

‘I ain’t no homosexual, I am a . . . Barrysexual!’: Queering the Bildungsroman in Bernardine Evaristo’s *Mr Loverman*

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Abstract

Grounded in Europe’s imperial practices, the classical European *Bildungsroman* has been imbued with a fixed set of characteristics and normative implications to educate and ‘civilise’ its bourgeois readership and colonial subjects alike. Portraying the development of a young, white male, heterosexual protagonist who overcomes obstacles to finally integrate into society, the European *Bildungsroman* perpetuates a certain kind of subject-formation that has been instrumental in colonial education. Due to its embeddedness in colonial history, the genre of the *Bildungsroman* has been subject to frequent criticism as well as transformations, especially by female and postcolonial authors. An exceptional example for such a postcolonial subversion of the genre is Bernardine Evaristo’s novel *Mr Loverman* (2013), which traces Barry’s coming-out story at the age of seventy-four. Unlike a classical European *Bildungsroman*, the narrative unfolds the story of an ageing, black, non-heterosexual protagonist. Therefore, I argue that Evaristo queers the European *Bildungsroman* and its normative implications along the intersectional axes of race, age, and sexuality. Additionally, she employs several formal strategies such as multi-perspectivity, polyphony, non-linear temporalities, and intertextuality to destabilise dominant normative implications of the *Bildungsroman*, further queering the more conventional form of the genre, opening it up for cultural particularities and transcultural exchange.

Keywords: Bildungsroman, Queerness, Bernardine Evaristo, *Mr Loverman*