

***When I was a little child/Bir yokluktu Ankara:*
The Turkish Bildungsroman and its Problems**

Meltem Gürle (Köln)

What lies at the heart of *Wilhelm Meister*, the quintessential Bildungsroman, is the attempt to bring together the two conflicting themes of modernity: individual and society, or as Goethe would call it, *Wollen* (individual desire) and *Sollen* (social obligation).

Though it also plays on this dichotomy, the Turkish Bildungsroman does not follow the poetics of the classical novel of formation animated by the dilemmas of apprenticeship and concluded regularly in an act social commitment following a hefty process of education. Being closely connected to the country's project of modernity and the question of national identity, the Turkish Bildungsroman is born into a complex regime of truths and follows its own narrative arc burdened by its unique problems concerning selfhood and citizenship.

Revisiting different periods since the formation of the Turkish Republic, this talk poses the question whether the Turkish Bildungsroman emerges as a failed endeavor or opens up new narrative possibilities in the genre. It also aims to demonstrate that the Bildungsroman, being located at the crossroads of literature and culture, provides a useful means of understanding some recurrent patterns in Turkey's history of democratization and modernization, while at the same time shedding light on the disappearance of the socially viable subject in the Turkish novel.

Bio

With advanced degrees in philosophy and literature, Meltem Gürle is a comparative literature scholar whose focus is on the genre of the Bildungsroman, with a particular interest in the relationship of twentieth-century Turkish literature to the modernist masterpieces of the West. Her research areas are Turkish, English and Irish literatures, theories of the novel, modernity and modernism, German idealism, and the European Bildungsroman.

Meltem Gürle worked as a lecturer at Boğaziçi University (Istanbul) between the years 2001-2016. She spent a year at Trinity College Dublin as a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow in 2017 and carried out her research on contemporary Irish coming-of-age novels. Presently, she works as a Fritz Thyssen Fellow at the University of Cologne, where she is both teaching and writing her book on the Turkish Bildungsroman.

Apart from her academic writing, Meltem Gürle is also the author of *Kırmızı Kazak* [*The Red Sweater* – 2017], a collection of essays on literature and everyday life, and *Roko ile Konuşmalar* [Talking to Roko – 2018], a children's book of philosophy.