

ARTICLE

Kurdish Bildungsroman and Its Historical and Social Concerns: The Case of Sayyed Qadir Hedayati

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Abstract

This research delves into the works of contemporary Kurdish novelist Sayyed Qadir Hedayati, specifically focusing on two of his novels: *Bull Roar* and *Bardinah*. These selected novels fall within the Bildungsroman genre, a category not commonly explored in Kurdish literature. The scarcity of such novels in the language prompted the investigation into the underlying reasons for their emergence in Hedayati's works. While Bildungsroman focuses on the formation of the individual, Hedayati's novels, very much like the early German cases of the genre, delineate the social and cultural concerns of a community. Through analysis, it is revealed that Kurdish Bildungsroman can flourish within specific historical and political contexts. The driving force behind the plot of these novels lies in the quest for identity in a controversial historical and political context. Hedayati utilizes the Bildungsroman genre to amplify the voices of a community that has grappled with marginalization. By doing so, he invites readers to immerse themselves in the intricate fabric of Kurdish life and development.

Keywords: Kurdish novel; identity; Kurdish history; Sayyed Qadir Hedayati; Kurdish Bildungsroman

The whole man, the man of integrity, becomes thus the man who is integrated with and reproduces the spirit of his nation.
—Philip Lloyd

I

Sayyed Qadir Hedayati, born in 1976 and residing in Bukan, Iran, stands as a prominent contemporary Kurdish novelist. His literary repertoire includes a number of novels, with the most notable and widely read being *The Yoke of Azazel* (*Tuqi 'Azāzil*, 2012), *Bull Roar* (*Gābur*, 2017), *The Punishment of the Grave* (*Gurashār*, 2019), and *Bardinah* (2022). Notably, *Bull Roar* swiftly gained bestseller status upon its release.¹ Despite this acclaim, scholarly analysis of Hedayati's fiction remains scarce, primarily due to the concentration of his serious works in the past decade. His thematic focus revolves around Kurdish identity, which he skillfully narrates through the lens of Bildungsroman—the novel of growth. Specifically, *Bull Roar* and *Bardinah* explore the intricacies of identity formation within the Kurdish context. Identity has long preoccupied writers of Kurdish fiction, especially those living on the borderlands and navigating liminal spaces. Hashem Ahmadzadeh's exploration of

¹ Zakarya Bezdoode, "Bardinah by Sayyed Qadir Hedayati," *World Literature Today* 96 (2022): 78.

nationalistic themes and identity in the works of various Kurdish novelists sheds light on the historical roots of Kurdish fiction and its nationalistic orientations. In “In Search of a Kurdish Novel That Tells Us Who the Kurds Are,” as an example, he investigates the historical roots of Kurdish fiction and its nationalistic orientations.

In this article, I examine two of Hedayati’s novels, *Bull Roar* and *Bardinah*, which fall under the Bildungsroman genre, to explore how he leverages this genre to address identity concerns, specifically those of Kurds in Iranian Kurdistan. What is to be discussed is the problematics of Kurdish identity that have taken the form of Bildungsroman in a literature that is not much familiar with the genre. The Bildungsroman genre has predominantly thrived in Western literatures such as German, French, British, and Russian, particularly within the context of realism. However, Sayyed Qadir Hedayati, a young Kurdish novelist in the twenty-first century, has employed the Bildungsroman genre within a less widespread and less influential literary context, rooted in a liminal culture and literature. The resolution to this tension can be investigated in Bildungsroman and its crucial role in establishing and developing a national identity. What are the capabilities of Bildungsroman that Hedayati values? What benefits does this genre offer to the representation of a marginalized and under-represented community? The analysis of the protagonists of the novels reveals that the individual symbolizes the collective spirit and the destiny of the Kurdish nation. In this context, the novelist’s interest lies in the capability of Bildungsroman for symbolically representing not only individual growth but also the collective spirit of a community. The novels are set within firm and critical historical-cultural narratives of Kurdish community. This embeddedness of the novels within such narratives reveals the concerns of a typical Kurd regarding the collective spirit.

II

Bildungsroman, German for “novel of education” or “novel of formation,” is a popular literary form which “focuses on the psychological and social development of its main character.”² Even though there seems to be a common assumption about Bildungsroman as it develops “a male, heterosexual, middle class protagonist, possessed of a coherent identity that unfolds over the course of an organically unified narrative,”³ Sarah Graham’s *A History of the Bildungsroman* reveals the complexity and versatility of the recent and modern developments of the genre. There are such categories discussed in Graham’s work as Bildungsroman for children and young adults and postcolonial Bildungsroman, among others. Quite significantly Moretti looks at Bildungsroman as “not a straight line but a tree, with plenty of bifurcations for genres to branch off from each other.”⁴ In the context of Bildungsroman, the theme of identity plays a pivotal role. When characters grapple with questions about who they truly are—questioning their beliefs, passions, and values—the Bildungsroman becomes a fitting literary form. According to Redfield, this genre allows us to witness a journey of self-realization and personal growth as characters navigate their paths toward becoming.⁵ The significance of personal growth during the process of becoming becomes even more pronounced in critical historical and geographical contexts, such as residing on the border or existing in a state of liminality. An illustrative example is the “Hispanic/Latino Bildungsroman,” which pertains to the experiences of minority immigrant communities in the United States. This literary form vividly portrays the challenges, resilience, and negotiations faced by a new generation of young individuals who grapple with

² Marc Redfield, “The Bildungsroman,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Oxford University Press, 2006), 191.

³ Redfield, “The Bildungsroman,” 191.

⁴ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (Verso, 2000), 234.

⁵ Redfield, “The Bildungsroman,” 193.

poverty, discrimination, and marginalization.⁶ A well-known case is Rudolfo Anaya's 1972 Chicano novel *Bless Me, Ultima*, in which

Ultima is a wise *curandera* who belongs to a combination of Spanish and Native American cultures. She guides Antonio Márez through his learning process of becoming a mature young person: Antonio's formation is a narrative of maturation of a new kind of citizenship in the United States that will test his traditions and morals.⁷

The protagonist's growth and maturity gain importance against the backdrop of language, history, and nationalistic issues. Margaret Atwood has also used Bildungsroman for similar purposes. Her novels *The Nature Hut* and *Surfacing* are prominent in this regard. In these two works, Atwood "deploys the Bildungsroman for the purpose of contesting and re-envisioning images of Canada in a project that writes against the past and for the future of a Canadian literature."⁸ Here one can see the use of Bildungsroman as a "vehicle for the expression of a new idea of Canada."⁹

Why is Bildungsroman important to a twenty-first-century Kurdish novelist? To explore this issue it is necessary to go back to the theories about the emergence of Bildungsroman. There are two dominant historical approaches to Bildungsroman: "essentialist" and "universalist."¹⁰ The "essentialist" camp, including Julian Schmidt, Thomas Mann, and Wilhelm Vosskamp, look at the genre as a representation of nationalist concerns. Since most have started their study with *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* and the German Bildungsroman, they have attempted to explicate the connection between German nationalism and German Bildungsroman. From the "universalist" camp, which "detects themes of universal human significance in the novel of formation," one can name Fredric Jameson and Jed Esty. The nationalist concerns of the novel of formation are so prominent that despite their "essentialist" views, Jameson and Esty have described it as "national allegory" and "soul-nation allegory," respectively.¹¹

The origins of Bildungsroman can be traced to the discourse of German idealism and nationalism as the very "concept of *Bildung* evolved within the intellectual context of romantic nationalism"; the foundation of Bildungsroman, then, is grounded in "a burgeoning nationalism based on an ideal of organic culture whose temporality and harmony could be reflected in the developing personality at the core of the bildungsroman."¹² Mikhail Bakhtin, too, looks at Bildungsroman as a vehicle for the expression of a specific historical and spatial position. He defines Bildungsroman as "an image of *man growing in national historical time*." It is the national-historical position of the protagonists of the Bildungsroman that makes them significant. The historical significance of Bildungsroman is explicated in terms of chronotope or time-space relationship in Bakhtin's theory. He proclaims that "the image of the emerging man begins to surmount its private nature (with certain limits, of course) and enters into a completely new, spatial sphere of historical existence."¹³ Boes quite relevantly concludes that "historicism" has "a crucial influence not only on the

⁶ Alejandro Latinez, *Developments: Encounters of Formation in the Latin American and Hispanic/Latino Bildungsroman* (Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2014), 9.

⁷ Latinez, *Developments*, 9–10.

⁸ Ellen McWilliams, *Margaret Atwood and the Female Bildungsroman* (Routledge, 2016), 61.

⁹ McWilliams, *Margaret Atwood*, 62.

¹⁰ Tobias Boes, *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Bildungsroman* (Cornell University Press, 2012), 19.

¹¹ Boes, *Formative Fictions*, 20. See Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Age of Multi-National Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65; and Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 24.

¹² Esty, *Unseasonable Youth*, 5 (italics in the original).

¹³ Mikhail Bakhtin, "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee and ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (University of Texas Press, 1986), 24–25 (italics in the original).

form of the *Bildungsroman* tradition, but also on the national imagination, and indeed *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* can be read as a first tentative expression of the national dynamic."¹⁴

There are multiple ways in which Hedayati's *Bardinah* and *Bull Roar* can be approached as *Bildungsroman* based on what Graham enumerates including "challenges of growing up" for the protagonist; a *Bildungsroman* provides access to "the psychological development of the [protagonist] whose sense of self is in flux, paralleling personal concerns with prevailing values."¹⁵ Nevertheless, the discourse of nationality pervades the narratives of these novels. One could aptly rephrase Karl Morgenstern's well-known assertion that Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* reflects "German life, German thought and the morals of our time"¹⁶ as: Hedayati's novels, beyond just depicting individual development, represent Kurdish life, Kurdish thought, and the issues facing Kurdish society. *Bildungsroman* allows Hedayati to reflect upon Kurds, their history, language, and, on a larger scale, their identity. The protagonists of the novels grapple with a sense of disorientation. It is only after encountering critical elements like history and language that they are enlightened and are propelled into a quest. Quest is a significant factor in the plot of novels in general and more particularly in that of *Bildungsroman*. The disoriented protagonist—in terms of identity—has to embark on a quest in his history and language in order to reconcile with his national identity. As depicted by Hedayati, it is the plot of *Bildungsroman* that best shapes and utilizes this journey both in a literal and a figurative sense.

III

Bardinah (2022), also known as *The Shadow of the Stone*, is Hedayati's latest novel. It unfolds in the early seventeenth century, during the reign of Shah Abbas I in Iran. The novel encompasses a vast geographical landscape, stretching from Urmia (which was then inhabited by Kurds) through Qazvin to Isfahan. A deeper comprehension of the novel necessitates an awareness of a pivotal historical period in the history of Kurdish life and fate in Iran during Shah Abbas's reign. Based on Iskandar Beg Monshi's *History of Shah Abbas the Great (Tārīkh-e Ālam-ārā-ye 'Abbāsī)*,¹⁷ Amir Khan—one of the Kurdish rulers in Urmia—made an effort to achieve autonomy during the time of Shah Abbas. Afterward, Amir Khan embarked on the reconstruction of the Dimdim Castle, securing Shah Abbas's approval for its rebuilding.

He conceived the idea of building a castle, and wrote to the principal officers of the Safavid state as follows: "the old fort in Orūmīya is in ruins and beyond repair; it cannot be relied upon. I need a castle for the protection of my property and family. If you grant me permission, I will construct a fort at some suitable spot." On receiving permission, he laid the foundations of a fort some three farsaks from Orūmīya, on a high hill just inside the Targavar district. There is a Kurdish tradition that there used to be a fort there in pre-Islamic times known as Fort Domdom, which had fallen into ruin in the course of centuries.¹⁸

Subsequently, Amir Khan defied Shah Abbas's directives. In response, Shah Abbas dispatched troops led by Hatem Beg Ordubadi to lay siege to the castle. This resulted in the demise of Amir Khan and all his steadfast companions. Following the castle siege, the Kurds in Urmia

¹⁴ Boes, *Formative Fictions*, 45 (italics in the original).

¹⁵ Sarah Graham, ed., *A History of the Bildungsroman* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1.

¹⁶ Karl Morgenstern, "On the Nature of the *Bildungsroman*," trans. Tobias Boes, *PMLA* 124 (2009): 655. It was Morgenstern who first used the term "*Bildungsroman*."

¹⁷ Books I and II were completed in 1616 and Book III in 1629, the year of Shah Abbas I's death. Roger M. Savory, "Introduction," in Iskandar Monshi, *History of Shah Abbas the Great (Tārīkh-e Ālam-ārā-ye 'Abbāsī)*, trans. Roger M. Savory (Westview Press, 1978), xxiv.

¹⁸ Monshi, *History of Shah Abbas*, 990.

and the surrounding regions were massacred.¹⁹ While historical accounts, often penned by non-Kurds, label Amir Khan's decision as an act of treason, later literary narratives have glorified his resistance during those tumultuous times and have, therefore, turned the resistance into a symbolic event in the unconscious of the Kurds. The Dimdim events and the courageous acts of Amir Khan and his steadfast companions have captured the imagination of Kurdish writers and novelists. Their valorous deeds continue to resonate in literary narratives and cultural memory. Hassanpour believes that

Baytī dimdim is considered a national epic second only to Mam ū Zīn by Aḥmadi Khānī. It is known in both the Kūrmānjī and Sorānī dialects of Kurdish and in Armenian. Most of the collected ballads portray the defenders of Dimdim as martyrs (*šahīd*) in a holy war.²⁰

Faqey Tayran was the first Kurdish poet to turn the events of Dimdim into a famous Bayt. It has been the subject of such well-known novels as Arab Shamilov's *Dimdim* (1966) and Jan Dost's *The Castle of Dimdim (Qalā Dimdimê, 1991)*.

The rise in historicist consciousness is a significant cause for what occurs in Dimdim. This is quite significantly comparable to the rise in historicist consciousness in eighteenth-century Germany. As explicated by Boes:

The rise of the novel of formation as well can be tied to the eighteenth-century transformation in the understanding of Bildung and the development of the historicist outlook—an outlook in whose birth many novelists of the day were actively involved.²¹

Bardinah is situated against the backdrop of the significant historical era pointed to above. Iranian national identity as such forms during the Safavid dynasty and, as just mentioned, it is during the reign of Shah Abbas that Amir Khan's attempt to reconstruct the ancient castle of Dimdim holds significance as an attempt for Kurdish autonomy. The Bildungsroman then becomes the most prominent novelistic form used to represent such historically critical events. It introduces several real historical figures as characters, including Amir Khan, Shah Abbas I, Iskandar Beg Monshi, Shah Abbas's historian and the author of *History of Shah Abbas the Great*, and Hatem Beg Ordubadi, Shah Abbas's vizier.

Bardinah can be regarded as a microcosm of Kurdish life and history. It weaves a complex tapestry of deceptive identities. Two major characters assume dual names, adding layers of intrigue to the plot. The heart of the novel lies in the life of Godrun, a homeless Kurd who works a while in Shah Abbas's court. Through Godrun's narration, the novel unfolds as a reflection of the experiences and struggles faced by a typical Kurd. At the outset of the novel, the protagonist, Godrun, candidly admits that he shares his story both as a form of solace and as a way to find inner reconciliation. In the novel's opening, Godrun serves as a mosque servant (referred to as Faqey in Kurdish) in a remote village in Oshnavieh, a city within the province of West Azerbaijan in northwestern Iran. Interestingly, he introduces himself as Faqey Baytan, a clever twist on the name of Faqey Tayran, who holds the distinction of being the first Kurdish poet to write a literary account of the events of Dimdim. Baytan, which rhymes with Tayran, is the Kurdish plural of Bayt. He calls himself by this name because he recites relatively long narratives in verse to the people of the village. It is this association in the novel of the protagonist, Godrun, with the first poet to give a

¹⁹ For a complete account of the events leading to the destruction of Dimdim and the massacre of Mokri Kurds, see Monshi, *History of Shah Abbas*, 989–1018.

²⁰ Amir Hassanpour, "Dimdim", in *Encyclopædia Iranica Online*, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dimdim. Bayt is a basically oral genre in Kurdish. It is different from other similar forms in that it is narrative and in verse. For more on Bayt, see Amir Hassanpour, "Bayt," in *Encyclopædia Iranica Online*, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bayt-folk-art.

²¹ Boes, *Formative Fictions*, 53.

literary expression to the historical events of Dimdim that emphasizes the collective aspect of the narrative rather than its individual layers.

The novel traces the protagonist's journey of growth and self-discovery. It commences with tales that predate his birth—narratives that significantly shape his identity as a Kurd as the story unfolds. The work unfolds in two distinct layers—a literary tapestry interwoven with both fictional elements and a historically grounded world. Initially, the tales shared by Godrun's mother, akin to bedtime stories, reside within the realm of imagination. These characters, including Godrun himself, lack verifiable historical existence. However, as the narrative progresses, they seamlessly merge with the authentic historical context. These characters become probable figures, placed within a plausible historical framework. As Hardin aptly observes, "*Bildung*" can be regarded as both "a developmental process" and

as a collective name for the cultural and spiritual values of a specific people or social stratum in a given historical epoch and by extension the achievement of learning about that same body of knowledge and acceptance of the value system it implies.²²

In the novel, Godrun's journey unfolds through the interplay of fictional narratives and historical context. These dual layers converge to depict Godrun's transformation—from a state of ignorance to one of maturity. As Dilthey proclaims, the protagonist

enters life in a happy state of naïveté seeking kindred souls, finds friendship and love, ... comes into conflict with the hard realities of the world ... grows to maturity through diverse life experiences, finds himself, and attains certainty about his purpose in the world.²³

Even though the beginning is not happy for Godrun, it is pretty naïve and dark. It develops in the form of a complicated mystery in which he becomes a passive object in the hands of both his mother and the courtiers of Shah Abbas. It is his groping through the history and the past that shapes the captivating plot of the novel. Over time, Godrun matures and grapples with his Kurdish identity, gaining confidence and ultimately joining the ranks of the eighteenth-century Kurdish partisans.

Godrun's maturation mirrors the timeless journey of a quintessential Kurd. Set against the backdrop of Shah Abbas's era, *Bardinah* transcends time, encapsulating the tribulations and endurance of the Kurdish people as they come of age. The story is a portrayal of the Kurdish struggle with historical and political forces, and their quest for identity. In the opening chapter of the novel, we encounter the story of Godrun's parents. His mother, through bedtime tales, recounts their history. The narrative culminates in the sudden and enigmatic demise of his father. Faced with this tragedy, Godrun's mother makes a momentous decision: she leaves their Kurdish hometown of Oshnavieh. Her journey takes her first to Qazvin and eventually leads her to settle in Isfahan, near the court of Shah Abbas. It is here that she names her son Godrun, in honor of his late father. This marks the commencement of a life in exile, a legendary archetype often found in Eastern narratives in which the hero grows up in the household of their adversary. We encounter this motif repeatedly across various tales. For instance, Moses is raised in the very household of his adversary, Pharaoh Ramses II; the upbringing of Key Khosrow (from the Iranian epic *Shāhnāme*) occurs under the watchful eye of Afrasyab. This is a symbolic representation of the overarching authority's efforts to contain a Kurd within its political structure, exploiting him to act contrary to his own identity.

Godrun's personal fate holds no significance apart from his shared Kurdish identity. His upbringing, as a Kurd, unfolds amid intricate political and historical circumstances. In

²² James Hardin, "Introduction," in *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, ed. James Hardin (University of South Carolina Press, 1991), xi–xii.

²³ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Poetry and Experience*, vol. 5 (Princeton University Press, 1985), 335.

Isfahan, Godrun and his mother assume different names and conflicting identities. Their lives have been scrutinized by the court since his childhood and his mother has been deceived by the court, raising her son for a mission that starkly contradicts their true identity. Despite being the son of a courageous Kurdish partisan who battled both the Ottomans and the Safavids under the rule of the legendary Amir Khan of Dimdim, Godrun is now assigned a cowardly task: gathering intelligence on the activities of the Kurds in Dimdim, a mission given against his own identity as a Kurd by his *Other*.

Godrun's quest for identity begins with his search for his father within the bedtime stories narrated by his mother. As the first chapter unfolds, we discover that these stories are, in fact, the tale of Shareh and Godrun, his mother and her husband. Godrun reflects, "My mother knew I searched for my father in the stories she told me."²⁴ This revelation sets the stage for a captivating historical encounter between Sultan Ahmad the Ottoman and Shah Abbas I, whose opposing forces are depicted as the Black Hats and the Red Hats,²⁵ respectively. Amid their life in exile, Godrun and his mother—known as Ghamartaj in Isfahan—discuss their homeland. It is within this narrative that Godrun comes to know the legendary hero Amir Khan, the builder of the Dimdim Castle. The mystery surrounding his father's alliance with Amir Khan gradually unravels, shaping Godrun's understanding of his own lineage and identity.

Godrun's pivotal life chapter unfolds in Isfahan, where he recounts his experiences from the age of six. It is in Isfahan that the narratives of origin gain prominence. Anthony Smith refers to them as "myths of origin" and believes that they are significant in identity formation: "in the promise of new modes of solidarity and fraternity, they provide cures for our homelessness and alienation; in the return to primordial origins of kinship, they seem to minister to our need for security."²⁶ As a Kurd attending Quran classes, Godrun conceals his identity. However, his teacher subjects him to severe racial and religious prejudice, referring to him as "baby snake" and "baby Jinn"—a common practice at the time for addressing Kurds. The verbal violence he endures from both the teacher and classmates highlights prevailing narratives about Kurds, particularly after the advent of Islam. In the introduction to the Kurdish translation of *Sharafnāme*, Abdurrahman Sharafkandi (known as Hajar among Kurds), a prominent contemporary Kurdish writer, translator, and activist, sheds light on similar stories. This underscores a significant gap in Kurdish identity history which has been predominantly written by the *Other* rather than by the Kurds themselves. One such narrative even traces the origin of the Kurds back to the Jinn, still another to adulterer concubines.²⁷

Subsequently, he joins the classes of another Quran teacher named Bayaqub (also known as Baba Yaqub). Bayaqub, characterized by kindness and compassion, opens a new window to Godrun and offers him a fresh perspective. As the novel progresses, a significant revelation emerges: Hatem Beg, one of Shah Abbas's prominent courtiers, discloses to Godrun that both he and his mother have been closely monitored and controlled throughout their lives and the court has meant to push him into this destiny. This revelation profoundly impacts both Godrun and his mother. Hatem Beg further reveals that he possesses intimate knowledge of Godrun's background and that they have meticulously prepared him for a critical mission—to serve as an envoy to Amir Khan on behalf of Hatem Beg and, by extension, Shah Abbas. When Hatem Beg shares the truth about Godrun and his mother, she admits to her deception. She had always believed she was deceiving Shah Abbas's court, but it becomes evident that she herself was deceived. This encounter with the government

²⁴ Sayyed Qadir Hedayati, *Bardinah* (Khani Publications, 2022), 12.

²⁵ Shah Ismail I's forces who helped him conquer a vast area to found the Safavid dynasty are called Qizilbash in Farsi and Turkish. It is a Turkish word meaning Red Heads.

²⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 88.

²⁷ Abdurrahman Sharafkandi, "Introduction," in Mir Sharaf Khan Badlisi, *Sharafnama*, trans. Abdurrahman Sharafkandi (Aras, 2006), xxiii. For more stories of this type, see Ahmad Mahmood Alkhalil, *The Image of Kurds in the Islamic Culture (Soratal Kurd fi Masadere Toraseel Eslameyyah)* (Aras, 2012).

becomes a central theme in the novel, triggering an identity crisis for Godrun. The dynamic between a typical Kurd and the *Other* is depicted with deep symbolism. While Godrun's mother believes she has outwitted Shah Abbas's court, in reality, the court has manipulated her and her son as pawns for its political ends.

Confessions unfold leading Godrun to realize that he cannot escape the lifelong game he unwittingly participated in. Hatem Beg advises him to become a preparer of reed pens and ink for the court's writers. This role symbolizes his involvement in recording court history, which is heavily distorted during Shah Abbas's reign. This involvement in the activity of writing history prepares Godrun for being the writer of Kak 'Ali, a loyal friend of Amir Khan, who strives unsuccessfully to reclaim Dimdim. His identity crisis intensifies by the end of chapter 2; however, he later learns the craft of making reed pens and preparing ink under Iskandar Beg's guidance.

Later in the novel, Hatem Beg assigns the mysterious mission to Godrun: to return to his homeland and employ his mother tongue as a spy to collect information about Amir Khan and Dimdim. The motif of language, which has been evolving throughout the story, becomes crucial as Godrun requires his native language for this self-contradictory mission. His mother reveals that it was the court that impelled her to speak Kurdish, which they consider *the language of the Jinn*, to Godrun. In a second devastating confession, she discloses, "for twenty years, they have named me Ghamartāj. I believed I was deceiving the court, but it was the court that deceived me."²⁸ Godrun reproaches his mother for not revealing that she spoke Kurdish to him at home under Hatem Beg's rule. She laments that the Black Hats took her husband's life, and now the Red Hats threaten her son. Godrun prepares for the treacherous mission of betraying his own identity. As part of his disguise, he receives Kurdish clothing, each item symbolically coming from a different region of Kurdistan.

Embarking on his journey back home, he assumes the role of a spy for his *Other*. Upon reaching his destination, a series of crucial questions arise in his mind, shaped by his experiences as an immigrant:

[Contemplating my sense of belonging, I find myself torn between several places,] Qazvin where I spent my childhood; Isfahan where I went to school and fell in love; and Urmia and Oshnavieh from where my parents and relatives are—places I have never seen. I perceive myself as a wanderer, partially tied to Qazvin, partially to Isfahan, and partially to Urmia and Oshnavieh.²⁹

Captured by Amir Khan's forces, Godrun endures brutal beatings before being sent back to Isfahan. There, he discovers the devastating news of his mother's death and the disappearance of his beloved. Abandoned by the court, he lives as an outcast until Iskandar Beg, Shah Abbas's historian, recruits him into the army, their mission being fighting Amir Khan and conquering Dimdim. It is under Iskandar Beg that Godrun undergoes the most traumatic experience of being racially and linguistically subjugated by the *Other*. Eventually, he escapes and seeks refuge in a distant village in Oshnavieh, closely following the news of Dimdim's fall after more than a year of unwavering solidarity.

In the novel, a pivotal and artistically significant moment occurs during Iskandar Beg's monologue about the Kurds and Amir Khan. This monologue reflects a common perspective—the way the *Other* perceives and recounts Kurdish history and identity. In this relatively long monologue addressed to Godrun, Iskandar Beg reviews the historical events that have caused Shah Abbas to get angry at Amir Khan and order the besiege of his castle, Dimdim. Iskandar Beg addresses Godrun, whom he playfully refers to as "the blond cat," a clever twist on Abdullah Pashiv's "the blind cat" from the poem "It Is Hundreds of Years." The poem itself begins with the poignant symbolic line, "It is hundreds of years that I am the blind

²⁸ Hedayati, *Bardinah*, 135.

²⁹ Hedayati, *Bardinah*, 150.

cat of the kitchen of the Sultan in the ruins of my own home.”³⁰ The line insightfully reflects the historical reality of a Kurd such as Godrun, who is raised to feel subordinate within his homeland. Iskandar Beg, as Shah Abbas’s historian, delivers this monologue objectively to Godrun; yet he acknowledges that certain parts may be omitted, as they do not align with Shah Abbas’s preferences. The terms are accidentally alliterative and consonant both in Kurdish and English: blond vs. blind meaning bor vs. kor, respectively. The poem is an angry lament of how the Kurds have been treated by the *Other*. Iskandar Beg is Shah Abbas’s historian and is objective in his monologue addressed to Godrun. However, he confesses that he does not report all this to Shah Abbas and will omit the parts Shah Abbas would not like or approve of.

Having survived the fall of Dimdim and living in exile for six more years, Godrun learns about Kak ‘Ali, a trusted ally of Amir Khan who also survived Dimdim. ‘Ali endeavors to reclaim Dimdim, and upon hearing this news, Godrun feels reborn. He joins ‘Ali and their loyal companions in a quest to recapture the castle. As ‘Ali’s scribe, Godrun pens numerous letters to Kurdish tribal leaders, urging them to join their cause. However, their pleas go unanswered, and the novel concludes with sorrow over the castle’s loss as their efforts are thwarted once again.

Like Nurrudin Farah’s novel *Maps*, in which, as Wright claims, “sexual, national, and ontological boundaries are straddled,”³¹ Godrun as the protagonist of this Bildungsroman develops on the crossroads of ontological and national identity. His search for his self in the past and in the stories his mother narrates to him is indicative of this fact. Godrun’s quest for self-understanding, fueled by his mother’s narratives about the past, underscores this struggle. Given its exploration of nation and identity, *Bardinah* can be regarded as a post-colonial Bildungsroman too—its protagonist, as Hoagland asserts, is “fated never to stop searching, to never stop wondering who they are and where they belong.”³² In other words, Godrun’s lived experience closely resembles that of a postcolonial Bildungsroman protagonist. According to Cheah, Bildungsroman “is the most appropriate symbolic expression of the search to alleviate the sense of homelessness experience by those without a sense of community or nation as a consequence of the onslaught of colonialism.”³³ *Bardinah* transcends the genre of postcolonial coming-of-age novel, embodying a tale of national identity. Beyond charting the growth of a single person, it narrates and evolves the story of a nation, highlighting its historical mistreatment and marginalization.

IV

Set in another historically significant era in the history of Iran, the years following the Islamic Revolution, *Bull Roar* explores several issues that are significant concerning the question of identity. While *Bardinah* was closely intertwined with nationality, it did not address it directly. However, *Bull Roar* very openly discusses the theme and its critical role in the formation of the protagonists. The novel is narrated by several characters. However, the central focus lies on two teenagers in their mid-teens, ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Karim, who undergo a transformative moment as Kurdish subjects. Upon discovering fragments of a torn magazine containing Kurdish literature, they become acutely aware of their language and their current historical context. This encounter with Kurdish literature opens new perspectives for them, but their youth prevents them from effectively managing their emotions, leading to numerous challenges. The families they hail from further complicate the situation, as their parents,

³⁰ Abdulla Pashew, *My Horse Is Cloud and My Stirrup Is Mountain: Poems of 1980–2005* (Ministry of Education, 2006), 66.

³¹ Derek Wright, “Mapping Farah’s Fiction: The Postmodern Landscapes,” in *Emerging Perspectives on Nurrudin Farah*, ed. Derek Wright (Africa World Press Inc., 2002), 100.

³² Ericka A. Hoagland, “The Postcolonial Bildungsroman,” in *A History of the Bildungsroman*, 217.

³³ Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (Columbia University Press, 2003), 242.

having suffered from political activism, maintain strict views on such matters. The importance of the growth of two teenagers in the novel is emblematic of the emergence of a shared identity. As Schreiner proclaims, “sometimes what is more amusing still than tracing the likeness between man and man, is to trace the analogy there always is between the progress and development of one individual and of a whole nation.”³⁴ The resemblance of the teenagers to the circumstances of the Kurds holds greater significance.

One major, if not the most important, concern of the novel is language. Benedict Anderson posits that language, alongside “capitalism” and “print,” is a fundamental principle that enables the conception of new communities.³⁵ The most critical event in *Bull Roar* is when ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Karim suddenly become acutely aware of their language, a realization that sets off their awakening. Like their fellow teenagers in the town, they have been educated in Farsi at school, leaving their native language neglected. However, stumbling upon a torn piece of paper containing Kurdish literature changes everything. Their astonishment and delight mirror that of Monsieur Jourdain in Molière’s comedy, *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, where Monsieur Jourdain discovers that he has been speaking prose all his life without realizing it.³⁶ Similarly, ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Karim find themselves connected to a fragment of the story of Fis Fis Hero,³⁷ an ineffective hero, inscribed in Kurdish on that humble piece of paper. It is a very dramatic moment in the life of the protagonists of the novel. They embark on a search to find the full text of the story. Their search takes them everywhere including bookshops. The tale of Fis Fis Hero leads them to the second volume of *Sirwah*³⁸ magazine, precisely on the same page referenced in the novel. The story’s central theme revolves around overcoming fears. Fis Fis, with the name’s humorous undertones in pronunciation and meaning, must confront fear head-on to overcome it. As a polygamous man, Fis Fis is so timid that he cannot even venture to the toilet alone at night. Instead, he wakes one of his wives each time to accompany him. One fateful night, his wives lock him out of the house, forcing him onto an unexpected journey. During this comical quest, he encounters both a fox and a ghou. Surprisingly, these frightening creatures become the antidote to his fear. Symbolically, the experiences of ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Karim mirror Fis Fis’s journey as they grapple with their own fears in their quest for identity.

The pivotal moment of maturation in *Bull Roar* unfolds in chapter 6. During their quest to find the full text of the story, ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Karim encounter the book peddler Suleiman. Through him, they are introduced to the realm of contemporary Kurdish poetry, rich with political and historical connotations. ‘Abd al-Muttalib faces a significant challenge due to his Arabic name, which is both difficult to pronounce and carries cultural weight. His awakening begins earlier when a teacher mocks his name. Despite attempting to change it on his ID card, he ultimately shortens it to “Muttalib.”

The initial sense of wonder arises when the protagonists encounter the introduction of *Dark and Bright* (*Tārik u Run*), titled “From Where to Where,” where Hemin, the poet, asserts that “despite poetry not yielding tangible benefits, it has allowed him to get rid of his cumbersome name, Seyyed Muhammad Sheikholeslami Mukri.”³⁹ Hemin becomes ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s role model. Suleiman, the book peddler, then introduces them to the enchanting realm of Kurdish literature. He encourages them to earn money to purchase more Kurdish books. Among the transformative volumes he sells to them are *The Green Necklace*

³⁴ Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) (Project Gutenberg, 2016), part 2, chapter IV.

³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006), 42–43.

³⁶ Molière, *The Bourgeois Gentleman* (1670), trans. Philip Dwaight Jones (Project Gutenberg, 2013), act II.

³⁷ A children’s story by the Kurdish poet Jalal Malakshah.

³⁸ *Sirwah* was a well-known, literary, cultural, and social magazine that was published in Kurdish and Persian for twenty-five years from 1986 to 2011. Among its editors were such dominant figures in Kurdish literature and culture as Hemin Mukriyani, Abdurrahman Sharafkandi, and Ahmad Ghazi.

³⁹ Sheikholeslami, *Dark and Bright*, 10, quoted in Sayyed Qadir Hedayati, *Bull Roar* (Khani Publications, 2019), 132.

(*Milwānkey Shin*, 1979) by Sharif Husseinpanahi⁴⁰ and *Dark and Bright* (*Tārik u Run*, 1974) by Hemin.⁴¹ These poetic works extend beyond mere verses; they are rooted in a historically significant context related to Kurdish history and identity and, as Esty posits, they shape the protagonists into “national subjects.”⁴² ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Karim then turn into “the whole man ... who is integrated with and reproduces the spirit of his nation.”⁴³

The torn page from *Sirwah* magazine provides a glimpse into their identity. This opening leads to the realm of native language and literature. The significance of the two books received from Suleiman lies in their historical and political context, as their authors were once socially and politically engaged. ‘Abd al-Muttalib acknowledges that “acquiring and reading these two books marked a fresh start in our lives.”⁴⁴ Suleiman used to say “reading those books flew a new blood in their vessels and founded a nationalistic tendency in them. He said day by day this feeling grew stronger in them and reading Hemin’s poetry had revolutionized their inner feelings.”⁴⁵ Upon encountering Hemin, ‘Abd al-Muttalib begins to grapple with the identity crisis stemming from his awareness of his challenging and distinctly Arabic name. He believes that embracing poetry could alleviate the burden of his lengthy name, prompting him to aspire to become a poet:

He said the only way to get rid of that unpleasant name is to become a poet.
He said compose poetry and be born again.
He said, become a poet and choose a pleasant name for yourself, and get rid of that unpleasant name.⁴⁶

In the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, exploration of Kurdish language and literature was a challenging activity. ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s mother, apprehensive for her son’s safety, swiftly tears the piece of paper related to this endeavor, fearing he might face the same fate as her brother. Engaging with Kurdish language and literature during that period could be risky. The novel alludes to the challenging landscape of Kurdish publication at that time. As ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Karim embark on their quest to uncover the story of Fis Fis, they reveal details about the state of Kurdish newspapers and journals in the 1980s. Along their journey, a bookseller imparts further insights:

There is not such a thing called Kurdish newspaper. There exists a single magazine called *Sirwah*. This monthly magazine is printed at the start of each month, and its copies are swiftly sold out. You can find it available at Khani Bookstore. I recommend checking there.⁴⁷

The awakening of the teenagers is represented in quite interesting technical narrative devices in the beginning of chapter 5. When ‘Abd al-Muttalib reads the Kurdish excerpt on the paper to his mother, a series of wordplay unfolds around the term “tongue,” which is used in Kurdish for both tongue and language:

⁴⁰ He was very well-known as a poet in the 1980s, the first decade after the Islamic Revolution, for this collection of poetry. He was also a Kurdish language activist.

⁴¹ He is one of the most famous contemporary Kurdish poets. He is also very well-known for being politically active before the Islamic Revolution. He was the poet of Qazi Muhammad, who founded the Republic of Mahabad.

⁴² Esty, *Unseasonable Youth*, ix.

⁴³ David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism* (University of California Press, 1987), 70.

⁴⁴ Hedayati, *Bull Roar*, 131.

⁴⁵ Hedayati, *Bull Roar*, 131–32.

⁴⁶ Hedayati, *Bull Roar*, 133.

⁴⁷ Hedayati, *Bull Roar*, 103.

I said, once upon a time there was a man who had two wives ...
 His mother bit her lip⁴⁸ instantly.
 She said, my goodness! Let me see where you have found this.
 I said, no it's nothing, I lied.
 She said, give it to me; the *tongue* never lies.
 She took the paper and tore it.
 She said, don't tell anybody about this. Hold your *tongue*! We're doomed.
 Don't tell anybody you have seen such a thing.
 I said, it is right they say don't let your *tongue* cut your throat.
 Your uncle didn't tie his *tongue* and a few of such papers doomed him.
 She said hundreds of people died because of their *tongues*.
 I said to Karim, if your dad finds out what we do, he cuts our *tongues*.
 It's time to hold *tongues*.⁴⁹

The symbolic exploration of the term “tongue” and its ominous implications is skillfully depicted in this context. Despite the potential risks, ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Karim find themselves increasingly drawn to it, embarking on a quest reminiscent of Godrun’s journey in *Bardinah*. This time, the search revolves around a different facet of Kurdish identity: *language*.

The narrative in *Bull Roar* develops in two layers simultaneously: (1) the literal story of the growth of the protagonists of the novel, the two teenagers, ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Karim, and (2) the symbolic fragmentary pieces written in italics in the novel which are narrated by Karim. These fragments narrate his traumatic memories, recounting moments when he accompanied his father, a former butcher, during early mornings to transport bulls to the slaughterhouse. The novel’s title, signifying the bulls’ roar, directly connects to the sounds echoing within the slaughterhouse before the bulls met their fate. These fragments weave a narrative of mistreatment and slaughter inflicted upon the bulls by the butchers. The culmination of this symbolic narrative occurs with the death of Seyda Sura, one of the cruel butchers in the slaughterhouse. Karim, who once accompanied his father on these grim errands, shares an unexpected identification with the bulls. His observations of the bulls are interspersed throughout the plot, including scenes where they peel the bulls’ heads and sever their *tongues*—a harsh reality for children like ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Karim: “he held the *tongue* with one hand and cut it out with the knife in the other hand and put it aside. Two empty eye sockets and a cut *tongue*!”⁵⁰

One dominant aspect in the growth of the teenager protagonists of *Bull Roar* lies in their struggle against the patriarchal figures surrounding them, eventually transcending these influences. These patriarchs permeate various aspects of their lives—within their families, the neighborhood, and even at school. Notably, the novel employs a clever narrative technique by portraying these patriarchs with a sense of humor. Beneath their outward appearance, they are depicted as ridiculous, foolish, and surprisingly timid. They embody the essence of Fis Fis Hero encountered on the torn page of *Sirwah* magazine. For the protagonists, understanding the reality behind these patriarchs becomes crucial in reconciling their Kurdish identity.

The first of these patriarchs is Mirza Hadi, ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s father. A significant dimension of ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s maturation process involves grappling with this difficult and despised paternal figure. Chapter 8 delves entirely into this character, with the narrator unveiling various facets of his conflicting, abhorrent, and reprehensible personality. “He said Mirza Hadi was a tall, reddish, robust and stout man so much so that one could locate him among many from a far distance. He was so imposing and awesome few people dared to

⁴⁸ In Kurdish, it is “tongue-biting” rather than “lip-biting.” The twist lies in the fact that it’s not the polygamous husband that causes the mother to bite her lip, but rather her son’s act of reading Kurdish aloud to her.

⁴⁹ Hedayati, *Bull Roar*, 98–99 (italics added).

⁵⁰ Hedayati, *Bull Roar*, 101 (italics added).

speak to him.”⁵¹ Initially portrayed as a commanding and impressive father and husband, Mirza Hadi is introduced through the perspectives of his son and wife. Beyond his remarkable physical presence, he hails from a lineage of Mirzas, a title bestowed upon him since childhood. His education included learning to read and write, with Saadi’s works *Gulistan* and *Bustan* serving as his guides. He never allowed his wife to leave the house. Upon discovering that ‘Abd al-Muttalib possessed Kurdish books, his anger flared. He berated ‘Abd al-Muttalib, accusing him of secretly reading “the perverted works of Sheikholeslām’s son and Mollā Rahman the Hazhar.”⁵² His harsh treatment extended to everyone—philosophers, scientists, poets—except for Saadi.⁵³ He looked equally down on all of them. He most particularly harbored a deep disdain for politicians and political figures, and he despised books, keeping none at home. He did not even keep Saadi’s books, whom he admired. He belittled ‘Abd al-Muttalib, mocking his interest in Kurdish books and his support of the Kurdish cause. In frustration, he exclaimed, “The Kurdish cause? To the hell with it!”⁵⁴ His contempt for political activists knew no bounds, and he constantly berated himself for having a son who embarrassed him by championing such a cause. In essence, he was an excessively critical father, consistently undermining ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s abilities and ridiculing him.

The other patriarch in the novel is Seyda Sura, the butcher. His treatment of the bulls in the slaughterhouse symbolizes his cruelty. This cruelty, reflected in how he slaughters the bulls, highlights the gap between the teenagers and their fathers. Despite working alongside others in the slaughterhouse, Seyda Sura has minimal meaningful interaction with characters like ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Karim. However, his treatment of the bulls provides a symbolic framework for understanding the relationships between patriarchal figures and their sons in the novel. His eventual demise becomes a powerful symbol of the overthrow of despots and patriarchs. The novel concludes with a highly symbolic scene: Seyda Sura meets a cruel death at the hands of an enraged bull. As he confronts the bull alone, it impales him with its horn, resulting in a gruesome end. Blood spills from both Seyda Sura and the bull, staining the slaughterhouse in a vivid and visceral manner.

The third patriarch, Mr. Sarchashmah, serves as the school chancellor. He holds this position at the same school attended by ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Karim. Mr. Sarchashmah instills fear in the students and treats them with extreme cruelty. His mistreatment of ‘Abd al-Muttalib one day prompts their decision to flee from home. Mr. Sarchashmah’s threat to involve security institutes due to their political activities becomes the catalyst for their escape. These patriarchs share a common trait: they intimidate and terrify the teenagers in their vicinity hindering their ability to grapple with their identity and important aspects of their lives. For ‘Abd al-Muttalib, the only viable solution is to break free from this oppressive network of patriarchs.

The last chapter in the formation of ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Karim occurs when, following Mr. Sarchashmah’s threats above, they make a desperate attempt to escape across the border to Iraqi Kurdistan. Although a man they come across on their way convinces them not to flee, ‘Abd al-Muttalib remains trapped due to his strict father’s potential retribution. Meanwhile, Karim, who initially persuaded ‘Abd al-Muttalib to run, eventually returns home. This poignant escape and separation mark the beginning of ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s life in exile—a recurring theme in contemporary Kurdish literature. Notable works in Kurdish fiction like Ata Nahai’s *Guli Shoran* and *Betting on Halalah’s Fortune* explore protagonists who similarly choose lives of isolation and estrangement. The most critical moment of ‘Abd al-Muttalib’s formation as a Kurd occurs at this time when he decides to leave his homeland.

⁵¹ Hedayati, *Bull Roar*, 167.

⁵² Hedayati, *Bull Roar*, 176.

⁵³ The famous didactic poet of thirteenth-century Iran.

⁵⁴ Hedayati, *Bull Roar*, 179.

V

Sayyed Qadir Hedayati recounts the coming-of-age experiences of three Kurdish teenagers in *Bull Roar* and *Bradinah*. What makes the narration unique is the fact that the growth occurs on the background of Kurdish history and political ups and downs. Throughout, the central theme revolves around the search for identity, breathing life into the stories. As time passes, the protagonists gain awareness of their heritage and language. As they mature beyond mere psychological development, they grapple fervently with their Kurdish identity from a young age, actively involving themselves in related pursuits. Politics becomes part of their lives during their teenage years, unfolding against a politically charged backdrop. Their decisions, though not always rational, emerge from the challenging circumstances they face and their youthful perspectives.

Bull Roar and *Bradinah* unfold in historically distinct environments and contexts: Karim and ‘Abd al-Muttalib grew up in the 1980s and Godrun lived in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century in the court of Shah Abbas I, two historical eras that were significant in the lives of Kurds and concerned their social and political destiny. However, despite their distinct historical settings, there exists a shared underlying context that binds them together. Hedayati’s novels, serving as examples of Kurdish Bildungsroman, are profoundly political. They abound with references to political figures, events, and take place in politically charged environments. The characters, whether inherently politically aware or swiftly becoming so, contribute to the uniqueness of these Kurdish coming-of-age narratives. Their growth is intricately woven into the political and historical fabric of the societies they emerge from.

Hedayati employs the Bildungsroman to give voice to the experiences, struggles, and aspirations of a community that has navigated the margins. Through his works, he contributes to discussions about Kurdish identity and status, inviting readers to explore the rich tapestry of Kurdish life and growth. The fortunes of Hedayati’s protagonists, most particularly Godrun and ‘Abd al-Muttalib, in these two novels are the fortune of a typical Kurd. The Bildungsroman in Hedayati’s fiction is, according to Esty, that

special kind of time machine that organizes personal and historical experience into the loaded motif of bounded growth ... the existential fixity of the mature individual and the modern nation are not just analogies for each other, but mutually reinforcing ideological constructions. Their symbolic exchange gives the nation the organic coherence of a person and gives the individual the apparently objective continuity of nation.⁵⁵

In Hedayati’s novels, the individual is not merely a humanistic entity; rather, they symbolize the collective spirit of a community. The personal experiences and struggles of these characters mirror the destiny of an entire nation within specific historical and political contexts.

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⁵⁵ Esty, *Unseasonable Youth*, 44.

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