed to spread and encourage (“Bildungsroman”). The Entwicklungsroman is much more inclusive and can also apply to texts which take place over a different time span than the Bildungsroman (Wagner 42). Much of this differentiation, however, only holds from a very conservative point of view, which I deem neither practical nor useful. Like most other literary genres, the Bildungsroman too has been subject to changes over time; considering that one of the novel’s most important features is its connection to the non-literary world, it would be odd if later Bildungsromane still adhered to the exact same criteria critics derived from Goethe’s archetype. Therefore, it is often assumed that the Entwicklungsroman is “die allgemeinere

Obergattung,” whereas the Bildungsroman constitutes “eine ihrer inhaltlich-formalen Spezifikationen” (Jacobs, *Wilhelm* 14).

The upcoming chapters will follow this distinction: When using the term Entwicklungsroman, I refer to novels which generally depict a protagonist’s development although they do not follow him or her for most of their development or do not adhere to other important Bildungsroman criteria. Yet, my use of the expression Bildungsroman is not tied to the exclusive definition of the eighteenth century. Some deviances like a lacking educational effect on the reader or the influence of values other than idealism or humanism should not diminish a work’s capacity to be read as a Bildungsroman. I still hope to be cautious enough not to add to the misleading use of the term for nearly all juvenile fiction (cf. Hardin x).

Reception of the Bildungsroman started out, at least in part, from a nationalist, or rather nation-forming point of view. This is to say that in the early nineteenth century, Germany as a nation-state was more of an idea, a goal to be pursued rather than actual fact (Boes 6). Morgenstern was only one of many people who believed – and some still believe – that the Bildungsroman “could give . . . a ‘national form’ to the narrative trajectories of their protagonists” (Boes 3; cf. Castle 9). The Bildungsroman was thus welcomed as a means of supporting the German nation-forming process, and up until what is widely assumed to be the end of the Bildungsroman era, German authors have employed these kinds of texts to comment on the current social, political, and cultural conditions of their national environment (Boes 3).

According to Boes, this group of people arguing that the Bildungsroman is particular to Germany are essentialists: “The genre, so these critics argue, provides a narrative response to the provincial and politically repressive atmosphere that prevailed in central Europe throughout the nineteenth century. It could therefore not have flourished in any other national context” (3-4). Whether or not this perspective on the origin of the Bildungsroman is true is

open to debate; in fact, novels of development have been written all over the world, even if they do not follow the strict standards established by Morgenstern and his German idealist followers (Jacobs, *Wilhelm* 154-66). Over time, the genre has established itself in many countries, usually accompanied with the respective nation as an adjective as, for example, in the expression French Bildungsroman. Implied in this modification of the term is a distinction between the classic German Bildungsroman, which seems to serve as the “original”, and Bildungsromane of other nations, which come from a different cultural and social background. Therefore, they may also differ in style and emphasis. Katharina Uhsadel, for instance, states that English novels of development have a much stronger pragmatic focus than their German counterparts (14) while Gregory Castle notes how “Irish colonial writers . . . were able to translate their disempowerment into Bildung plots of survival and triumph – even if survival means exile and triumph means death” (6).

The other “camp” Boes describes, the cosmopolitans, would probably agree with the claim that the traditional German Bildungsroman is not the only “true” Bildungsroman insofar as they are of the opinion that the novel of development is “a universal marker of modernity, a literary response to changing times in which individuals have to secure their own place in the world rather than find it pre-given by tradition or inheritance” (4). According to this interpretation, novels of formation are attuned to their current environment and explore the struggles specific to that situation. From this point of view, the exact topics and the protagonist’s course of development may differ greatly between novels from different nations and historical times.

Some reasons for the Bildungsroman’s fall can be seen in the bourgeoisie’s decreasing prestige and increasing doubt about humanist ideals in the early and mid-twentieth century (“Bildungsroman”). In the face of holocaust, world war, and socialist theories, clinging to classicist world views was next to impossible. Herrmann Hesse’s *Glasperlenspiel* from 1943 and Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*, published only four years later, are thus not only re-

garded as modern forms of the Bildungsroman but most importantly as markers of the genre's decline (Boes 156). Apart from a literary farewell to the bourgeois conceptualization of life, the latter of the two novels in particular is highly concerned with the apocalypse: "Besides the attack on the liberal subject that was already diagnosed by Lukács and Mayer, it also stages an attack on the formative novel's characteristic structure of temporal unfolding. Mann's apocalypse of the novel is an apocalypse also of historicism" (157). In other words, as Boes reads *Doctor Faustus* as a national allegory, the apocalypse inside the novel simultaneously stands for the apocalypse of the causal, step-by-step development of both human beings and history, for there is barely any reasonable event that would have naturally and inevitably evolved into the horrors of Nazi Germany (178).

Above, I have given a short outline of the development of the Bildungsroman, its roots in German idealism, its relation to nationalism, and its transcontinental spread. Today, little has remained of the former classicist aspiration for self-cultivation, harmony, and a balance between the individual and society. Though certainly desirable, these themes are no longer the main concern for either writers or readers. This has led to a decline in novels of development which comprehensively depict a protagonist's upbringing, career and personal fulfillment. Due to historical changes, the Bildungsroman has been and most likely will continue to be subject to substantial modifications. The question whether or not these new forms still deserve to be called Bildungsromane cannot be answered here, but I would argue that much of the genre's core – the search and construction of an identity over an extended period of time, the struggle with society, triumphs and failures – has survived and is sometimes, though not always, transferred to other kinds of formative fiction.

Even the claim that it tends to represent a nation's distinctiveness and is relevant for the nation-forming process may have some validity when considering that in Canada, which has a relatively short tradition of national literature and consciousness compared to Germany,

England or France and is sometimes diagnosed with an inferiority complex (e.g. Chiara; Capel), Bildungsromane are still slightly more common than in Europe. Well-known and successful examples include Mordecai Richler's 1959 *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, Margaret Atwood's Entwicklungsroman *Surfacing* from 1972, Robertson Davies' *The Manticore*, also a 1972 Entwicklungsroman, Tomson Highway's 1998 *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* from 1981 as well as its sequel *Emily Kato* from 2005. I have singled out *Surfacing* and *The Manticore* in this account due to the fact that they are insufficient by Bildungsroman standards insofar as that they cover a very limited time span of their respective protagonists' life and do not have personal development and formation as primary focus. The narrations are complemented by flashbacks and childhood memories, but there is no chronological order and, as previously stated, I do not wish to endlessly broaden the inclusiveness of the genre. Margaret Atwood's works, however, have repeatedly been read as female Bildungsromane (McWilliams). The United States, too, have developed a formative genre that corresponds to the nation's specific "national mythology" as "the rebellious teenager, impatient with the authority of its European parents and eager to create its own character founded on a different set of values and priorities. So there is a confluence of the genre of the coming-of-age novel and a particularly, or even uniquely, American narrative of national identity" (Millard 5). The coming-of-age novel, the adolescent novel and the postadolescent novel are related to the Bildungsroman and fulfill similar social and cultural tasks, but they are not equal in theme or form.

#### **4.2. Bildungsroman and Postadolescent Novel**

Before giving a brief explanation on how the various types of formative fiction are different from one another, I would like to start with the link I see between the emergence of postadolescence as a stage of life and the decrease in Bildungsromanen. As Kenneth and

Gillis have pointed out, different historical periods produce different personalities and different kinds of development; Boes' cosmopolitans support the claim that the Bildungsroman reacts to those differences both in form and content. The question is, to what degree can one genre change and adapt to a rapidly and continuously transforming social, economic, and cultural environment without transforming into something else as well? Literary critics are still arguing about this and have not come to an agreement as I have explained above.

Furthermore, the pluralization of life careers, biographies as well as family and job models makes it impossible to present an exemplary life path, which is one thing the Bildungsroman was originally appreciated for. This is not to say that it has become unfeasible in the twenty-first century to write a Bildungsroman that has some reference to the non-literary world, but as single life stages become more independent from one another and more important in their own right, it is safe to say that the focus has shifted away from the holistic contemplation of life. The increasing fragmentation of the latter and the absence of a thread holding the pieces together call for a different approach to reading and writing literature.

The interesting thing about postadolescence is that it presupposes the psychological state of an adult while simultaneously admitting that the postadolescent still needs time to develop his or her own identity before fully, in the sociological sense that is, submitting to the stage of adulthood. This implies that the search for a "gefestigte Ich-Identität," as it is called in the *Metzler Literatur Lexikon*, is not necessarily over once adulthood is reached but may well become important again later in life. So-called midlife crises are one result of this recurring theme (cf. Jacobs, *Zwischenbilanzen*). The end of adolescence merely marks the achievement of a first sense of oneself, a rough understanding of what kind of person one is; postadolescence is not preoccupied with the search for a self, but with the search for a meaningful and acceptable relationship between self and society (Keniston 268-69). From this perspective, it does indeed make sense that the Bildungsroman covers a time span which goes

beyond the first time a feeling of stability has set in. Adolescent or postadolescent novels cannot, of course, provide such a comprehensive overview as they concentrate on one specific phase in a person's development. Some of them, however, shed light on one of the most important transitions in which the ground for being a fully recognized part of society is laid – including a certain amount of freedom but also duties and responsibilities. A character's development is not necessarily completed insofar as that it has reached the next level by the end of the novel; exploring the peculiarities of adolescence or postadolescence is a worthy enterprise in itself.

This is also why not every (post)adolescent novel is automatically a coming-of-age story. When Kenneth Millard supports the idea that the main character of an adolescent novel is somewhere between twelve and nineteen years old, he immediately draws attention to the fact that today, many people do not come of age during that time (4-5). Additionally, it would be difficult to convincingly tell the coming-of-age story of a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old, at least in the western, industrialized world where adolescents are not considered legal adults before they are eighteen or twenty-one years old. The issue of the term “coming of age” is phrased nicely in Millard's questions: “When exactly does a character come of age and what specific experiences are deemed to be integral to it? Is it possible for fictional characters to come at age at any point, for example in their twenties?” (4). He goes on to describe Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* as “some form of contemporary Bildungsroman, but of characters who are certainly older than adolescents,” (ibid.) which is exactly the problem I am addressing in this work: although coming of age is primarily denoted to mean legally reaching adulthood, it is used for novels which deal with the mental processes that accompany this transition in literature; if the transition is only fully accomplished after the end of adolescence, as is increasingly the case in both fiction and non-fiction, new parameters need to be set for interpreting and reading these texts.

At this point, I would like to refer to Wagner's scope of texts she has analyzed as adolescent novels, because it includes *Generation X*. I have already mentioned how much her definition of adolescence resembles that of the Bildungsroman's protagonist's development and experience; however, she asserts that novels of adolescence are different from the Bildungsroman in so far that they lack the opportunity to reflect on their childhood and adolescence because they are still in that phase (Schäfer 35, qtd. in Wagner 47). As my analysis will show, this claim is not true of all postadolescent characters although they are explicitly included in Wagner's understanding of adolescent novels (47, 312). Similarly to Firza, she reads the postadolescent novel just like an adolescent novel; the only difference she admits to is that the characters are older and out of school, but the implications this has for the characters and the novels as a whole are mostly ignored.

Meyer-Sickendiek is one of the very few scholars in literary studies who have looked a little closer at the concept of postadolescence. The reason I have not mentioned her earlier and used her work as an orientation for my own reading is her problematic understanding and approach to postadolescence: due to her misreading of Keniston's *Young Radicals* according to which postadolescents were lacking all "für den Erwachsenenstatus grundlegenden Aspekte," Meyer-Sickendiek is starting with a premise that, despite her constant reference to sociology and psychology, contradicts the sociological findings reviewed in the previous chapter (238). In her attempt to simplify this phenomenon, she calls for a clearer definition that assigns postadolescents to either a group of people approaching adulthood, as Hanspeter Buba defines it (351), or one whose members are trying hard to keep their adolescent status (Jaide 159 ff., qtd. in Meyer-Sickendiek 238-39).<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Keniston contends that postadolescents are not protracting their adolescence or prolonging a psychosocial morato-

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<sup>7</sup> Jaide 159ff. is the source given by Meyer-Sickendiek; however, I was unable to find the phrase in quotation marks ("über das 30. Lebensjahr hinaus") or the idea behind it in the entire chapter of Jaide's book.

rium because they already have the sense of self that is supposed to be reached by the end of adolescence or a moratorium, which again contradicts Meyer-Sickendiek's characterization of postadolescence (263). Meyer-Sickendiek's understanding of postadolescence is therefore not suited for my own reading of postadolescent literature. Of course, I have to agree with her when she states that "gerade mit Blick auf romanhafte Texte zwischen Adoleszenz und Postadoleszenz deutlich unterschieden werden muss," though not necessarily and only on the grounds she gives. As previously explained, not all novels of adolescence include a form of initiation or a coming of age of the protagonist, but according to Meyer-Sickendiek, this is an "entscheidende[s] Merkmal[]" for the genre missing from the postadolescent novel (241).

To return to the relationship between Bildungsroman and postadolescent novel, I would like to refer to an observation by Jürgen Jacobs:

Die Helden der Bildungsgeschichten haben meist das Privileg, vor dem Eintritt in das Alter der Erwachsenen eine Phase freier Selbsterprobung zu durchlaufen. Wilhelm Meister etwa wendet sich seinen Neigungen folgend dem Theater zu, der Grüne Heinrich versucht sich als Maler, Hans Castorp nimmt einen siebenjährigen Urlaub vom Leben, und Hesses Sinclair widmet sich während seiner Schul- und Universitätszeit weniger disziplinierten Studien als einem leidenschaftlich betriebenen Lebensexperiment der Selbstfindung.

*(Zwischenbilanzen 8)*

Interestingly enough, Meyer-Sickendiek discusses the green Henry as a "Berufsjugendlichen", identifying him as a postadolescent, but unfortunately tying this to his "gescheiterten Existenz," which she sees as a decisive feature of postadolescent characters (251, cf. 258). As the analysis will show, none of the postadolescent characters I am investigating are consciously going through a time of experimentation or self-discovery. Hattie Troutman's years in Paris and her trip through the USA are the closest thing to such a

phase, but she is not actively pursuing the formation of her identity. The difference between conscious identity search and more or less incidental self-exploration is another opposition between Bildungsroman and postadolescent novel, if only a marginal and an idealistic one considering the breadth of characters in works which are referred to as Bildungs- or anti-Bildungsromane.

Above, I have discussed the relationship between the emergence of postadolescence and the decline of the Bildungsroman. While the latter presents a literary character's development over the course of many years and throughout different life stages, adolescent and postadolescent novels focus on a limited phase of life. Diversification, pluralism, and disintegration of many aspects of society make it difficult for the Bildungsroman to respond adequately and authentically to contemporary social and cultural issues. As a means of popular and national identification or an exemplary life career it is no longer useful for most countries. Simultaneously, those were the conditions under which postadolescents began to appear: more complex and demanding professions required longer stays in the education system, social changes and political crises called for attention, and the insecurity that accompanied these developments made young people want to make sure they were making the right choices.

In terms of format and content, adolescent novels and postadolescent novels focus on specific states of personal development; however, the respective life stages deal with different issues and topics. The degree to which psychological development tasks are relevant for the character's development alone should suffice to reasonably differentiate between adolescent and postadolescent figures. This discrepancy becomes even clearer when reading novels of postadolescence with a Bildungsroman approach, that is, with an emphasis on the protagonist's development. The flashbacks, which are part of the two stories I have chosen, support

such an undertaking and enable an observation of the changes and influences that have taken place in the respective protagonists on their way from adolescence to postadolescence.

## **5. *The Flying Troutmans'* Overstrained Aunt Hattie**

### **5.1. Living Conditions and Occupation**

Hattie Troutman is 27 years old, lives in Paris and has just been left by her boyfriend Marc when she receives a phone call from her eleven-year-old niece Thebie in Canada. Hattie's sister Min, who has been suffering from mental problems since childhood, can no longer leave her bed and requires hospitalization. As Cherkis, Min's ex-husband and father to her two kids, has not been there for many years, Hattie flies back home to take Thebie and her older brother Logan on a quest to find him. Their trip takes them from Manitoba across the United States all the way to the Mexican border, triggering a sequence of conflicts between the helpless Hattie, Thebie and her desperation to be loved, and the withdrawn Logan. Instead of parting ways over family fights, they learn to tolerate each other's flaws for the time being and finally find Cherkis together.

At the time of Thebie's phone call, Hattie is employed in a bookstore. She had previously been to university years before, but never graduated because she "had missed so many classes babysitting Logan and Thebes, while Min was in meetings with the voices in her head, that [she] decided to drop out entirely and go to the airport and fly away" to Paris instead (182). The way she explains it gives the impression that Hattie had to sacrifice her own education for her sister's career, which resembles (and subtly criticizes) the traditional, conservative model of stay-at-home moms with working husbands. It also implies the impossibility of pursuing an academic degree and having children at the same time. Since Hattie is also the first-person narrator and thus unreliable, it is possible that the babysitting duties were not the only reason she never finished university. After all, she repeatedly praises Min for her great parenting skills (94, 174-76), and even if Hattie had had to take care of the children for a longer period, she could have started studying again in Paris. Having looked after Logan and

Thebie so much is also contradictory to the anxiety she faces when being left alone with them three years later: if she had been able to be a substitute mother back then while simultaneously at least attempting to attend university, it should be much less of a problem for her to do the same again. Additionally, Hattie repeatedly feels the urge to give up on their search for Cherkis and leave the children behind (86, 114). Although she never gives in to this inclination, the returning thought of surrendering signals a predisposition to not finishing things when they become difficult.

Hattie mentions that she would like to work as an artist or a psychiatrist, but does not pursue any professional training in either of these or related areas. Her aspirations, hence, are merely daydreams with no real attempts at realizing them. It is not clear whether or not Hattie is aware of it, but the fact that she does not give any reason for why she is interested in these two career options, which have no obvious connection, hints at her lack of willingness to work at realizing these dreams. The curtness of her statement stresses the indifference she really feels towards these professions: “I wanted to be an artist, in Paris, or a psychiatrist” (9). Her only effort consists of portraying tourists once in a while without charging them as she practically sabotages the drawings herself by incorporating little details from her sister’s face into those of the strangers. Moreover, although she never explicitly says it, Hattie’s ambition to be a psychiatrist also very likely stems from her attempts to comprehend Min and her illness. Since she has some sort of background knowledge from reading many books on psychology and a personal interest in learning about the human psyche and body, it is possible that she would succeed if she ever decided to enrol in a medical or psychological program. On the other hand, shaping her career after the problems of a family member may interfere with her attempt to live a life of her own, which is, after all, the reason she came to Paris in the first place. Her indecision, however, also points at the postmodern fluidity Keniston found to be characteristic of postadolescence as well as the decentered self. Hattie sees herself as a multi-

dimensional personality with various interests, skills, and experiences, which is reflected in her choice of potential career choices.

Before leaving for Canada, she gives up her apartment including nearly everything in it and quits her job at the bookstore, obviously planning not to return. This may seem like a rushed decision, especially because she does not have employment or an apartment to return to in Manitoba. Furthermore, Hattie's departure from France is probably not only motivated by the assumption that she will be staying at her sister's for a while, but also by her not wanting to stay in a place where there are too many things reminding her of her former relationship with Marc. At the same time, she never mentions what she wants to do once her family is taken care of until shortly before they reach Cherkis. The fact that Hattie never even thought about this subject suggests that the prospective necessity of an income and a residence other than Min's house never crossed her mind. She summarizes her state of mind concerning these matters as follows: "I didn't know how long I'd be staying but it really didn't matter anyway. I'd lost my boyfriend and didn't care about my job and there was no reason to go back to Paris. I didn't own anything besides books, and Marc could keep those if he wanted to" (4). This statement allows for the conclusion that she had never planned on staying in Paris and starting a new life there. France was only one of several stations in Hattie's life, a vacation from the constant reminder of her inability to help Min stabilize. An alternative interpretation is that she generally does not plan far ahead. It is only when finally decides to stay with her sister and look after her family that she gets a general sense of direction, a new "mission," as she calls it (259). This disinterest in future plans appears to be typical for postadolescence considering that Keniston's young radicals avoided to think about life after their involvement with social movements as long as they could.

It seems that Hattie has little need for material or economic security or is at the very least barely concerned about her future. Her decision is typical, however, for the postmaterial

orientation commonly found among postadolescents, as is her dropping out of university and the apparently meaningless occupation at the bookstore. Yet, it seems that she was indeed happy with what she was doing: Similarly to Frank Lehmann in Sven Regener's "Herr Lehmann", a challenging career with the option of promotion and an increasing salary is not necessary for Hattie's satisfaction with life (cf. Firaza 567). Unlike the young radicals, these two fictional characters are not politically, socially, or otherwise active; they also are not actually rebelling against society; and neither do they seek fulfillment in collecting status symbols. These last two characteristics also distinguish them from the "Exklusivität der *Generation Golf* oder Subversivität der *Generation X*" (Firaza 567-68). Hattie and Herr Lehmann are content with the undemanding lives they lead and are thus almost fit for Kastner's category of the retreating postadolescent, except that they do not have problematic features attached to them like drug abuse, criminality or sect membership.

Hence, Hattie shares several features of postadolescents as described by Keniston and Kastner. She had enough money and the intellectual capacity to go to university. While she has no conflict with society, she is also not interested in participating in it: instead of working for wealth and prestige, she wants to come to terms with the relentless influence her sister has on her mind. The air of "pretending to be an artist" (2) is her means of expressing herself, intruded by her inability to abstain from including features of Min's face in her works. Furthermore, Hattie does not care much about economic success or matters of social status. She is interested in learning and love, but she is not eager to really commit to anything, be it professional or in terms of marriage. Although she had a job which provided her with financial security, it did not mean enough to her to outweigh all the other factors that characterize her as a postadolescent. This means that, at least in literature, postadolescence cannot be tied primarily to economic independence as suggested by Gillis.

## 5.2. Family

Hattie's character starts out as slightly insecure and unsure of her own capabilities; that is, she seems to be very sure about the things she is not capable of, one of them being to take care of Logan and Thebie while Min is in the hospital. She refuses to consider this a possibility, and her efforts to function at least as a temporary parent replacement are half-hearted at best. After her sister's hospitalization, she does not even try to convince the social worker she meets of her ability to be the children's legal guardian (17-18). Instead, she answers the woman's information that "they might have to conduct a home assessment and perhaps a background check on [her] to make sure [she] was competent and didn't have any outstanding arrest warrants or [her] name on any abuse registries" with "That's fine . . . but Logan and Thebes can't go to a foster home" as if she had a criminal record (17). Her tactic is not to present herself as the trustworthy, responsible aunt but to emphasize that the alternative is out of the question. Although the decision is not made on the spot and the social worker uses the subjunctive, Hattie obviously expects to fail any investigation by a visiting social worker, providing a commentary on her self-image; just as she is unwilling to commit to a university program, a career, or marriage, she does not even want to try to take care of Logan and Thebie. It is not only that she rejects the role of a legal guardian; Hattie doubts her personal ability to fulfill the role. From her point of view, she is too unorganized and occupied with her own desires and problems as to bring up the strength to support her sister's family. In this regard, she is between the psychological sphere of being able to sustain a love relationship and the ability to start a family, which is part of the sociological demands of being an adult. The gap between the two is too big for Hattie to even consider crossing it temporarily.

The naturalness with which she assumes to be incapable of properly looking after Thebie and Logan occurs repeatedly in the text, for instance when a cashier points to Thebie's noticeably untended, shabby appearance (115). Hattie shrugs the comment off with the excuse that she was simply an "inferior" mother (ibid.). She does not share any more thoughts on the incident with the reader, neither in the form of trying to justify her neglect, nor by admitting that she feels guilty for not taking better care of her niece. Thebie's dirty looks, her inability to stay clean and especially her badly coloured, filthy hair come up frequently. In a *laissez-faire* kind of way, Hattie says that Thebes should consider washing herself or combing her hair both to Thebie and to herself (2-3, 34, 86, 93). At one point, she even asks her if she is "supposed to tell" her to take a bath and comb her hair (78). The fact that a parent or a substitute parent asks the child for advice on how to raise him or her in such a blatant way demonstrates not only insecurity but also a lack of investment in trying to raise the child. When she finds out that Logan was not at school one day, her reaction is the same: "Was I supposed to find him? I finished cleaning up and went into the backyard for a smoke" (41). It is only when she expects to be meeting Cherkis the next day that she warns Thebie she will have to bathe and fix her hair (199), although Logan already told her Thebes was starting to smell and she "probably" should force her to wash (153).

Hattie cannot see herself as a substitute mother, and that may be the reason for her indifference towards the cashier's criticism; if she does not take on the role, then she cannot be blamed for performing poorly. From a sociological perspective, Hattie rejects the "institution" of responsible aunt/substitute mother/guardian for herself. In doing so, she proves her initial concerns to have been true all along without ever having attempted at doing better. Unless there is a case of teenage pregnancy, these issues, self-doubts and fears are usually not major topics for adolescent novels, but the question of maybe starting a family become more pressing for postadolescents. It is noteworthy that Hattie never explicitly states she was not

yet feeling ready to look after two children but reasons that personal character traits make her unfit to accept the responsibility for Logan and Thebie.

This does not mean, however, that she did not care about her sister's son and daughter. On the contrary, she is deeply worried when Logan and Thebie are in a pool playing with a girl who Hattie had previously seen giving someone a hand job in a car (78, 80). As mentioned above, she also insists that Logan and Thebes cannot be taken to a foster home because she loves them and knows the implications it would have for the two of them, namely, that their mother will be gone for a while and is unlikely to return any time in the nearer future. This is also the reason she does not tell Thebie and Logan about their mother's condition in the hospital: She is afraid that they will worry about Min and their own future (e.g. 62, 86). As becomes clear in a conversation with Thebie and in another one with Logan, Hattie's fear is justified. When they return home immediately after leaving Min at the hospital, Thebie demands that Hattie pretend to be Min in front of the school principle. Hattie is surprised by this request and asks if she cannot be herself and "explain the situation" to which Thebie "shook her head slowly, gravely. She didn't want to go to a foster home" (20). Her aunt's attempt at taking this fear from her are not entirely successful due to Thebes' doubt that she will stay long enough and the fact that Hattie's "tone was tentative" (ibid.). Hattie herself is not so sure she will be able to live up to the promise she makes, either; she calls it "preposterous" and "begins to panic" (ibid.). Apparently, she had not given too much thought to what she was going to do with her niece and nephew once she arrived there and had Min taken care of, which fits to her quick departure from France. All she cared about at that point was to flee from the constant reminders of her ex-boyfriend, and the call from home gave her an excuse to do so. It seems like Hattie did not even think about how to stabilize the fatal situation Thebie described to her on the phone, which suggests once more that she does not spend much time organizing her life.

Later, when all three of them are in the car looking for Cherkis, a “stupid [joke] given the circumstances” that Hattie makes about Logan being “adoptable” results in a serious conversation about adopting teenagers, foster homes and living alone (148-59). Logan is obviously contemplating his options should his mother not recover from her current mental breakdown. His insistence on not needing an adult to look after him leaves Hattie with the suspicion that he “is planning to run away before [they] find Cherkis” (150). One particularly interesting comment in this passage is Hattie’s statement that teenagers in group or foster homes stay there “only until they’re eighteen.” Upon Logan asking what they do then, she continues: “Well . . . they go wherever. They do their thing. They’re adults then” (149). She was probably trying to calm Logan down with the implication that even if he did have to go someplace else, it would only be for three years – or maybe she was just talking without thinking about the consequences. It is telling that she is rather helpless when her nephew inquires about what happens once quasi-orphans reach full age. Just as she does not think about any plans for her own future, Hattie is at a loss when faced with the question what it means to be legally adult. This is stressed by the grammatical format of her answer, i.e. the anaphoric “they” and the parallel sentence structure. She tries to evade a comprehensive answer by pretending adulthood brought with it the wisdom to find a purpose and build a meaningful life. The most striking aspect, however, is Hattie’s proposition that the three years between Logan now and when he will be eighteen would make all the difference.

It is also noteworthy in this context that when she first sees Logan on the airport, she is impressed with his appearance, thinking that “[h]e was a young man now, not a child” (6). Probably, Hattie is commenting on his physical development and the new reticence with which he has replaced his childhood chattiness, thus recognizing his movement to the life stage of adolescence. Her definition and understanding of what makes a boy a man, though, is not very clear, especially considering the fact that Logan is dressed and behaves like a typical

teenager of the time: He wears pants that are too big and reveal his boxers, he turns his music up too loud, casually hugs his aunt with one arm instead of two and drives the car although he does not have a driver's license (4). The maturity implied in the word "man" is not reflected in Logan's actions, which is not surprising considering Hattie's own lack of responsible, adult behaviour. I will talk more about this later when discussing traces of immaturity in her character.

The conversation about Logan living on his own continues a bit later when Thebie is asleep and he confronts Hattie with his conviction that it was not Min who asked her to look for the kids' father and that she simply did not want to have them around (180-81). Hattie reacts with extremely strong opposition, claiming that "That's not true at all! That's completely not true. I just think that Cherkis should probably ... you know ... he's your dad. He could take care of ... It's not like-" (181, ellipses in original). The vehemence with which she defends herself combined with the fact that she cannot underline her claim in any other way than to repeatedly deny his proposition supports Logan's argument, though. This incident is a testimony to Hattie's helplessness; she does not know how to hold the kids together, how to give them hope and how to motivate them because she is feeling abandoned and insecure herself. Her uncertainty and nervousness might also be what keeps her from confiding in him that while it is true that she does not want to be responsible for Logan and Thebie, this is not the case because she does not "want [them]" (181). The real reasons are her feeling of insufficiency and fear of failing. Still, she feels a close connection to the two remaining members of her family and appreciates their presence; in the night she thinks might be their "last night together for a long time," she does not want to think about being separated from them and not having them around all the time anymore (199). Falling asleep, she describes how she can hear her late father's and Min's voices as well as that of her niece and nephew, whose presence gives her comfort and a feeling of satisfaction and homeliness (*ibid.*).

As irresponsible as Hattie acts, she does communicate important values to the kids even as she neglects her parenting duties. Very often, Thebie receives mean comments about the way she looks, and although this should lead Hattie to make her wash so that she will no longer be verbally assaulted, her aunt supports her and tells her she is perfectly fine the way she is. In this respect, Hattie follows Min's pedagogy. Instead of forcing the young girl to conform to all of society's expectations, she teaches her to be tolerant, open-minded and not to put too much emphasis on a person's appearance.

Apart from her obligations as an aunt, Hattie also appears in the roles of sister and daughter. She hints several times at the fact that she feels guilty for Min's psychological problems because they started with her birth, but she also does not know what exactly it is that disturbed her sister. Despite Hattie's suspicion that her sister tried to kill her when they were both nearly drowning while on vacation (10), Min never displayed any signs of dislike for her, besides the rejection with which she confronts everyone when she is going through an episode of depression. Even when she left Hattie alone in a cast for almost an entire day, it seemed more like it was the result of her illness than that of any sort of hatred for her younger sister (172). They went on vacations together (65-67), she held Hattie's hand at their father's funeral telling her that "she'd take care of" her (79), and she told her she was the "only one person in the world she loved" (231).

Nonetheless, their relationship is complicated, and Hattie contemplates this issue several times throughout the novel. When Min asks her to help her die, Hattie answers "No, never," (26) but later she has doubts about whether or not this is the right way to handle her sister's illness (88). She used to be scared that Min might think it would be best for Hattie to die (79) while simultaneously fearing for Min's life. Unsure if her presence is helping or disturbing her sister, and also exhausted from years of trying to be there for her, Hattie left her in hopes that Min may feel better once the apparent cause of her breakdown was out of sight.

However, she did not disappear from her life entirely: She visited on Christmas, sometimes for a birthday, and stayed in touch via phone calls.

A recurring theme is the advice not to feel responsible for Min. Hattie's mother tells her to live her own life on her deathbed (63-64), and Hattie tries to explain the same to Logan (130, 270). Yet, she is unable to live by this rule herself, for when Min finally feels better and talks to her on the phone, Hattie agrees to stay and take care of her and her children so that Min can be released from the hospital soon (247-49). Obviously, she is going to remain the center of Hattie's life for a while longer, as she has always been. Even when she fled to Paris, Hattie kept reading psychological handbooks and had Min on her mind while drawing other people, so she has never really been emotionally independent from her.

Hattie had a good relationship to both her parents when they were still alive; her father drowned trying to save her and Min when she was nine (10) and her mother died "from a ruptured aorta" when Hattie was twenty-six (27). She explicitly states her wish to ask her mother for advice on how to handle the situation with Min in the hospital and herself alone with her niece and nephew or, from her perspective even better, let her "talk to Min and bring her down to earth" (ibid.). Although Hattie knows the strategy behind her mother's skillful treatment, she seems to be unable to reproduce the dark humour with which to counteract Min's death wish.

This does not mean, however, that their mother always knew how to help Min and keep her alive, as she once told Hattie that sometimes she becomes so desperate she wishes that Min would die just to put an end to everyone's suffering; she apologizes to her younger daughter afterwards, claiming that she had not actually meant it and was just scared all the time (215-16). In the end, it seems like none of Min's family knew what would be best for her. For Hattie, this means that, while she did rely on her mother's capability to keep Min stable most of the time, she could not always trust that she knew the full extent of her older

daughter's insanity. This becomes clear when Hattie "off-handedly" confessed to her that she suspected Min had tried to push her underwater during their drowning accident on purpose and that she was afraid she might try to kill her again (65). Her mother appeared not to take this concern seriously and attempted to calm her down, but Hattie still surrounded her bed with bubble wrap in hopes she would wake up if her sister ever tried to stab her in her sleep (ibid.).

Since he died when Hattie was still very young, there is little information about her father in the novel. The only thing the reader knows, besides his attempt to save his daughters from drowning, is that he once drove in the wrong direction for miles while the family was on holidays. He was terribly embarrassed for not noticing his mistake earlier, but neither Min nor Hattie care about the delay "because it didn't really matter to [them] where [they] were going" as long as they were together (243). The girls were laughing as it was all just a curious incident to them, but their mother asked them to respect their father's feelings, so instead, they were pretending to laugh at things in the environment outside the car. The reason Hattie remembers this moment is because she was grateful for her father not being offended by their laughter but appreciating their positive way of handling the event (244).

Hattie is able to live on her own and be financially independent of her parents. This is not only the case because she has to as both her mother and father are dead, for she was already living in Paris before her mother passed away. While her want for advice does not stem from an inability to live life on her own terms but from the fact that her mother was better at dealing with Min's illness, it proves that she is not emotionally independent from her sister. From a psychological perspective, the former aspect grants her partial adult status nonetheless. Hattie's mental capacity required for starting a family, however, is not yet fully developed, mostly because she tells herself so. It seems that she has been involved with raising and taking care of her sister's children from the start and she has watched Min doing it

for years, but she still perceives the responsibility for Logan and Thebes as coming out of nowhere. Taking her unwillingness to replace Min in her role as parent while she is in the hospital as a marker of an adolescent frame of mind seems unjustified; just as in Keniston's observation of young radicals, she does not want to commit to the binding commitment constituted by having children.

### **5.3. Love Relationships**

Over the course of the novel, the reader learns about two love interests of Hattie's, the first one being her long-term (ex-)boyfriend Marc, whom she met and shared an apartment with in Paris, and Adam, whom she meets in the United States one night when looking for Logan. Hattie and Marc first saw each other under very romantic circumstances in a museum, Smoking cigarettes and enjoying the view over Paris on the building's roof, Marc asks her for her name to which she replies "Aurore" (182-83). Although he knows she is not telling the truth, he is willing to call her by this name and that is what Hattie "liked most about him for a long time" (183). After feeling responsible for her sister and having suffered from her moods and fits her entire life, she is relieved to have someone pay attention to her and accept her quirks without questioning. For once, she is at the center of interest, she can start over without having to explain anything and be loved unconditionally for the person she wants to be. Nevertheless, according to her first description of him he is "moody, adjective-hating" and interested in esotericism (2). At least the first two features make him appear far less likeable and hard to get along with. Furthermore, Hattie does think he is really that attractive, and she had no intention of marrying him either (22). This supports the previous observation her carelessness about future plans and serious long-term commitments. Moreover, it hints at her desire to be loved regardless of whether or not she really feels the same way about her partner. Marc is not someone Hattie wants to spend her life but he helps her gain confidence, which is extremely important for her.

One moment when she is lying in bed and trying “really hard not to think about Marc,” she reminisces about the things she did like about him (30). Her memories go from physical details to habits to compliments he made about her body before culminating in the question “what the hell can an ashram offer that I can’t? I mean besides silence and solitude and spiritual revitalization” (ibid.). It is noteworthy that she only remembers him speaking positively about her physique, not her personality, whereas Hattie’s feeling of insufficiency stems from her comparison with qualities concerning mental well-being. Put differently, she sexually objectifies herself and then desperately recognizes that Marc supposedly left her not because she wasn’t attractive but because he sought fulfillment on a psychic level. It is unclear, though, if she actually realizes this distinction. Her impression that she had “been dumped for Buddha,” however, implies that she does perceive Marc’s decision as a downgrade of her worth as a girlfriend (25), neglecting that no other woman could provide “silence and solitude and spiritual revitalization” (30).

On the other hand, had she accepted his explanation, it probably would have hurt her even more when she found out that he had never left Paris but had met someone else (82). Initially, she had dialled their common phone number in France because she “wanted to hear his voice on the answering machine” (81). When he picks up the phone, she feels betrayed, thinking that he just wanted an excuse to break up with her and never planned to go to India. When Marc hears her crying, he tries to calm her down by making her compliments again and insisting that she had done nothing wrong. Hattie, however, knows that he does not mean any of it and is embarrassed for being unable to display more dignity: “Major kiss-off. It was so untrue. It was pathetic” (ibid.). Although she does not define who she is via the person she is dating, much of her self-esteem relies on being loved and adored by someone. With this new information, namely, that Marc did not only choose an Indian ashram over Hattie, but then

another person over that ashram, she is pushed even further down on the priority list of the man she loves.

Shortly after their conversation on the phone, she dreams about having a baby with him and that they are happily back together (101). This wish of hers stands in utter contradiction to her overwhelming fear of being responsible for Logan and Thebie. She does not actually want to have children with Marc; she just wants to be loved by him. The baby is most likely an extra incentive supposed to increase his commitment to her. Additionally, she is currently under a lot of stress and the harmonious family picture probably is perceived as a soothing alternative. Hence, the dream represents her impulsiveness as well as her indecision concerning her ex-boyfriend. The latter is stressed in the next instance of her thinking about Marc: when Logan breaks his wrist, Hattie has to give the hospital an address to send the bill to, and her last one happens to be the one in Paris where Marc is still living. Him having to pay for Logan's expensive treatment can be read as a form of poetic justice. While at first, she dreams about starting a family with Marc, she seems rather content with having the hospital bill sent to him only a few days later.

Adam is no less extraordinary than Marc. When Hattie wakes up one night and finds Logan and the van gone, Adam, a weed smoker, helps her search the city for him. Still high, he tells her all about his life, and in turn, Hattie confides her heartbreak, her anxiety and her exhaustion in him (205-06). He is obviously making advances towards her, which surprisingly does not scare her or make her uncomfortable as one would assume considering Hattie is alone in a truck with an intoxicated stranger (203-07). To give a few examples, he "said it was totally dope with him if [she] sat on his lap" (203) and later, he asks her to sit closer to him in the truck (207). Most other women would not have been as pleased by this behaviour, but Hattie is simply longing for any kind of affection from anyone.

One thing Adam has in common with Hattie's ex-boyfriend is an interest in philosophy, which might be the reason she is so trusting. She admits that she likes the attention and the fact that he does not want her to leave (204). Fully aware that she is only enjoying the situation because she is still lovesick, Hattie gives him a short kiss once they have found Logan. She goes back to the motel alone with her nephew, but the next morning, Adam is at the door offering to lead them to a mechanic he knows who will repair their leaking car for an extra low price (219). While they are waiting for his friend to finish work on the van, Hattie and Adam kiss again inside the friend's house despite the fact that Adam actually has a girlfriend. It is Hattie who mentions that he should not cheat on his girlfriend and objects to him calling her "stupid," but since they both feel like they need a break from the stress they recently had, they decide to continue (224). Although Hattie half-heartedly tries not to be involved with someone who is not single, her loneliness and insecurity take over. Adam shows understanding and respect for her situation, he does not criticize her and he is the only source of comfort she has had in weeks, so she puts her own well-being over that of another woman in spite of her own recent experience with betrayal.

Even though she does not expect to see Adam again after they leave with the repaired van, Hattie is feeling some kind of heartache and longing for him. She is unsure if her short encounter with this man has resulted in "love or maybe something deeper and shallower at the same time" (225), but the emotional confusion has opened her eyes to the fact that she does not really want Marc because she loves him. Rather, she knows now that she wants to be loved, and this is actually what she cannot let go of. Hattie calls Marc again later and finds out that his new relationship is over, too, and that he wants her back. She responds very honestly to his attempts at convincing her to return to Paris and be with him again, letting him know that she is uncertain of her feelings and wants to take care of her sister and the children for now. When Marc doubts the success of her projects and tells her she sounds "a little crazy",

Hattie does not give in but maintains her position without seeing the necessity to give him any further explanation (239-41). If Marc does not support her and apparently only wants her back because he does not want to be alone, then Hattie has no use for him. It is remarkable that she reacts this way, for in the beginning, she wanted nothing more than to stay in Paris and keep living with Marc (2). It is highly unlikely that she would have rejected his offer had he made it shortly after her arrival in Canada; at least, she would have agreed to return once Logan and Thebie were taken care of.

Hattie is obviously able to commit to a long-term relationship as proven by the fact that she shared an apartment with Marc for years. She is a little needy and clingy, but she does not want a boyfriend to help her define her own identity; rather, she desires support, understanding, and reassurance. Claire, one of the main characters in *Generation X*, shows a similar pattern insofar as that she does not give up on her affair with the extremely attractive, but arrogant and capitalistic Tobias before she has the chance to turn her back on him herself. Hattie seems to be able to deal with the separation from Marc much better after he calls her crazy and doubts her project concerning Min as well. From this perspective, they both appear less like the highly insecure, unstable personalities who are “in ihrer Selbstfindung abhängig von anderen Menschen” that Wagner sees at least in Claire (338); after all, the final fight Claire has with Tobias is partially rooted in her values and ideals which he criticizes (Coupland 159-160). They know what is important to them and act according to their own priorities.

#### **5.4. Peculiar Behaviour**

Many of the things Hattie does can be considered odd, childish, or irresponsible. Instead of giving in to the temptation of classifying her behaviour as an overall symptom of “immaturity”, as Tom De Haven did in his *New York Times* review of the book, this section

will look into her mannerisms more closely in order to distinguish between patterns that are simply a result of her overextension, part of her general disorganization, or indeed juvenile. The latter category may, for instance, be identified by a resemblance with Logan's typically adolescent attitude or Hattie's undue understanding thereof. Her frequent embarrassment about her own actions allows for the assumption that those manners belong to one of the two former categories; however, she is not always aware of her ineptitude for socially adequate behaviour.

An outstanding incident occurs when she is on her way to find Cherkis and passes a slowly walking man dressed like he was participating in a marathon (112). She is so distressed by being solely responsible for her niece and nephew as well as the heartbreak she is going through that she is desperate for the company of an adult. When she slows down the car and talks to the man, she tries to convince him to get in and let her take him home. He politely declines the offer several times and Hattie becomes increasingly pressing to the point that she sounds like a kidnapper. Logan, Thebie and the man are confused by her behaviour: "Do you want to ride with us for a while? I asked him. Thebes and Logan looked at me, looked at him, looked at me. . . . Is it because we're strangers? I asked him. He looked at us. He said he just wanted to walk if that was okay with me" (113). Finally, after Hattie's fifth request that the man enters the car, Logan practically begs her to let the man go (114).

The initial reason Hattie gives for inviting the man to join them is that she "wanted to talk to another adult" (112). At this point in the story, it has already become apparent that Hattie can barely be regarded an adult; the expression "*another* adult" does not quite fit. A more suitable description of who she wants to talk to is a person of her own age group for whose well-being she is not in charge. This is also one thing that has probably motivated her to start a conversation with the man in the first place: She wants to leave her responsibilities behind and talk about things unrelated to her sick sister or teenage hardships. The man's

comment that going for a race “had been a stupid idea” because he “hadn’t known what he was doing or what he was getting into” reminds Hattie of her own decision to take the children and go looking for their father without really having thought it through (114). Seeing someone as exhausted and far from his goal as she is causes her to enthusiastically assume a connection with him, reflected in thoughts like “I liked this guy. We could become best friends” (113), “I loved this guy!” and “Kidnap this odd walking man, be lost and tired together, . . . laugh at our misguided ways, . . . change my name from Troutman to something like Grey” (114). Since she notices Logan’s and Thebie’s embarrassment about the encounter she probably also knows that her attempts to lure the man into the car are inappropriate. Moreover, she is sufficiently self-reflexive to detect that her behaviour is merely the ad hoc result of her desperation (113).

Nevertheless, there is more behind the phrase “another adult” than Hattie’s own wish to escape the burden she had loaded onto herself. As mentioned above, while she longs for the company of a person wiser than she is, that is, an actual grown-up person, she is also tired of hearing about nothing but adolescent’s and children’s topics. She has been alone with Thebie and Logan for a very long time and barely had the chance to talk about things unrelated to school, peers, basketball and whatever anecdote or joke Thebie comes up with to avoid silence. The fact that she needs a pause from being surrounded exclusively by minors supports the assumption that, while she is far from being fully adult, she no longer has the mindset of an adolescent either.

Later, however, she seems to react very much like a thoughtless, trouble-seeking adolescent when she lets herself be overwhelmed by the desire to release some of the tension in a fight with two policemen. The police try to convince Hattie that the three of them should leave town to avoid having charges pressed against Logan, who broke his wrist playing basketball and betting with a group of local youths. She seizes the opportunity to start an

argument about “the nature of these so-called charges,” but the officers stay calm and refuse to be provoked by Hattie’s fury, which enrages her even more (168). Only her knowledge of the fact that she is actively pursuing the fight speaks against an interpretation of her conduct as a manifestation of purely juvenile rebellion. Thanks to Logan’s and Thebie’s silent plea not to let the situation escalate, she manages to keep her self-control after all. Again, it is her niece and nephew who have to intervene to keep Hattie from causing trouble. Her disrespect for authority in a foreign country almost endangers their entire journey and could be regarded as proof of her lacking sense for the consequences her actions have. The inability to control her impulsiveness becomes even clearer in her own estimation of the encounter with the two policemen: “The cops were very calm and actually quite reasonable. It was making me nuts. I wanted a fight too. I wanted to break my wrist on a stranger’s head and scam some Moabites and get run out of town for being better at something than the other kids” (168-69). As previously said, Hattie is tired, upset, under a lot pressure and looking for an outlet. When taking into account her family history, however, it becomes clear that foolish conduct in front of others, especially people of authority, runs in the family: To give one example, Min held such resentment against a kindergarten teacher of Logan’s that even after years, she hopped around mocking him when she accidentally met him on the street (148). The Troutman sisters do not care much about other people’s opinion of them, which results in unsuitable, child-like behaviour. Attributing this to an overall immature state of mind, however, is to neglect the difference between psychological development and personal character traits.

The aforementioned behaviour she seems to be less aware of includes things like throwing hatchets into Min’s neighbour’s garden as the kids do just out of spite (41-42) and giving unsuitable advice to them: she suggests to Thebie that she show her teacher both middle fingers (37) and that she should take money from Hattie instead of reading a thick book for a “read-a-thon” that is supposed to raise money for Vietnamese children (39).

Hattie's nearly nonexistent respect for authority is a recurring motif and can simply be regarded as part of her personality, although it is debatable whether or not it is pedagogically valuable to teach the same behaviour to children. Advising an eleven-year-old girl not to work for something she wants, however, is to withhold the satisfaction of achievement from her. This proposition allows for the conclusion that Hattie has never been rewarded for hard work on anything she cares about, which is, of course, difficult if her most important concern is supporting a sister with chronic and obviously incurable mental illness. When Hattie herself is in a phase where she is trying to get the things she wants with as little effort as possible, she can hardly understand Thebie's desire to honestly earn something. This is probably also the reason she lied to her niece and nephew about the search for Cherkis having been Min's idea, and to Min, that she and the children were at home. She avoids issues and difficulties at all costs.

Additionally, she repeatedly allows Logan to drive the family van knowing he does not have a license (46, 156, 196). She does so with an air of carelessness when advising him, for example, just not to "get pulled over" and then no one would stop him and ask to show his nonexistent driver's license (156). Moreover, they smoke marijuana together when Thebie is asleep (245). While this is certainly not adequate behaviour for a guardian, Hattie is arguably the poster woman for a "cool aunt". If she cannot accept the role of a responsible guardian, then she can at least try and be a more or less trustworthy grown-up the children can confide in and do minor illegal things, like driving and smoking, in Hattie's presence.

Overall, most of the strikingly inappropriate conduct she displays can be attributed to her frustration and fear in the particular, admittedly demanding and difficult situation Hattie finds herself in. She has not developed the skills to accurately deal with stress, which may be a sign that she has insufficient knowledge on how to best solve a problem she is faced with. Although Hurrelmann speaks of task completion in the sense of doing schoolwork, it seems

sensible to apply this category to Hattie's general approach to life. From this point of view, she may have a slight deficiency in the realm of solving problems: instead of being honest and calculating the possible outcome of her unusual behaviour, she chooses the path which promises the least resistance.

### **5.5. Formation**

Hattie does not turn into a different person or discovers an entirely new side of her personality over the course of the novel. On a more subtle level, though, she has become more self-reliant as evidenced by her rejection of Marc's plea to come back to him, and she starts to come to terms with her situation. The moments in which she panics over being responsible for two children also decrease during the course of the novel. Thus, their joint road trip has helped her gain confidence and possibly a greater sense of responsibility as well, which, in turn, might lessen some of her fear of accepting the social roles sociological adulthood brings with it. Furthermore, she decides that she wants to stay with her sister and her niece to take care of both of them. This "new career" or "mission", as she sees it, resembles the cause which Keniston's postadolescents were pursuing insofar as that she believes her project to be temporary, that is, until Min has as fully recovered as possible, it is very personal, and it is necessary for her to do what she "ha[s] faith in" before she is able to move on with her own life (259).

Probably the biggest formative influence on Hattie's development during childhood and adolescence is her sister Min. While she was growing up, she always tried to be there for her, to make her smile, lighten her mood and distract her from her depressions. Quite early in the text, Hattie comments on Thebie being "more manic than the last time [she'd] seen her. [She] knew what that was about. It's hard not to get a little hysterical when you're trying desperately to keep someone you love alive" (6). Hattie remembers that she used to be just like her in that respect, which indicates a high amount of self-reflection on Hattie's side

(ibid.). Since Min's issues started with Hattie's birth, she believes to be somehow responsible for her sorrow and recurring death wish, even though she cannot say what exactly it is about her presence that causes these mental breakdowns (7). She has always been determined to make up for this by relentlessly trying to cheer her up and staying close to her so if anything happened she "could be the one to rescue her" (13).

Min's psychological problems have caused Hattie to constantly wonder about the world and the people around her; she frequently speaks of her family members as planets in a solar system and tries to get a better understanding of her sister (8, 258). The strategy she is pursuing here is to put herself outside of the situation and look at it from above like a scientist contemplating a hypothetical reaction between different chemicals. In doing so she displays the ability to both creatively and analytically think about a problem in search for a solution. This is not necessarily a contrast to the previous finding that she avoids conflict or too much hard work: she needs time and resources in order to work on a task. Additionally, the many attempts she makes at comprehending her sister's illness have not been successful yet.

Hattie's time in Paris has given her some insight into how spending her childhood and adolescence with Min has impacted her behaviour to the same degree which she now recognizes in Thebie. One particular characteristic is the need to constantly talk and produce sound as a counterweight to Min's life-negating muteness (23). In a more or less friendly way, Marc told Hattie "that silence was golden, especially" hers; before that she had never even noticed what a talkative person she was (ibid.). Compared to Thebie, she is indeed quieter, unless she gets nervous or feels like she has been seen through as she does when Logan admits he is certain that Min would never suggest asking Cherkis to take care of her children. The fact that Thebie reacts to her mother's unidentified illness with the same pattern Hattie did stresses the strong influence that Min exerts on others including her own family members.

It is worth mentioning here that Min is a good example for the direction discourse on maturity and mental illness sometimes takes. Hattie recollects how the family doctor, after he could not find any medical indications for her sister's behaviour, decided that she was simply immature and "needed to grow up" (64) – an estimation shared by *Telegraph's* reviewer Jane Shilling, who finds it "hard . . . not to agree with the doctor." Reducing symptoms like self-mutilation, suicidal tendencies, manic episodes and lethargy to a lack of maturity is quite questionable, especially considering that Min has been suffering from her undefined disorder since she was six years old. The more interesting it is that this connection is also made in Herrndorf's novel *In Plüschgewittern*.

There are only two instances in which Hattie really talks about her experience as an adolescent. In one of the conversations Hattie and Logan have in private, she tries to be understanding and demonstrate that she can relate to his situation by explaining that when she was his age, she would play guitar and "feel[] completely misunderstood and unloved and stupid and ugly and fucked up and lonely. So phenomenally lonely" (125). Her account is not surprising considering that Min probably received and demanded much attention. Hattie never says so, but it cannot be ruled out that she might have suffered from a lack of consideration. There is at least one point where she talks about Min's effect on other people:

At that resort in Acapulco, before our father drowned, Min owned the place. . . . Can you hold this for me? she'd say to anyone who was around. She'd stick her book and her beedies into her toque and hand it to them and then sashay like a supermodel across the sand and into the water to cool off. I would stand on the beach squinting into the sun and watch her and count the number of seconds she stayed under water. (13)

While Hattie is staying in the background looking after her older sister, Min seems to be admired even by strangers; otherwise they probably would not watch over her belongings.

It may be, however, that Hattie's perception was distorted by the fact that her sister always does such extraordinary things that she is usually the center of attention. Moreover, she is absolutely fascinated by her sister just as well, so she might project her own adoration onto others. She postulates her self-perception in the form of a counter-identity to Min, who is extraordinary, beautiful, smart, and creative (e.g., 12-13, 24, 273-74). In any way, Hattie did not enjoy her years as an adolescent and felt alienated, which is not an unusual experience in this life stage; adolescence is oftentimes connoted with expressions like "Initiationserlebnisse und Krisenerfahrungen" (Wagner 47), "Außenseiterposition" (81) or "Störungen" and "Risikoverhalten" in the sense of addictions, misperceptions of one's own body or violence (Gansel, "Zwischenzeit" 41). The fact that she uses the past tense in her confession to Logan indicates that she is over this phase now, suggesting that he will get better, too, and presenting herself as a person who has passed through adolescence.

When Thebie asks her to share a secret with her, Hattie admits to having slept with and blackmailed a married swimming coach when she was younger (191). She immediately regrets this and tries to make amends for having disturbed Thebie as well as the image she had of her aunt. Thebes wonders about Hattie's alleged promiscuity, who does not know how to react without complicating the story of her youth even more:

I wanted to mention that I'd been lonely, vulnerable, pathetically enamoured with this guy's twisted attention, probably conducting a misguided search for a father figure, periodically terrified of my sister, whom I loved and revered but never understood, definitely insecure about my body and my brain, wanting to be adored by somebody adorable, lousy at swimming, on the verge of an eating disorder and dangerously impulsive. . . (191-92)

The issues she is listing here are a nice summary of all the things she has been through as an adolescent. They also form a useful basis for comparing Hattie as she is now with her

high school self. Since Hattie never mentions any friends but repeatedly refers to herself as lonely, it is likely that she really did and does not have many people to rely on, especially now that her mother is dead. Insofar, her affection for the swimming coach is understandable. The desire “to be adored by somebody adorable” has not disappeared completely, but it appears in an undeniably healthier shape considering that Marc and Adam are roughly her age and neither of them has a professional relationship with her. During the course of the main action, there are no signs of Hattie suffering from an eating disorder or an abnormal fear of not being attractive or intelligent enough. Most of the features she describes can be associated with typical teenage angst and they are no longer visible in her character. Yet, some of them resurface as, for instance, her impulsive reaction mentioned above and the need to be loved and accepted.

The formation of Hattie’s character has been observable in two ways: firstly, her indecision, insecurity and lack of orientation diminished over the course of the main action to make room for a personal goal she is going to pursue with much passion. Secondly, the memories from childhood and adolescence allow for an understanding of the influences that have shaped Hattie while growing up.

## **5.6. Overview of Postadolescent Characteristics**

Even though she sometimes displays slight deficiencies in the area of social interaction and problem solving, Hattie has completed all the psychological development tasks of adolescence and is no longer in the same mental state as Logan or herself when she was a minor. She has successfully detached herself from her parents and established a value system of her own. In terms of culture, consumption and politics, Hattie can be considered an adult as well due to her interest in fine arts and psychology, the reasonable amount of money she spends and her awareness of cultural and political differences between Canada and the USA.

The last two features, consumption patterns and politics, have not been explicitly pointed out before because they do not require much analysis: she does not go on excessive shopping trips but she is also not actively saving it or thinking twice about buying something. The children's essential needs in the form of food, new headphones and a knife for Logan as well as clean clothes and art supplies for Thebie are taken care of. As suggested by Hattie's indifference towards her job, finances are not important to anyone in the family in any way; they do not pursue wealth but they do not condemn it either. Hattie's political views play a similarly small role, not because they were unimportant but simply because she is not overly involved with politics. Nevertheless, she agrees with Thebie's estimation that 9/11 did affect Canadians in a more or less personal way (38) and shares the stance of many Canadians that the United States are both fascinating and weird (cf. Berton; Capel; Chiara). Her stereotypical view on US Americans leads her to assume rather unlikely events like being murdered by a group of potential criminals (106-07, 218-19). She is not actually a political person, but she has norms and ideas according to which she acts and which influence her behavior.

By the end of the novel, she has found a purpose and direction for her life, namely, looking after Min and Thebie until the former is able to stand on her own. Yet, Hattie has to finish this new venture before she can accept the sociological roles of adulthood in the form of a professional career that suits her interests as well as her skills and a steady, reliable partner with whom she can settle down and start a family. She is still a postadolescent, but she has a plan for the immediate future that will probably pave her way to full adult status in a few years.

## 6. Nameless Lost *In Plüschgewittern*

### 6.1. Living Conditions and Occupation

The nameless protagonist of *In Plüschgewittern* is thirty years old. During the entire plot of the novel, he has neither a steady place to live nor a job; the story begins with him taking the final step of breaking up with his ex-girlfriend Erika in a parking lot by the highway. She moves to Frankfurt while the first-person narrator hitchhikes to his brother and sister-in-law in Hamburg. He resents both of them for their allegedly overly bourgeois attitudes and world views; he only stays for two days because his dying grandmother wants to see him one last time. Having fulfilled this duty, he takes the train to Berlin to visit his friend Desmond, whom he met during his university years. Whether the protagonist ever completed his degree or not is never mentioned. After arriving in Berlin, he stays in Desmond's boyfriend's vacant apartment. He falls in love with a woman named Ines, but because she is a lesbian, their relationship remains a platonic friendship. For almost the entire time he spends in Berlin, the protagonist is either drunk or on drugs, and when one of Desmond's acquaintances lets him know that Desmond does not always speak well of him, he leaves Berlin and tries to find Erika. In the last chapter, the first-person narrator changes to the perspective of his brother, who reports on the protagonist's strong mental health issues and his obvious addiction to alcohol. He also explains that Erika died in a car accident on her way to Frankfurt and that the protagonist does not know what to do and where to go.

Both the main action and the recollections demonstrate his aimlessness. He never suggests that he has any professional or private goals or ambition, and it seems that he never actually had them – his choice of courses, for example, was based on those of the girl he had a crush on. Although he has been to university, he does not have an occupation adequate for his intellect and education; the only job he ever mentions is that of a night shift loader (79). The

brother's comment that the protagonist never wants to accept money from him implies that he is indeed in need of financial support. It is very likely that he has made a habit of living at different places for a limited amount of time if he does not have a girlfriend and works low-profile jobs without ambition or passion, similarly to the main characters of *Generation X*, admittedly without the drive to accomplish personal fulfillment on a different level, a project the narrator seems to have given up on. Interestingly, he points out that he believes the social concept of the Generation X to be a myth which only became real later because people were attracted to the lifestyle once they were informed about it. He admits that he finds the way of living presented in a magazine very intriguing (14), but it is noteworthy that to an extent, the article's description of the Generation X already mirrored his own life and still is. I will return to this ambivalence when discussing the peculiarities of his behaviour and world views.

The fact that he does not have a place to live after the breakup with Erika does not seem to worry him at all. At one point, he contemplates searching for work in Berlin so he can afford an apartment (124) and actually starts looking at places for rent, however bad their condition may be (90-91). His attempts remain superficial and without serious engagement, though. The protagonist knows that he should be able to complete these two tasks, but he is not. Although he managed to graduate from high school and even went to university, which suggests a respectable amount of intellectual skills, he fails at simple practical things. Therefore, he cannot be considered fully adult. In contrast to him, Hattie was at least able to find a place to live for a few years, and if she tried again in Manitoba, she would probably succeed. *In Plüschgewittern's* narrator seems to either have to work on his power of endurance when it comes to basic things such as finding a job and an apartment, or he needs psychological assistance in order to do so.

## 6.2. Family

Early on, the first-person narrator explains that he has always felt alienated from his parents and especially his brother Volker: “Meine Mutter hätte ja fremd gegangen sein können oder ihn adoptiert haben. Das habe ich wirklich gedacht. Alles an ihm war fremdartig und langsam. Zur fixen Idee wurde diese Vorstellung allerdings erst, als . . . ich dachte, wahrscheinlich bin *ich* es, den sie adoptiert haben“ (19; emphasis in original). During the main action, he only interacts with Volker and it is not clear whether his parents are still alive. Since he uses the expression “übernehmen” when he says that his brother and sister-in-law Marit moved into his parents’ house (18) and mentions that Marit never met his mother (21) it is quite likely that they are dead.

The protagonist seems to have an ambivalent relationship to his parents: While he used to believe that he was adopted and frequently remarks how little he thinks of them, he is sufficiently attached to his mother that when he hears a phrase commonly used by her from Marit’s mouth instead he is “wie vor den Kopf geschlagen” (21). He believes those words belong to his mother and not to Marit, and the thought that one day she might say “Dein Hemd ist ja die gedrängte Wochenübersicht” to her own children the way his mother did upsets him (*ibid.*). This suggests that he had a better relationship with her than he has with his brother, because Volker’s association with Marit does not bother him at all. Where this disparity comes from is entirely subject to speculation: one possibility is that he had a closer relationship to the woman who raised and loved him than to the little brother whose lifestyle he despises.

Another instance in which his parents are relevant is the protagonist’s eczema: his father believes that it is all a matter of self-control and once he stops scratching, it will go away on its own (29), whereas later, during the summer break after grade ten when the rash

does get better, he claims that it was all due to stress (34). While the father is right about his son's eczema having a psychological cause, it is not the pressure in school as he presumes – the protagonist obviously could not care less about his education – but the longing for the girl in the bright blue jeans which makes the boy suffer. His mother, on the other hand, asks several doctors for help before finally giving up (29). So far, the narrator's parents seem rather stereotypical with his father requesting his son to defeat the disease purely with the power of his own will and his mother being more caring and trying to find a cure. She also does not comprehend her son's wish to have furniture more fitting for his age as the old furniture is still functioning, which is a typical conflict between adolescents who want to keep up with their peers and parents who cannot see the sudden need of their children to be perceived differently.

His mother's care for him also shows in her attempt to comfort him when he had his first panic attack at the age of five or six: "Ich habe einen Verzweiflungsanfall bekommen, und meine Mutter hat versucht, mich zu trösten, indem sie mir von Jesus erzählt hat, der für uns alle gestorben ist. Ein absolut unverständlicher Satz." (49). While the protagonist downplays her ability to say anything consoling, he also accepts that it is hard to pretend things are not as bad as they seem. He suggests that his mother had the same thoughts about afterlife as he does, claiming that she "selbst nicht dran geglaubt hat" and really "dachte, . . . dass wir alle zu Kompost werden" (ibid.). Apart from the fact that he probably does not know what she thought about death and the soul, this statement is proof of his overall negative attitude towards life and his negation of anything immaterial. Volker reveals the severity of his brother's early feeling of alienation from his family, which did not only lead him to run away from home multiple times, he also claimed to be held hostage in a "großen pädagogischen Anstalt", that his parents were "bestellte Schauspieler" and tried to detect evidence for his theory in maps and news shows (181). Thus, it is obvious that the main character has never

even established a basic sense of trust with his family, which makes the further development of his social and emotional skills difficult. In contrast to him, Hattie's only trust issues concern her sister and the fear that she might want to kill her, but this did not leave her with a general distrust in the world as a whole.

The only person of his family he seems to have had a comparatively good relationship with is his grandmother. It is unlikely that he would have visited anyone else shortly before their death just because they asked to see him one last time. It is true though that he does not like being around her: he has barely arrived when he is already wondering how long he will have to stay because the house's smell bothers him (50) and due to her sweatiness he is repelled by the thought of having to touch her (51). Again, the knowledge of her unconditional love for him does not outweigh the physical discomfort she and her environment cause him. The mixture of repulsion and sympathy he feels around her climaxes when he drives back and considers killing his grandmother to release her from her suffering, her loneliness and, most of all, her indignity (53). He is horrified by the conditions under which she is living, or rather, in his perception, waiting to die. One of the things he considers to be the most awful aspects of her state is the woman looking after her, whom he pictures to be overly eager and pretending everything was perfectly fine when this is clearly not the case (50). To the narrator, this seems like an attempt to manipulate reality based on the assumption that the old and terminally ill patient was already too deteriorated to notice. Being lied to and not taken seriously seem to be among the worst experiences he can imagine.

Terrible as his murderous intention sounds, especially to Marit and Volker, he is not contemplating killing her out of spite or recklessness; when he ponders the thought, he seems to see it more closely related to euthanasia. The fact that he feels bad about how her life is coming to an end becomes apparent in the following passage: "Die Vorstellung, wie sie da jetzt ganz allein liegt in ihrem Alte-Leute-Zimmer, während das Licht draußen immer fahler

wird, und über ihren schrecklichen Fehler . . . nachdenkt – da wird mir auf einmal ganz schlecht” (53). With his choice of words, he draws a very melancholic and depressing picture of her which disturbs him as much as the reader. Suffocating her with a pillow might not appear like a merciful act but the protagonist’s motive is (ibid.). Possibly, this is also why he does not want to hear from Marit what his grandmother tells other people about him and not because he does not care, as he puts it (56); after all, he is still thinking about her on his way to Berlin the next morning (58).

Both Volker and Marit repeatedly become the objects of the protagonist’s anger. On the surface, it seems to be the petit bourgeois lifestyle they represent as university graduates, house owners and prospective parents that aggravates him. Although this is certainly part of his rejection, there are several clues that lead to the assumption that the couple could not do anything to improve their relationship with the protagonist. One of them is the contradiction in his description of Marit’s allegedly unbearable stupidity. He says she was “unglaublich beschränkt, und das offenbart sich am deutlichsten in ihrer Weltoffenheit, in ihrer absurden Toleranz” (19). “Weltoffenheit“ and “Toleranz” are usually not part of a “beschränkt” person’s personality. It cannot be ruled out that he simply does not like her because of his aversion for his brothers, which makes it impossible for him to accept that Volker is happily married to an attractive woman with good qualities. On the other hand, he has come to condemn these exact values as false hypocritical during his adolescence, an aspect to which I will return later.

He is not only rude to his brother and sister-in-law, he actively tries to provoke them by, for example, sexually harassing Marit at a dinner party until Volker has to violently kick him out of the house (22-24). He does admit that Volker had every right to react the way he did, but the narrator shows no sign of regret or contrition despite the fact that the incident most likely played a part in Marit’s miscarriage a few weeks later. Instead, he suggests they

make another child, and when he finds out she did get pregnant shortly thereafter, he calls her a “richtige Maschine,” which is also quite offensive (24). Interestingly, he also knows that he is being unfair to her because he doesn’t really know her. His capability of self-reflection stands in remarkable contrast to the allegedly childish behavior he so often displays.

The narrator’s family is far from giving him the same sense of belonging and emotional connection that Hattie received from hers. At a first glance, he seems to resemble Min in that he worries his brother about his state of mind, his aimlessness and the constant trouble he gets into, but on the other hand he does not have children that he loves, or anyone else he feels obligated to for that matter. The only affection he admits to is that towards his girlfriends, but when he learns that Desmond is not as fond of him as he thought he was and it turns out that Erika died, he returns to his brother and is offered a place to stay – even if he takes off again after only a night. No matter how much he resents Volker and Marit and their company, they are the safest place he has available. The fact that he brings himself into situations where he needs them shows that he is not independent and unable to live on his own, but he also refuses to really let them help him as proven by the short duration of his stays and the harsh sarcasm with which he talks to Volker (180, 181).

It is debatable whether or not the protagonist has successfully and adequately cut the cord from his family. Assuming that his parents are dead at the time the story is told, he does not have much of a choice but to live on his own and be economically independent from them. From a sociological perspective, thus, he has solved the respective developmental task; as the reader learns from Volker in the last chapter, he has wanted to leave his family since he was a child (181-83). He does not feel the need to be protected, supported or loved by a family, but he does not have the mental capacity to deal with life on his own, either. Another possibility is that he does not want to admit to himself that he has no control over his life. While Hattie still cares about her family and is aware of the fact that she cannot leave her

sister behind entirely, she wishes that her mother were still around so she could ask her for advice. A plea like that would never cross *In Plüschgewittern*'s protagonist's mind. He has always believed that he was able to take care of himself without anybody else's help. Of course, Hattie is in a different situation, and she does not want her mother's support for dealing with her own life but for handling that of her sister and Min's children, whereas the German novel's main character never has to take care of anyone but himself.

### **6.3. Love Relationships**

Ever since he was a teenage boy, he has shown a tendency to get obsessed with girls he is interested in. Starting sometime in high school, his biggest interest for years was a girl from school wearing "hellblaue, ausgewaschene Jeans" called Anja Gabler (26). In grade eleven, he based his course choice on hers (35), he gathered all the information he could about horses because he thought he overheard her say she liked horseback riding (39), and when she asked him a random question about their chemistry class, he could not stop asking himself why of all people she had asked him (37), to name just a few instances. His feelings and his longing for her become so intense that he gets eczema, which does not disappear until he finishes school. Obviously, he has been extremely sensitive, reacts physically to stress, and unable to properly deal with his emotions since he was a teenager.

Two years after his graduation from high school, he meets Anja again at a party, and for a little over a year she is his first girlfriend (47). The narrator remembers how he and Anja broke up when he is distracting himself from what Erika tells him in the parking lot, reminiscing about the way he can never recall concrete words or topics of the conversations he has during breakups. Instead, it is little details that get stuck in his head, like a football game that was taking place, "Werbemelodien" or "eine kleine Entzündung auf der Oberlippe des Gegenübers" (13). He contrasts this with love vows or life crises, which appear far less stable and consistent to him (*ibid.*). His conclusion seems to be that love relationships are less

worthy and meaningful in general, for if a trifle catches so much more of his attention than, for instance, words or a touch, then the emotional aspect of the relationship cannot have been of major importance. In this respect, he is completely different from Hattie, who frequently thinks of Marc and stumbles upon things that remind her of him. The memory of his breath is even part of the comfortable half-dream she has when she is falling asleep in a hotel with Thebie in her arms and Logan in the shower (199). It is these moments of intimacy and connectedness that she remembers and longs for which elude the protagonist in *Plüschgewittern*.

The fact that he did not actually know Anja bothers him especially in the beginning when he only sees her in the schoolyard; once the narrator talks about the time when they have classes together, he stops mentioning the confusion and resentment he initially felt due to his fascination for a stranger. The intensity of his feelings and their duration is remarkable: having started before grade eleven, his fixation on her lasted at least four years. Their relationship was comparatively short, but considering that it was his first one, this is still long enough to prove that he can maintain a love relationship for an extended period of time. His evaluation of the fact that he was still very emotional at that point and cried, however, seems odd: “An sich war die Sache längst vorbei, aber es war, wie gesagt, meine erste Liebe, und damals wusste ich noch nicht, dass so etwas ohne großen Knall enden kann” (12). In hindsight, he believes that he only reacted the way he did because he thought crying and talking about the past was a necessary part of breaking up. If he had “known” “dass so etwas auch ohne großen Knall enden kann,” then he would have been much more relaxed and less affected by the event, or at least he assumes this would have been the case. Despite his pragmatism when it comes to separating from his girlfriend, he is not entirely pessimistic about love in general; otherwise, he would not have called Anja his “first love,” implying that he has fallen in love

again and still does, at least from his point of view and under consideration of his definition of love.

The narrator does not say much about his relationship with Erika. Most of the information about her is given in the sequence of their last conversation. Unlike him, Erika is distressed, crying, clinging to and accusing the protagonist alternately, which is no surprise when taking into account her borderline personality disorder (179). If it was not for the new job she found in Frankfurt, it is quite likely that the two would have continued living together although they were no longer officially a couple (9). Why they were sharing an apartment and sleeping in the same bed is not clear; one possible explanation is that it was out of habit and apathy, another that he could not afford a place of his own because it is nowhere mentioned that he had a job or another kind of income at the time. According to the protagonist's description, Erika was compulsively collecting things (9-10), and Volker sees her as overly dramatic, slightly hysterical and unable to talk about "ganz normale Dinge" (180). Together with the protagonist's description of her appearance in the journal *Stern* as a member of the Generation X and her furious reaction to the way she was presented in the article, this suggests a tendency to nihilism that is also observable in the main character (14). Both of them dislike mainstream and high culture without showing an interest in alternative kinds of art or entertainment, which makes them, as Volker ironically observes, suitable partners for each other (180). On the other hand, Erika gives the protagonist's complete lack of interest in anything as the main reason they had to break up (9). It is more likely, though, that she actually criticizes his lack of interest in her, because when he replies to that with "Na dann ist ja alles gut," she says that that was exactly what she meant, although his statement only showed an indifference towards her and nothing else (ibid.).

The first night the protagonist goes out to a bar in Berlin, Desmond goes through a list of people who will be there. When he mentions Ines' name, the main character is immediately

interested as he once read something by her that he found odd and disturbing, but apparently also intriguing. Upon first meeting her, however, he is “einigermaßen enttäuscht”, for she “ist absolut nicht [sein] Typ” (66). While he claims that this is not because of her rather unattractive he does not explain what kind of woman he is usually attracted to. His eagerness to meet her, thus, was not only based on an interest in her intellectual work but on the assumption that someone producing a text “so seltsam” and “ein bisschen krank” that he remembers its author must be a potential lover or at least a sex partner (64-65). Certainly, this is an unusual feature to look for in people, but Volker later explains that none of the protagonist’s girlfriends after Anja were “psychisch intakt” (180). There seems to be a pattern of which he is very aware and obviously has no desire to change. While he knows what kind of woman he is usually attracted to and has developed a “type,” which suggests that he is over the adolescent phase of sexual and emotional experimenting, it is debatable if this interest in mentally unstable women is healthy for him.

At first, the narrator is also disappointed by Ines’ behavior: He admires her ability to form highly complex sentences, whereas he is having trouble articulating himself at all, probably due to the influence of alcohol, but he also finds her slightly pretentious (67). During the evening, she and another woman who is part of the group have an argument about reality TV shows and Ines declares her opponent’s thesis as “Schwachsinn” while picking at her teeth with a finger and staring at her (70-71). The protagonist must have been impressed by Ines’ reaction as shortly thereafter, he ponders the thought of lying in bed with her and listening to her “Sätze mit zwanzig Nebensätzen” (72). Although he is initially not attracted to her, Ines’ impolite behavior, her intellectual and complicated way of talking and her victory over the much better-looking woman change his mind. Apparently, he is fascinated by people who are calm, intelligent, and demonstrate how extraordinary they are.

The next morning, he is eager to make sure she comes to the party Desmond planned for the night, so the protagonist leaves her a message from a phone booth but forgets to say his name. It is already clear how much he wants to see Ines again, yet he does not want his friend to know: “Wenn ich jetzt allein wäre, würde ich sofort nochmal anrufen. Aber weil Desmond dabei ist, möchte ich nicht, dass er denkt, dass es mir so wichtig ist, und ich zuckte die Schultern“ (77). Oddly enough, he does not mind Ines noticing he called her twice in a row but is embarrassed in front of his best friend to admit that he does tend to call a woman he likes several times. Ines herself gets annoyed by the protagonist’s daily calls during the course of the novel. This does not constitute the first time he realizes his own clinginess, but her directness unsettles him sufficiently that he tries to talk to Desmond about it (118-19). At that point, he already knows she is a lesbian, but apparently he cannot let go of the idea that they might become a couple anyways.

In this respect, he resembles the protagonist of Benjamin von Stuckrad-Barres novel *Soloalbum*: The nameless narrators share the obsessive need for self-affirmation through a female partner regardless of whether or not they actually love these women. While their identity is not irrevocably dependent on being in a relationship, their ego cannot accept rejection (Wagner 412). As noted above, this is not a peculiarly male feature: Hattie and Claire are just as much in need of confirmation as these two characters.

The protagonist in *Plüschgewittern* repeatedly talks about feelings and thoughts he has about Ines which are similar to the presentiment he had when he first heard he was going to meet her. At the aforementioned party, for instance, he silently curses one of the women who are present, “und dann fällt [ihm] ein, dass Ines jetzt dasselbe denkt wie [er]” (85). He quickly admits that he cannot know for sure what she was thinking, but not before experiencing a feeling of unity and common understanding which supposedly brings them closer together (ibid.). Later, they are kissing on the building’s roof and he admits to himself that, although it

was him who claimed he wanted to kiss and Ines only agreed, he only did so because he felt it was a social convention when calling it a “Pflichtgefühl, eine Betrunkenhetsküsserei” (89). It is striking that he willingly follows the notion that, if he is alone with a person of his desired sex, he has to kiss her (or him); usually, he likes to criticize social norms or what he believes to be social norms. In this instance, he has probably been traumatized as an adolescent by not understanding his peers’ dating rituals. This experience has had such an impact on him that he is too afraid of failing in interacting with women not to adhere to the standards he has observed. Furthermore, it is possible that he regards the short kiss as part of a scheme which he follows when meeting potential love affairs. In this case, it does not matter if he actually wanted to kiss her or not because he wants to spend more time with Ines and get to know her better anyways: he already calls her again the next afternoon to go out for dinner, displaying the beginning of an obsession similar to the one he had with Anja as a teenager (95).

In his head, the protagonist can already see his and Ines’ entire future together as well as its presumably inevitable end (97-98). These thoughts support the impression that he acts according to a relationship plan with preset forms of beginning, duration, and end. While he speaks of the idea of two people “belonging together,” he does not believe in it (98). His pessimism begs the question why he would start a relationship with someone in the first place if it is doomed to fail? Since the protagonist has no goal in life, he most likely sees dating as a pastime. He is not looking for a soul mate the way Hattie and Claire are because he does not believe such a person exists, at least not for him. From his point of view, settling down with a steady partner or wife and starting a family seems pointless; it is not going to last anyway.

He revises this attitude once he meets and talks to Ines over dinner. They understand each other without having to explain what it is they are trying to say, which is highly valued by the narrator as he is often misunderstood and also hates to have give explanations. However, the ease with which he prefers to have conversations does not only stem from

immediately understanding an utterance's meaning; he also likes his conversation partners to be of the same opinion as he is (99). He is very rigid concerning his point of view: instead of seeing it as exactly that, one of many different opinions, the protagonist believes his stance to be the only right one. He does not say, for example, "Ich treffe lieber Leute, die das auch so sehen" but "Ich treffe lieber Leute, die das *von alleine wissen*" (ibid.; emphasis added). With this attitude, it may be hard for him to work out relationships based on love as well as friendship or business. If he is unwilling to compromise and accept other people's opinions as valid too, he does indeed depend on women whose viewpoints are exactly the same as his.

The rest of his date with Ines is just as pleasant to him as the detail just mentioned until she lets him know that they are "sexually incompatible" (102, 103). This information unsettles him very much, and it may well be that it is this circumstance which actually makes him fall in love with her, or maybe only believe he has fallen in love with her. Right before he entered the bar where they were having dinner, he said that she seemed "nicht mehr halb so begehrenswert wie zuvor," expecting the night to end up with them as an official couple (98). He finds it hard to deal with this kind of rejection, especially because she invites him to stay at her place, which only adds to his confusion (104-06). As previously stated, he cannot give up hope that she may be interested in him after all, even though nothing happens while they are sleeping in her bed (ibid.).

The protagonist keeps trying for Ines but apparently without success. His many attempts at calling her make him appear lost, lonely, and helpless, which he is. Ines in turn does not wish to be constantly contacted by him, probably because she sees a purpose in life, goes to university and does not want to be responsible for the narrator. Their liaison ends rather abruptly after they engage in some sort of sadomasochistic game (125-26). What exactly happens between the two remains unclear; the reader only finds out that he leaves with a bleeding wound on his leg and leaves Ines' apartment without saying goodbye to her. He never

speaks of her again either, the only exception being a phone call she does not take. Possibly, the protagonist has realized himself that he will never have the kind of relationship with Ines he desires. Another explanation is based on the premise that they had sex, which cannot be determined with certainty. In that case, he may have lost his interest in Ines because he “conquered” her. It is certain, however, that the experience deeply disturbs him as he feels sick and tries to numb himself with alcohol for several days in a row. Again, his expectations have been disappointed, and in contrast to Hattie, he lacks the optimism as well as the honesty toward himself to admit that he has to reorient and find people who are actually there for him.

#### **6.4. Peculiar Behaviour**

Just as is the case with Hattie, not all of the protagonist’s odd deeds are caused by a lack of maturity. What is of special importance here is the distinction between actions he can take full responsibility for and patterns that are more likely to stem from his mental problems in order to avoid mixing psychological illness with a presumably flawed stage of development as Min’s family doctor did.

There are multiple instances in which the narrator himself calls his behaviour childish, especially when interacting with his sister-in-law Marit. The first time, he describes how he was jumping around her reading out a sexually very explicit poem by her favourite writer and made “bei jeder Assonanz Brechgeräusche . . . wie ein Dreizehnjähriger” (22). When he returns from the visit to his grandmother, Marit tells him she liked that he went to see her, for she did not want anyone else around anymore. She rhetorically asks him if he wants to know what his grandmother used to say about him, to which he replies “Interessiert mich nicht” (56). She tries to continue anyways, but the protagonist holds his hands over his ears and closes his eyes. Similarly to the first example, he recognizes that his reaction “ist zwar albern,” but he does not seem to care or have any desire to improve (ibid.). On the contrary,

he appears to be just fine with the way he acts or at least pretends not to care. This distinguishes him from Hattie, who is frequently embarrassed by her own behaviour. Neither of them is able to stop once they find themselves in an awkward situation, but Hattie seems to be more willing to socially adapt than the nameless protagonist of *Plüschgewittern*.

Another aspect that can be considered rather puerile is his defensive demeanour towards middle-class values including (high) culture and the aforementioned openness and liberalness of attitudes as represented by Marit. Strikingly, he was raised to be liberal himself:

Ich war liberal erzogen worden, man hatte mir beigebracht, meine Mitmenschen nicht nach Hautfarbe, Kleidung oder Religion zu beurteilen, Hässliche und Behinderte nicht auszulachen, jeden nach seinem Charakter zu schätzen und tolerant zu sein. Ich hatte diese Vorurteile über die Gleichheit der Menschen einfach so in mich aufgenommen. Ich verachtete alles Oberflächliche. (28)

The “prejudice of humans’ equality” is another wording that seems contradictory. Usually, people with prejudice are by definition against equality, and those who preach the latter try to reduce prejudice in society. The above paragraph appears in the context of the narrator’s obsession with Anja, whom he has never talked to before at that point and does not even know her name yet. It is unclear if the cognition that he is in love with someone he does not know at all made him abandon those values or if this development happened over time. In any way, he believes, and makes everyone else believe, that he has come to oppose this stance. In fact, however, there is not one moment in the novel in which he actually talks or acts accordingly, that is, he does not display any prejudice based on race, gender, or disability, although he finds people with mental health issues “albern,” like Erika, who has scars from cutting herself (17) and a girl on Desmond’s party who is so skinny he assumes she is anorexic (82-83). It is thus more likely that the real target of his despise is not so much the morals

behind those values as are the people who openly live by them or claim to do so. Possibly, he regards them as hypocrites because he was not able to live up to these expectations and cannot see why anybody else would; after all, Anja was the object of many boys' desire and only a minority of them actually knew her. His objection to general tolerance and emphasizing the importance of inner values probably stems from this experience.

Other reservations he has, for example, towards high culture or certain art forms are less easily explicable. While he also rejects much of mainstream and pop culture, there is hardly anything in the text the protagonist appreciates or believes in. To put it in Erika's words, he seems to be someone "der sich für rein gar nichts interessiert" (9). It is indeed true that the protagonist barely ever mentions topics he is interested in; his life revolves around women, alcohol, drugs and parties with very little substance. It is not only that the narrator is not interested in cultural events or arts; in fact, he despises most of it. This attitude resembles the frustration experienced by adolescents who find the symbols, clothes and manners they used to visibly distance themselves from adult and mainstream culture turned into fashionable accessories. He does not consume cultural or commercial goods if he does not have to: while his friend Desmond goes to see a play, the protagonist cannot find anything interesting about it and only initially agrees to come with him in hopes that Ines will follow his invitation to the bar they are going to before the theater.

For him, culture has lost all its subversive potential and is therefore no longer able to serve people who actually do not feel at home in the world as it is. This becomes apparent in his thoughts about a weirdly shaped building that is supposed to look strange so as to make passers-by wonder what meaning the design might transport or why the architect chose to form it the way he or she did (118). The point is, as the narrator believes, that there is no meaning behind it but only provocation, a mere farce – let alone his persuasion that adult people should have better things to do than worry about buildings' geometric shapes. What

the protagonist does not seem to consider is that he does not have any other subjects worth contemplating. Since he is not one of the “usual” adults, who have a job, a home, a family and a life consisting not only of drinking, sleeping and partying, he does not have any sensible concerns with which to occupy his mind either. He deems graffiti to be similarly worthy of his discredit because it has been discovered as a form of art (114). His ensuing contemplations about postmodernism and orientation demonstrates once again his frustration with his incapability to find meaning in the world. He is, in fact, not much different from the members of the Generation X, except that he is too lethargic to actively pursue a satisfying, alternative lifestyle.

Several of his actions, for example, the way he treats Marit, have turned out to be indeed rather childish. Others, like his estimation of art and media’s portrayal of the Generation X, result from his nihilism and overall lack of trust in people. His psychological issues add to his conflict with society insofar that he rejects people with mental disorders as silly, which suggests that he is not aware of the seriousness of his own illness. Furthermore, he has a very strict sense of what kinds of lifestyle are tolerable and, predominantly, what is not tolerable. The narrator’s narrow-mindedness in those matters, however, seems more like a result of his experiences while growing up, which will be discussed next.

## **6.5. Formation**

Many aspects of personal development have already been mentioned in previous parts of this analysis, among them the thoughts and feelings he has when a love relationship ends or his liberal and tolerant worldview as a child. Therefore, it is valid to say that that *In Plüschgewittern* fulfills some, though certainly not all, of the Bildungsroman criteria: The protagonist lives through several phases of crisis, he reflects upon his past and his former actions, and his personality changes as a result of his interactions with society. Memories

from childhood and adolescence are the primary elements that make this observation possible, considering the short time span in which the narrator tells his story only covers roughly a week. While he has always been prone to eccentric behaviour, these patterns have worsened over time, partially due to years of unrequited love, the gradual loss of his best friend, and the lack of psychotherapy. After all, there were several signs of mental problems, like his running away from home, his paranoia or the sudden eczema, which is known for being a psychosomatic symptom. The fact that he did not solve all the developmental tasks of childhood, specifically the one requiring a stable relationship with his parents, puts the main character at a disadvantage when it comes to further enhancing his social skills.

There is also a moment described in the text in which the protagonist has obviously entered the stage of adolescence, marked by the orientation towards his peers when it comes to his furniture. This change does not happen gradually but rather promptly and consciously. Having heard what one of his schoolmates said about another boy's room, he feels the need to adjust his own appearance to the one that seems to be required. Functionality of, for example, a lamp is not of interest as it is to his mother, who "schaltete zum Beweis die Lampe ein und aus" (38); he cares about being accepted by boys and girls his own age, most of all Anja. It is remarkable that he is entirely aware of the fact that there is no practical reason he should get new room decorations, bed sheets or a lamp, but that he is afraid people he does not even necessarily like or actually care about will make fun of him in front of the girl he is interested in. He knows that the boy who made fun of his schoolmate is not actually superior to him, especially not in terms of intellect; however, the narrator is struggling with his inability to speak and act like everybody else around him. Insecure as he was at the time, he believes that he was "einfach nicht interessant genug. Ich war kein richtiger Mensch. Ich war randvoll von Dingen, die ich sagen wollte, aber ich war unfähig sie so zu sagen, dass sie einer verstanden hätte" (ibid). As stated under 4.1, the high degree of self-reflexivity he displays is not unusual

for Bildungsroman protagonists. Additionally, he is very self-conscious about his look, as is most likely the case with the majority of adolescents. He even goes as far as to measure his face, which convinces him of his presumed ugliness (29).

In other words, he is going through a phase in which he has a strong desire to be accepted by his peers and compares himself to them while simultaneously increasing the emotional distance between him and his parents. During a vacation before grade eleven, he spends most of his time alone, reading and watching girls apart from his family because for the first time, he feels embarrassed “mit [seinen] Eltern gesehen zu werden” (34). Furthermore, he develops feelings for a girl he does not know and seems out of his reach, which is also an experience most boys and girls in high school can relate to. What the narrator described during most of the first four chapters is, thus, the life stage of adolescence, defined by Hurrelmann in terms of reorientation from parents to peers, accepting and performing a heterosexual gender role, learning how to gain, organize and apply knowledge, developing a system of norms and values and beginning to partake in public decision-making. Although the latter realm is not mentioned in Herrndorf’s text, or Toews’, for that matter, the sociological and psychological criteria just mentioned have been discussed the most in the research by Keniston, Gillis, and Kastner.

Turning away from his parents and toward his peers is one step the protagonist has taken. Even though the performance of his male gender is not quite visible for other people, he is aware of common stereotypes and would like to adhere to those popular ideals. He frequently dreams about rescuing the girl with the bright blue jeans “vor muskulösen Angreifern . . . die [ihm] zum Dank ein Messer zwischen die Rippen hauten” (29). Shirtless and covered in blood, he dies in her arms like a martyr and with his last breath begs her to forget him and move on with her life (30). The influence of pop culture clichés of men’s physical strength, their proximity to fights, and their will to sacrifice themselves for the women they

love is just as apparent as that of the helpless, crying girl trying to comfort her hero. Of course, this scene is merely a dream, but the protagonist is convinced that he has to impress Anja in order to make her like him (38). He cannot think of anything to say to her or a topic she might find interesting, and the dating culture starting to spread among his peers irritates and alienates him (28, 30).

Along with the discovery that youngsters judge others by their bedroom furniture, these incidents make the narrator not only appear to be extraordinarily attentive, they also indicate that his social interaction skills are developing more slowly compared to others. The downside of his high intellect and ability to analyze situations and persons is his struggle to naturally engage with his peers. There is no other way for him to integrate more or less successfully than to closely watch what the other boys and girls at school are doing and try to copy it. This is also how he learns that the values his parents taught him are not shared by everyone: To him, it is very important that Anja considers him attractive and interesting. If she and her friends believed that is wrong to judge people according to superficial criteria like room decoration, they would not have mocked that boy. So instead of slightly modifying his value system or accepting that many people are less tolerant than he was told to be, the protagonist completely changes his attitude. Later, this renunciation shows, for instance, in his rejection of Marit's friendliness, tolerance, and open-mindedness.

He only ever mentions one friend he had while growing up, Malte Lipschitz. Malte was his role model, someone he could imitate to fit in with the world, and he was also his bodyguard who "verprügelte Ulf Kramnik für [ihn];" the protagonist calls their relationship "die Freundschaft zwischen Theorie und Praxis," allocating the role of the theorist to himself and that of the practitioner to Malte (30). As turns out during the course of the story, his metaphor was accurate not only because of his high intellect: he falls in love with Anja but is incapable of doing anything about it while Malte distracts himself from his family issues with

a motorbike. Even later, at the age of thirty, the protagonist remains a rather passive character, letting things happen to him instead of trying to shape and influence the situations he gets into. The only exceptions to this lethargy are his phone calls to Ines. Malte is more than just the counterweight to his passivity. He spent “[d]ie glücklichste Zeit in [seinem] Leben” with him, namely a summer during which they were throwing chewing gum at crows in the fields, buildings caves and watching the stars at night (31). This may sound indeed like the typical cliché of a happy childhood, but when thinking of Hattie and Herrn Lehmann, there seems to be a postadolescent pattern of being completely satisfied with doing simple, undemanding things. Additionally, *In Plüschgewittern*'s main character was distracted from the complications of everyday life – he did not have to deal with his family, whom he did not trust anyway, or people he barely knew or did not take him seriously. Most likely, the friendship with the apparently self-confident, respected and strong boy also gave him a feeling of safety while simultaneously not requesting him to explain what he wants to say as he experienced so many times in school (see 38). Unable to live up to what he perceives as the common demands of a teenage boy, the narrator despairs increasingly; his later addiction to alcohol has its beginning at the graduation party where he is so frustrated by the fact that he could not get Anja to be his girlfriend that he drinks until he nearly passes out in the bushes (43-44).

This section has followed and commented on the protagonist's childhood and adolescence as compared to his current state of mind. While he still has issues with social adaptation and forming a stable basis for his life, he has passed the psychological developmental tasks of adolescence; most of his problems can and should be attributed to his untreated mental illness. Reading *In Plüschgewittern* like a novel of formation has shown that, even though Herrndorf himself called his novel an “Adoleszenzroman” (Interview), the narrator has gone through different phases of development, each of which has been affected

by his psychological problems. The Bildungsroman approach has helped highlighting the differences between immaturity in the form of a prolonged adolescence, postadolescence, and mental illness: the narrator has gained comfort and confidence in interacting with women both on a friendly and an intimate level, which was unthinkable when he was an insecure adolescent who did not know what to do with himself or how to talk to a girl he liked. Obviously, he is over the phase of experimentation in which the adolescent protagonist of Herrndorf's novel *Tschick*, Maik Klingenberg, finds himself when he contemplates the sexual attraction of nurses (15). In terms of mental illness, it has become clear that this factor has been part of his personality since he was a child. As a result, he never had the chance to form a healthy, trusting relationship to an adult role model. It is not a surprise that he has become an outcast skeptical of society, relationships and the media considering this circumstance. Therefore, it is plausible that a postadolescent development as Hattie went through during the main action does not happen in this novel.

## **6.6. Overview of Postadolescent Characteristics**

The protagonist has distanced himself from the norms and values his parents taught him and developed a belief system of his own. Furthermore, he has developed an interest in a certain type of woman who shares his world views and is as intelligent as he is. He is capable of intimate, emotional, and sexual relationships but has difficulties sustaining his initial interest and the intensity of his feelings, which inhibits his desire to find a potential wife over a short- or long-term girlfriend, let alone the wish to have children someday. Rigidly maintaining that most art and cultural events are of no use, the narrator's main entertainment consists of parties, bars, alcohol and flirting with women. His ability to socialize, however, seems underdeveloped, probably due to his mental illness; in the end, even his best friend Desmond appears not to like him as much as the narrator assumed.

Although he has been to university, his education never was important to him, and he does not have a steady job or any aspiration to find an occupation worthy of his intellect. Not much is said about his role as a political citizen, which suggests that it is present but not important to him. He does come rather close to performing the role of cultural citizen, even if only insofar that he reflects upon related topics and actively refuses to consume most cultural products. Along with that of the husband, there are two sociological roles he is approaching but not accepting. Financial independence comes and goes with the protagonist's frequent job changes and phases of unemployment, which puts the respective criterion on shaky grounds; if he does find a job and an apartment, it will most likely not be for long as there are no indicators that suggest a change of mind on his side. The aspect of political consciousness is as ambivalent as it in *Troutmans*: both protagonists are informed about political clichés concerning the United States and the former GDR respectively. For the nameless narrator, this means that he casually comments in his surroundings when he arrives in Berlin, obviously not impressed by the old buildings of former East-Germany (59). Similarly to Hattie, he sees a correlation between the strange place he visits and the behaviour he witnesses in the people who live there: “[D]ie Idee sich mit so etwas auf eine Wiese zu legen, ist einfach eine absolute Ostidee. Die waren ja schon immer hemmungslos” (60). Problematic as the two protagonists' political stances are, they do exist

It has become clear in the analysis above that this protagonist does not have a future to look forward to like Hattie and the main characters of *Generation X* do, who set themselves a new goal to accomplish and, hopefully, find peace of mind. For *In Plüschgewittern's* narrator, such an ending is not possible because he does not want to grow as a person. Nothing he does or says suggests that he has learned from his time in Berlin or will seek help in order to be able to come to terms with his life. Instead, he hopes to find refuge again with Erika, which leads to his breakdown when he finds out that she died (179).

## 7. Concluding Remarks and Outlook

This thesis has explored postadolescent characters in contemporary novels. As a starting point, emergence, influences on and development of postadolescence from a sociological point of view have been retraced. It has turned out that postadolescents have the mental and psychological prerequisites of adults but do not fulfill the sociological criteria required to obtain that status: They have widely completed the development of their social, emotional, intellectual and physical faculties but refuse to or are unable to integrate themselves into society's institutional structure. In other words, they are emotionally independent from their parents, capable of working with and finishing complex tasks by themselves, at ease with their sexuality as well as their gender role, and able to establish and build friendships as well as intimate relationships with others. Furthermore, they have created a system of values and norms by which they live and a corresponding, reasonable attitude towards the consumption of cultural and economic commodities. What they lack is financial independence, usually in the form of steady, adequate employment, a spouse and children, and engagement with the institutions of their usually highly industrialized, capitalist society. Additional characteristics typical for postadolescents include a strong identification with their individual and overwhelmingly postmaterial values, usually but not exclusively a middle-class background, and a desire to live according to their own wishes and needs. Hence, they are not, as sometimes suggested, legal adults who behave and live like adolescents.

Several conditions came together in the second half of the twentieth century that enabled the establishment of postadolescence as a stage of life distinct from both adolescence and adulthood. Along with higher technology and wealth came the requirement for better training, which led to an increasing necessity of post-secondary education. In addition to the longer stay in the education system, postmodern concepts began to spread in the form of more fluid and unstable identity construction, different, mostly postmaterial values, individualism,

pluralization of lifestyles, and self-realization. These values have encouraged and expedited the emergence of the life stage postadolescence.

At the same time, these circumstances supported the diminishing of the Bildungsroman. With most of its original intentions and functions obsolete, the genre has become far less popular than it used to be. However, it is not extinct; some of its features are present in the Entwicklungsroman, and it can still function as a tool to reading certain kinds of text. The above analyses have shown that the Bildungsroman aspect is useful when trying to detect the differences between, in this case, adolescent and postadolescent novels. Moreover, observing the evolution of the Bildungsroman and the genres it inspires aids in understanding the changing importance society ascribes to different aspects of life. Insofar, reading postadolescent novels against the backdrop of the Bildungsroman highlights the impact the cultural, political, and social conditions of these days have on those who live and grow up in them.

In my first example, *The Flying Troutmans*, I have shown that the protagonist and first-person narrator Hattie is a postadolescent because her character largely corresponds to the descriptions found in sociological research: she is capable of complex and creative thinking but does not use these skills to work in an adequate profession; she loves and wants to be loved for an extended period of time, but considers herself unable to face the responsibility that comes with children; she also has an interest in art and culture which she follows; finally, she has a set of values according to which she lives without being actually politically active or involved. Family and a significant other are the most important things to her, and while she knows who she is, she still needs to find her exact place in the world. Supporting her sister and becoming more independent from her in the process, thus, can be seen as her major task at the time the story ends. All these aspects demonstrate that Hattie is not merely juvenile, as most of the reviews published in newspapers suggest. Nevertheless, it is striking how much postadolescence is widely connected to immaturity when it is not identified as the

recently emerged stage of life that it is. The second novel's narrator has been described in similar terms by non-academic reviewers.<sup>8</sup>

The nameless protagonist of *In Plüschgewittern* is not as easily situated due to his mental illness. As he has never been able to accomplish one of the developmental tasks of childhood, his later development will always be impaired to a certain degree. While highly intelligent and reflective, he is unable to find a satisfying occupation he can identify with. He has also had several relationships which sometimes lasted for years, yet he is pessimistic about any love affair's potential to last. Except for the protagonist's rather negative attitude, these are all characteristic he and Hattie have in common. What distinguishes them is his skepticism towards cultural artefacts and art: he sees them as manipulation and a waste of time, whereas Hattie employs art to deal with her inner turmoil.

When comparing these findings from literature with those from social sciences, the literary figures display minor deviations from the sociological basis, as was expected. An exclusive orientation to the psychological and sociological development tasks has proven to be of little value if not complemented by the specific character traits postadolescents display as, for instance, postmaterial values, a high regard for self-actualization, and the lasting possibility of personal development as well as a change of direction of that development. This seems sensible not only for an application of postadolescent theory to fiction: it is quite unlikely that an individual is fully psychologically developed but does not perform a single sociologically "adult" role. Even Keniston's young radicals had arguably taken up the role of political and/or cultural citizen, which may be the reason Keniston mostly refers to the manifestation of these roles in a society's institutions.

This thesis has served the purpose of identifying postadolescent protagonists, distinguishing them from adolescent characters, and situating them in relation to their personal

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<sup>8</sup> Klaus Cähsar Zehrer, for example, calls him a "jugendlichen Schnösel"

development throughout the novel. More specified research is necessary in order to further investigate the phenomenon in literature and society's perception. I have alluded to several factors that deserve attention, among them narrative elements as well as the relationship between mental illness and presumed immaturity. Another possible and interesting area is that of national comparison, for which a broader scope of novels is required than this thesis could have covered; the tendency so far seems to be that Canadian novels are more positive in that they allow for new projects to be executed, whereas *In Plüschgewittern* and *Herr Lehmann* both end with the protagonist depressed, lost, and without perspective. Nevertheless, they all include references to their respective outlook on their own country, if not at others, too.

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