

Being and Time as a *Bildungsroman*? A Hermeneutic Proposal

¿Ser y Tiempo como *Bildungsroman*? Una propuesta hermenéutica

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Abstract: This article proposes reading Heidegger's *Being and Time* as a philosophical *Bildungsroman*. I argue that *Being and Time* presupposes an unthematized premise, namely that an existential turning is necessary in order to philosophize. Bringing Heidegger into dialogue with the German *Bildungsroman* tradition, I demonstrate how *Being and Time* exhibits a quasi-narrative structure organized around three dramatic acts: everyday existence in *das Man*, the existential reversal of anxiety, enabling the phenomenological interpretive conversion required for philosophical thinking, and the recognition achieved through authentic resoluteness. This interpretation reveals productive parallels with Aristotelian narrative theory while maintaining the crucial distinction between phenomenology and fiction, since the treatise composes ways of Being rather than events. Two peculiarities distinguish Heidegger's philosophical *Bildungsroman*, namely radical temporality and perpetual incompleteness. This reading illuminates the existential-formative dimension of Heideggerian phenomenology and its connection to the German ideal of *Bildung* as a constant, ongoing effort.

Key-words: Heidegger, Being and time, *Bildungsroman*, phenomenology, *Bildung*

Resumen: Este artículo propone leer *Ser y tiempo* de Heidegger como un *Bildungsroman* filosófico. Argumento que *Ser y tiempo* presupone una premisa no tematizada, a saber, que una virada existencial es necesaria para el hacer filosófico. Poniendo a Heidegger en diálogo con la tradición alemana del *Bildungsroman*, demuestro cómo *Ser y tiempo* exhibe una estructura cuasi-narrativa organizada en torno a tres actos dramáticos: la existencia cotidiana en *das Man*, la inversión existencial de la angustia que posibilita la conversión interpretativa fenomenológica requerida para el pensar filosófico, y el reconocimiento alcanzado mediante la resolución auténtica. Esta interpretación revela paralelismos productivos con la teoría narrativa aristotélica manteniendo la distinción crucial entre fenomenología y ficción, pues el tratado compone modos de ser en lugar de eventos. Dos peculiaridades distinguen el *Bildungsroman* filosófico de Heidegger, a saber, temporalidad radical y incompletitud perpetua. Esta lectura ilumina la dimensión existencial-formativa de la fenomenología heideggeriana y su conexión con el ideal alemán de *Bildung* como esfuerzo constante e ininterrumpido.

Palabras clave: Heidegger, Ser y tiempo, *Bildungsroman*, fenomenología, *Bildung*

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Introduction

In this article, I present a hermeneutic proposal for reading *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962) [*BT*] as a philosophical *Bildungsroman*, which complements other hermeneutic approaches.

I argue that *BT* presupposes a fundamental premise that philosophy is only possibly through an existential improvement and that phenomenology is the method par excellence for this task, even though this is not Heidegger's explicit aim. The treatise sought to develop the question of the meaning of Being using analytic of *Dasein* as a preparatory path since questioning it directly is impossible. However, I must note the most obvious point: Heidegger did not elaborate a question about the meaning of Being in general, but rather only about the meaning of Being of human existence (*Dasein*). I examine the role of existential analysis beyond its use as a formal means for a strictly ontological question.

To elucidate this unthematized premise, I bring *BT* closer to the German *Bildungsroman* (novel of formation) tradition, which goes back at least to Goethe.

1. *Bildungsroman*

The fundamental argument that is put forth in this analysis is as follows: According to *BT*, if ontology is philosophy; if ontology asks about the meaning of Being in general; if existing means understanding Being; and if ontology is a specific way of existing, then philosophy is a way of Being directed toward existence itself. In *BT*, the categorical identification of philosophy and existence seems impossible, yet a particular function of philosophy concerning existence appears to be presupposed. Rather than arising from existence, philosophy *leads toward* existence. Hence, *BT* develops a reflection concerned with a specific *formation*. I use this term intentionally to demonstrate the possibility of interpreting *BT* as a *Bildungsroman*¹, which aligns it more closely with the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, for example.

¹ Several other authors have already defended the rapprochement between *BT* and the literary category of the novel of formation. For example:

“En este sentido, esta obra magna puede leerse en clave de una novela filosófica de formación que, al igual que otras novelas de la época, reflexiona sobre el significado del ser humano en una era dominada por la ciencia.” (Adrián, 2015, p. 18)

“In diesem Sinn liebe sich dieses Hauptwerk als *Bildungsroman* lesen, der wie andere zeitgenössische Romane über die Bedeutung des menschlichen Seins in einer von Wirtschaft und Wissenschaft dominierten Zeit reflektiert.” (Adrián, 2013, p. 197)

“E dunque questo libro può essere concepito, anche, como una sorta di “romanzo di formazione”, al pari della Fenomenologia dello spirito di Hegel” (Fabris, 2000, p. 30)

Rorty does not specify *BT*, but refers to all of Heidegger's work: “Heidegger is writing a *Bildungsroman* about, in his phrase, ‘what Being now is.’” (Rorty, 1989, p. 117)

“En disant donc que Heidegger a écrit un *Bildungsroman*, je consolide mon interprétation de *Sein und Zeit*: le roman de formation du *Dasein* exprime la quête du sens - quête oubliée par les Modernes et réactualisée par Heidegger” (Hope, 2013, p. 24)

“If we use such an approach to *Being and Time*, then we can read this book as a quasi-literary text describing the formative experience of *Dasein* - i.e., a *Bildungsroman* - in the transition from inauthenticity to authenticity.” (Cimino, 2022)

I use Wilma Patrícia Maas's classic book *O C none M nimo* [*The Minimum Canon*] as a basis for literary analysis. As Maas teaches us, Morgenstern coined the term *Bildungsroman* at a conference in 1820, in which the critic argued:

[Such a form of novel] can be called a *Bildungsroman*, above all because of its content, because it represents the protagonist's formation in his beginning and path towards a certain degree of perfectibility; secondly, also because it promotes the formation of the reader through this representation, in a broader way than any other type of novel. (Morgenstern *apud* Maas, 2000, p. 46)

Based on Morgenstern's analysis, we identified four essential criteria that define the *Bildungsroman* genre:

1. The path to perfectibility: The protagonist embarks on a formative journey from an initial state toward a higher level of perfection or maturity. This transformation is gradual and follows stages of development.
2. The formative impact on the reader: The novel represents the protagonist's formation and actively forms its reader. The reading experience itself becomes transformative, educating both the character and the reader.
3. The cultural dimension: The narrative connects the protagonist's formation to broader cultural and national contexts. While rooted in specific circumstances, the *Bildungsroman* reflects universal patterns through particular cultural expression.
4. The universal dimension: Despite—or through—its cultural specificity, the *Bildungsroman* transcends its particular context to address universal human development, making it relevant beyond its original boundaries.

For our analysis of *BT*, criteria 1, 2, and 4 are most relevant, as we will see.

The second significant step in literary theory after Morgenstern was taken by Wilhelm Dilthey. This is especially relevant for our analysis because Dilthey was one of Heidegger's most influential figures. In *BT*, Heidegger selects Dilthey as one of his main interlocutors, dedicating several pages to analyzing the exchange of letters with Count York (cf. § 77). Heidegger also incorporates many concepts derived from Dilthey, such as "understanding" and "historicity."

Dilthey wrote a lengthy essay about Goethe, first drafting it in 1877 and revising it several times afterward. "The volume was instantly acclaimed and established a model for the *geistesgeschichtliche* approach to literary history" (in introduction to Dilthey, 1985, p. 19). In the essay, Dilthey argues that poetry should be read as a reflection of the author's personal experiences. By connecting the author's personal experiences to their artistic creations, the philosopher challenges the idea of a timeless genius and restores the historicity of each work. This is why biographical and historical studies are crucial for understanding any work. "All understanding is founded on experiences, but in Goethe's case, understanding enriches his own experience and, in turn, expands his existence." (*idem*, p. 280) The formation of his humanity, intertwined with his individuality, made Goethe's poetry possible, especially the prose trilogy dedicated to *Wilhelm Meister*.

German Romantic poetry, whose exponents include Goethe, Lessing, and Schiller, approached philosophy closely (*idem*, p. 284). Thus, the classic German *Bildungsroman* was also born with its own epochal character, blending philosophy and literature in such a way that made them nearly inseparable for these authors. They considered philosophical thought and study as essential to the ethical and political development, a premise exemplified in the *Bildungsromane*. In short, we cannot separate Goethe from Kant or Fichte.

Dilthey also devoted his efforts to analyzing the novel *Hyperion*, by Hölderlin. His essay was published in its final form in 1799, and firmly classified it as a *Bildungsroman*. Dilthey states that “these *Bildungsromane* gave expression to the individualism of a culture whose sphere of interest was limited to private life” (*idem*, p. 335). There is clearly a bourgeois element in this type of novel, as Dilthey and many other authors have noted. However, the novel does not aim to portray only the bourgeois world. Rather, it reveals a clear focus on exposing the “universally human” aspects of the hero’s life journey. An undeniable ideal of humanity traces back to figures like Lessing and Herder. According to Dilthey, there is a dialectical movement of the spirit within the *Bildungsromane*, justifying the link to the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Each stage of development holds value and serves as a necessary step in the hero’s/spirit’s formative development.

Dilthey highlights two elements of the *Bildungsroman* genre present in *Hyperion*. First, he notes the transition from a state of simplicity to one of perfectibility as “essentially the same in every individual”. Second, he mentions the quest to “interpret life from within itself” (Dilthey, 1985, p. 336). There is a genuine effort to give voice to life without any external ideals suppressing or obscuring it. In this double movement, Hölderlin does not favor extraordinary facts that could reveal an authentic existence far removed from everyday life. Instead, he patiently portrays how individuals are conditioned by their external world and to what extent a reflective consciousness, whose passions are calmed, comes to accept the needs and conditions present in their lives.

Beyond Dilthey’s analysis, we must also emphasize another crucial element of the *Bildungsroman*. This genre differs from other novels by presenting “the image of man in becoming” (Santos, 2020, p. 159) Or, according to Bakhtin: “Time is introduced into the interior of man, impregnates his entire image, modifying the substantial importance of his destiny and his life” (*apud* Santos, 2020, p. 130). It is impossible to consider transformations in existence without presupposing that *time* is essential to human life. Every narrative, regardless of its type, is rooted in time because everything narrated occurs within time, which is usually understood chronologically. As a condition for the possibility of a (temporal) narrative, *time becomes the essence of the narrator*. The particular aspect of the *Bildungsroman* is not that it is constituted by time, but that this temporal aspect becomes conscious and is elevated to the central theme of what is depicted. Santos also highlights the close tie between the focus on becoming and changes and transitions. It is time, as

structured within becoming, that enables change; therefore, a narrative centered on change perceives time as its core concern.

The concept of *Bildung* is a widely discussed theme in German culture. Heidegger explored it on many occasions, for example in his interpretation of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. According to the German philosopher, the main point of the Allegory involves the lengthy and challenging process of transforming the core of human nature, as shown in the narrative's four stages. The passages, transformations, and the transitional process are central to the issue being presented. This process involves re-familiarizing oneself with one's environment. Plato called this process *παιδεία* (*paideia*), which Heidegger, although he acknowledged the difficulty of translation, renders as *Bildung*, meaning literally formation but also "education," as the English translator chose.

At the same time Plato seeks to avoid false interpretations; he wants to show that the essence of *παιδεία* does not consist in merely pouring knowledge into the unprepared soul as if it were some container held out empty and waiting. On the contrary real education lays hold of the soul itself and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it. (Heidegger, 1998, p. 167)

The philosopher interprets the Allegory of the Cave as a narrative recounting the transitions that the "soul in totality" undergoes when leaping from immediate contact with beings to a realm where beings appear. In this realm, human beings "first encounter things and transferring and accustoming them to another realm where beings appear" (Heidegger, 1998, p. 167). Heidegger refers to this entire formative process as *Bildung*.

The dialogue with Plato becomes more pronounced when considering the Platonic thesis that the soul's definition is self-movement (Plato, 2008, 896a), a thesis which forms the basis of a philosophical tradition of self-care². From a phenomenological perspective, consciousness cannot find a *motive* for movement outside itself. By affirming freedom as the essence of existence and, in *BT*, temporality, Heidegger aligns with this tradition, which simultaneously affirms movement as fundamental to *Dasein* (soul, consciousness, etc.³) and emphasizes the need to see this movement as "capable of moving itself," or self-movement.

² The purpose of this work is not to establish the relationship between *BT* and the tradition of self-care. However, I recognize that my research is inspired by this reading. I distance myself by emphasizing the structural quasi-narrative character of *BT* (the "acts" or formative stages of *Dasein*) and the relationship between phenomenology and transparency, which I don't see present in the writings that seek to bring *BT* closer to the ethics of self-care (Adrián, 2013; Larivée & Leduc, 2002).

³ Indeed, with the term *Dasein*, Heidegger contributes an essential element to the tradition. Rather than being a movement of the soul independent of the world, it is a movement of Being-in-the-world itself—of the fundamental intentional relationship.

2. The Formative Movement in Being and Time: *Dasein's* Path to Perfectibility

Act I – A common life

We will defend, as the structuring axis of our reading, the hermeneutic hypothesis that *BT* accompanies the *Dasein* on its path of formation, which starts from the simplest everyday life when *Dasein* is indistinguishable from others and its “who” is defined by impersonality (*BT*, § 25). It passes through the seismic crisis of anxiety, and reaches the description of *Dasein* itself (Adrián, 2013, pp. 197–198).

BT aims to describe *Dasein*, whose ontological character differs from that of other beings inasmuch as *Dasein exists*. This means that *Dasein* does not have fixed characteristics, but rather, ways of being. The difficulty lies in deciding which way is the most suitable for existential analysis. Heidegger begins with *everydayness* [*Alltäglichkeit*], a *Dasein's* existentiale that indicates a way of Being that constitutes *Dasein* as both authentic and inauthentic, i. e., everydayness is the way of Being *from which* every existence must depart and to which it must return (*BT*, H232).

Everydayness also indicates *Dasein* in its most common existence, which means that it does not present a unique life, such as an artist, a scientist, or a religious person (von Herrmann, 2005, pp. 40–41). This methodological choice is crucial to understanding the formative trajectory the treatise describes.

Dasein has no inherent previous characteristics; it is a *disclosure of possibilities*. *Dasein* opens a range of possibilities and projects itself into some, choosing them. Through this projection, *Dasein* builds its identity, its own *selfhood* [*Selbstheit*]. Everydayness is a way of projecting oneself into possibilities as everybody does. Unlike authentic *Dasein*, inauthentic and everyday *Dasein* does not choose (*BT*, H268) its possibilities, but rather replicates those that have always been there. This means that the everyday *Dasein* accepts those possibilities that seem to be more relevant, intriguing, or acceptable to everyone. Heidegger calls this way of projecting itself into possibilities *they* [*das Man*].

They understand themselves through absorption in the world, understanding entities in general, including themselves, through concerned dealings [*Besorgen*] with ready-to-hand entities [*Zubandene*]. Crucially, all prejudices remain untouchable: one reads, talks, thinks, acts “like they do.” Absorbed in the they’s empire, everyday *Dasein* replicates common possibilities, including possible ways of making science, thinking, and constituting its own identity. As a possible self, they answer the question of who *Dasein* is in its everydayness.

In §27, we read a striking passage: “But this distanciality which belongs to Being-with, is such that *Dasein*, as everyday Being-with-one-another, stands in subjection [*Botmäßigkeit*] to Others” (*BT*, H126). The term *Botmäßigkeit* indicates both subjection and tutelage. The first translation highlights the critique of all theories of the subject—a word with the dual meanings of self and submission. Tutela, in turn, also indicates being under dominion while making evident the opposition to autonomy. In German, *Selbständigkeit* (autonomy),

literally self-constancy or “constancy-of-self”, is a characteristic of the mode of Being of authenticity (BT, H323). In *das Man*, constancy [*Ständigkeit*] is marked by inauthenticity and by not-being-oneself (BT, H128). Therefore, everydayness is privative mode of being oneself insofar as it is a positive mode of projection onto possibilities. Thus, there is a common mode of projection onto possibilities marked by domination, subjection, and tutelage, in which *Dasein*’s possibilities are arbitrated, concealing their character as possibilities, thereby making them appear as fatalistic determinations.

At the beginning of the journey, our hero is lost. Indifferently dealing with ordinary things, *Dasein* lives a common life, without truly choosing itself. This is the most common starting point of any narrative. The hero’s journey, as tradition tells it, may begin with a trivial scenario to which the reader becomes accustomed and with which s/he may identify.

Act II – The Collapse

Although everyday *Dasein* has possibilities guided by “they”, it believes that it possesses a profoundly different identity, creating a distance between itself and Others (BT, H126). As in *Bildungsromane*, development means understanding common worldly belonging rather than creating an isolated self. In BT, this understanding emerges from the collapse of daily significance, which is brought about by a rare attunement [*Befindlichkeit*], known as anxiety [*Angst*].

The formative movement described in *Being and Time* reaches its decisive turning point with the phenomenon of anxiety. As Dilthey emphasized in his analysis of the *Bildungsromane*, particularly in Hölderlin’s work, moods [*Stimmungen*] play a central role in genuine character transformation. Facts become secondary, contrary to everydayness; the moods matter, the atmospheric shifts that permeate existence. BT makes an exceptional contribution to the phenomenology of moods by interpreting them as the original disclosure of *Dasein* in the existential structure of attunement. Heidegger takes moods back to the most fundamental level of *Dasein*’s constitution (BT, § 29) and, through anxiety (BT § 40), identifies the initial essential step in the transition from impersonality to authentic existence.

Seized by anxiety, *Dasein* no longer feels at home. Unlike fear, anxiety’s “in-the-face-of” is not a being, but rather it is *Being-in-the-world* (BT, H188). *Dasein* understands that the dream of distance and differentiation from the world through acts and dealings is illusory because of its basic constitution as a being that cannot be separate from its world. An attunement, rather than an act or an event, provokes deep connection to the world, embodying the Romantic ideal of common belonging through mood as an essential step in the formation.

Another key point is the connection between anxiety and freedom. “Anxiety makes manifest in *Dasein* its Being towards its ownmost potentiality-for-Being—that is, its *Being-free* for the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself. Anxiety brings *Dasein* face to face with its *Being-free for* (*propensio in ...*) the

authenticity of its Being, and for this authenticity as a possibility which it always is.” (BT, H188). While everydayness is a positive way of projecting itself into possibilities which are not *chosen*, authenticity is the opposite: it is a free projection that comes originally from a *choosing*. This choosing is only possible because the common world, all the sedimented significance and meanings, *collapses*, indicating that no possibility has a quality that justifies its selection. Therefore, possibilities reveal their true nature as possibilities and not determinations. Anxiety reveals the freedom of projection, making possible a practical identity derived from projections into possibilities guided by an existential *decision*.

Act III – The Decision

Anxiety is necessary, yet insufficient for authenticity. The transition from impersonality (Division One) to individuation (Division Two) requires anxiety; however, anxiety alone does not constitute authenticity (BT, H344).

Beyond anxiety, *decision* [*Entscheidung*] is required. The resoluteness [*Entschlossenheit*] that anticipates death reveals *Dasein* authentically (BT, H296-301). However, resoluteness cannot arise without the prior disclosure accomplished by anxiety. Anxiety opens the possibility and resoluteness actualizes it. Together, they constitute the movement that reveals authenticity and inauthenticity as the fundamental possibilities between which *Dasein* must constantly choose.

Besides this central existential aspect, anxiety occupies a fundamental methodological role in *BT*. This methodological function is directly connected to the formative dimension of the treatise. If philosophy is phenomenology, and if phenomenology requires that phenomena disclose themselves from themselves, then the philosopher must achieve the state of disclosure in which existential structures can genuinely reveal themselves. Anxiety, by stripping away the cover of everydayness, provides this disclosure. As Heidegger notes, phenomenological interpretation must enable *Dasein* itself to disclose things primitively; thus, it must let *Dasein* interpret itself (BT, H140). Anxiety is the existential condition that enables such self-interpretation and then philosophy:

In anxiety (*Angst*) this dislocation is accomplished in such a way that authentic self-understanding can be made explicit as an existential possibility (though it need not be). Only if it is, however, can the philosopher carry out the task of fundamental ontology, achieve the ‘transparency’ necessary for making explicit the ontological structure of that being who is capable of raising the question of the meaning of being. Authenticity, a clear view of one’s own being, is a condition of philosophy’s possibility. (Crowell, 2001, p. 210)

With this methodological approach, we can connect the two formations in question. *BT* does not describe a singular character, as the approximation between the work and *Bildungsroman* might suggest, but rather the *transcendental conditions of philosophy*, including the formation of the philosopher, insofar as philosophy is a *Dasein attitude*. Clearly, *BT* does not aim to *provoke* anxiety for

the simple reason that it *cannot*. However, it describes phenomenologically that philosophy is only possible if a peculiar mood, a distinct way of Being attuned to beings in general, takes over the one's entire existence.

The Three-Act Structure

The analysis of anxiety reveals the three-act structure of the formative movement. In the first act, we observe the everyday *Dasein* absorbed in its world, lost in its preoccupations, understanding itself as *das Man* does—that is, it does not genuinely understand itself, but simply replicates inherited interpretations. This is the protagonist in his initial, unreflective state.

In the second act, which anxiety inaugurates, everything collapses. The familiar world becomes strange, meanings dissolve, and the comfort of *das Man* proves hollow. This is not merely a psychological crisis, but an *ontological rupture*. The very structures by which *Dasein* has understood itself and its world suddenly fail.

The third act—authenticity, resoluteness, Being-toward-death—cannot be reached without passing through the second act. However, the second act does not automatically lead to the third. As *Dasein* is essentially freedom, returning to the protective shell of *das Man* is always possible. The movement toward authenticity is not linear, but rather circular, a constant struggle and perpetual oscillation between the possibilities of authenticity and inauthenticity.

It is common to think of formation as a mostly linear process that culminates in reaching a certain stage, at which point one could say that a person is fully formed. The traditional educational path reinforces this notion by awarding a credential that signifies this state of unquestionable knowledge. Nothing could be cruder and more distant from reality. If we consider phenomenology as a formative process of individualization, it must be viewed as an *ongoing effort requiring reaffirmation* at every stage. Taking temporality seriously means understanding that no past decision can define the present or future. In his interpretation of the Allegory of the Cave, Heidegger emphasizes the fourth stage of the story—the return to the cave—as a Platonic reminder that there is never a final victory over truth, over the unveiling of beings, and therefore, over freedom:

Liberation does not come about by the simple removal of the chains, and it does not consist in unbridled license; rather, it first begins as the continuous effort at accustoming one's gaze to be fixed on the firm limits of things that stand fast in their visible form.. [...] *παιδεία* includes within itself an essential relation to lack of education. And if, according to Plato's own interpretation, the "allegory of the cave" is supposed to clarify the essence of *παιδεία* then this clarification must also make manifest precisely this essential factor, the constant overcoming of lack of education. (Heidegger, 1998, p. 169–170)

Heidegger refers to a "continuous effort" and a "constant overcoming of the lack of education [*Bildung*]". This interpretation of the Allegory also seems to apply to *BT*. It is an ongoing effort to move from everyday concerns

[*Besorgen*] to the phenomenological attitude, which restores the temporality of the phenomenon and its truth⁴.

Anxiety and Phenomenological Conversion

There is an essential connection between the existential transformation accomplished through anxiety and the phenomenological attitude required for genuine philosophical thinking. Heidegger understands phenomenology not as a doctrine or system, but as a *method*—a way of letting phenomena reveal themselves from themselves (*BT*, H34-35). This requires a specific stance, a particular way of attending to things.

Everydayness, absorbed in *das Man*, lacks precisely this stance. It interprets entities according to pre-established categories and prejudices. Genuine phenomenology requires breaking with this mode of understanding. According to Heidegger, in §40, this requires a “phenomenological interpretive conversion” [*phänomenologisch interpretierender Hinkehr*] (*BT*, H185)⁵⁻⁶—a turning-toward that is simultaneously a turning-away from the falling movement of everyday existence.

Anxiety makes this conversion possible. By moving beyond the familiar interpretations and revealing the groundlessness of everyday meanings, anxiety forces *Dasein* to confront phenomena in general without the protective mediation of *das Man*'s categories. The world disclosed in anxiety is not the world as *das Man* interprets it, but the world as such—the phenomenon in its phenomenality.

This is why anxiety has existential and methodological significance. Anxiety is not merely an important phenomenon to analyze phenomenologically; it enables phenomenological analysis itself. One who has never experienced anxiety cannot achieve the phenomenological stance. Conversely, those who have been shaken by anxiety and faced the uncanniness of existence have the possibility, though not the guarantee, of genuine philosophical investigation.

This insight reveals the connection between existence and philosophy. By

⁴ I cannot develop the argument here, but there is a straight connection between this struggle to authenticity and the combat between truth and untruth.

⁵ The English translation: “‘turning thither’ in a way which is phenomenologically Interpretative.”

⁶ *Hin-kehren* refers to turning [*Kehren* - turning] towards..., turning with a specific direction [*hin*]. Luther used this verb in “also zoch alles volk hin, ein jglicher in sein haus, und David keret auch hin sein haus zu segenen” (original version of 1545), 1Cro 16, 43. In the King James Bible, we read: “And all the people departed every man to his house: and David returned to bless his house.” In this chapter, the chronicler recounts a praise led by David in front of the Ark of Yahweh. After the hymn of praise, everyone returned to their homes. We can interpret this movement of returning to oneself following the encounter with the divine as correlating to that narrated by Heidegger after anxiety.

According to the Brothers Grimm dictionary, *hinkehren* translates the Latin phrase *vertere istuc*, which literally means to return to. Used this way, the unusual verb chosen by Heidegger also emphasizes the movement of *Dasein* back to its there, to who it truly is.

describing understanding [*Verstehen*] as existential and the project as the opening of being-in-the-world, Heidegger uses the term *transparency* [*Durchsichtigkeit*] to refer to “The sight which is related primarily and on the whole to existence” (*BT*, H146). Thus, there is a way to look at existence (the being of *Dasein*) and address it in a manner that makes it accessible from itself. This manner does not apprehend existence as a “a point called the ‘Self’ [*Selbstpunkt*]”, but seizes upon “the full disclosedness of Being-in-the-world throughout all the constitutive items which are essential to it” (*BT*, H146). Here, we see the convergence of the two aspects I have discussed: the phenomenological project and the existential project of self-care. Phenomenology is a method that aims to reveal what is as it appears from itself (*BT*, H34). A fundamental assumption of all phenomenology is that the phenomenon must be removed from any structure obstructing its full manifestation; phenomenology is the method that addresses this need. The phenomenology of *Dasein*, therefore, aims to reveal *Dasein* in its essential structures, in its existentials, as shown in *BT*. However, the passage above tells us more. Transparency is a vision that pertains to existence and uncovers its constitutive elements. Phenomenology seeks to achieve the transparency of *Dasein*. As an entity that interprets and is interpreted, *Dasein* must become transparent to itself as it develops its phenomenological perspective.

The relationship between philosophy as a discursive elaboration on Being (ontology) and the way of existing arises from philosophy’s ontological and ontical foundation. Philosophy should not be characterized as a transhistorical and timeless universal knowledge, but rather as the radical product of history: “As the work of the freedom of the human *Dasein*, the possibilities and destinies of philosophy are bound up with man’s existence, and thus with temporality and with historicity, and indeed in a more original sense than with any other science.” (Heidegger, 1988, pp. 19–20) This is more original because it corresponds to the very disclosure of the existential phenomenon itself. In other words, as phenomenology is ontology, philosophy is a way of expressing the being of entities or phenomena themselves (*BT*, H35). This doesn’t mean creating theories, but rather the discursively expressing what always happens, without forcing the appearance of theories, prejudices, ideologies, or world-views. Rather, it aims to reveal phenomena through their structures of being. With this approach, philosophy intensifies a tendency of existence itself: phenomenalization. Existence means allowing beings to be, because existence is understanding Being. However, phenomenology is essential precisely because phenomena are not primarily given in their Being (*BT*, H36–7). Therefore, philosophy articulates the very being of existence. For philosophy to exist, existence—often absorbed in daily life—must turn inward and transform itself.

Factual transformation

Such a conversion is made possible by the presupposition of *Dasein*’s Being, which Heidegger calls care [*Sorge*], whose sense of Being is temporality. The

capacity for self-movement that Plato referred to now returns as the character of always being outside [*Draußen-sein*] (*BT*, H62) of existence, which is made possible by ecstatic movement (*BT*, H329). Heidegger emphasizes the purely formal character of existence, which, as transcendental, constitutes the condition of possibility for all change and formation. This clearly sets his work apart from *Bildungsromane*. However, a purely formal reading of the work contradicts Heidegger's own aim to ground all philosophy in ontical foundations. Throughout the second part of *BT*, Heidegger seeks ontical confirmation for the formal analyses of the first part (*BT*, H309). This ontical possibility, as Heidegger himself recognizes, comes from a factual ideal of existence (*BT*, H310), which is merely assumed, but never explained.

I don't believe that Heidegger's factual ideal corresponds to any specific individual existence. It's as if he were starting from a particular "lifestyle" or "worldview" to guide his phenomenological analysis. Rather, by formalizing his analysis as much as possible, Heidegger seems to suggest that specific ontical lives cannot be considered models of authenticity. This is directly opposed to those who choose historical figures, often artists and religious leaders, as paradigms of authenticity. Clearly, Heidegger is moving away from a limited ontical prescription of what an authentic life should be. Thus, the absence of examples in the description of the authenticity stems not from mere difficulty in writing (see *BT*, H38), but from the impossibility of providing any examples on an ontological level. Thus, any transformation we might mention occurs on the factual level [*faktisch*], which involves the relationships and meanings that constitute the world. It does not occur on the factual level [*tatsächlich*], which pertains to observable and narratable facts (*BT*, H55-6 and H7, note 2). Therefore, we can speak of existentiell changes (ontical level) connected to ontological reflections, though such changes can never refer to a specific factual ideal. At the end of §59, we read: "Nevertheless, the Interpretation which is more primordial existentially, also discloses possibilities for a more primordial existentiell understanding, as long as our ontological conceptualization does not let itself get cut off from our ontical experience." (*BT*, H295). The relationship between ontological conceptualization and ontical experience is the main focus of philosophy, because it opens up existentiell possibilities without ever prescribing them. This passage also demonstrates Heidegger's awareness of the potential exhortative nature of his formal description in *BT* (Larivée & Leduc, 2002, p. 735).

3. But is *Being and Time* a Narrative? The Elements of the Narrative

BT is a phenomenological and hermeneutical description of *Dasein* within a broader ontological program. In the traditional sense, it does not constitute a narrative. However, some aspects of *BT* approximate its structure to that of a narrative, especially the *Bildungsroman* tradition in German literature.

To fully develop this argument, it would be necessary to present a comprehensive phenomenology of narrative. However, this is beyond the scope of the present paper. Therefore, I will only briefly explain what narrative and phenomenology are so as to allow for this approximation.

Traditionally, narratives involve characters, plot, setting (delimited space and time), and narrative discourse (the manner of telling). According to my hypothesis, the *Dasein* in its transcendental structures is the main character. *Dasein* is in its essence *time*, and its temporal dynamics enables spatiality (*BT*, §70). In other words, there is time and space only when there is *Dasein*, and *Dasein* is always in a delimited time and space, understood both ontologically and ontically. The manner of “telling” is hermeneutic phenomenology. Now, let’s focus on the plot.

In narrative, the plot is the connection of events, a *composing* (Aristotle, 1987, 1450b22 – from now on, *Poetics*). The narrator establishes a *narrative* connection among a sequence of events that becomes a unity only when the narrator *recounts it*. The narrator is a creator. In an ontological description, however, events do not have a place. Philosophy does not concern itself with individual occurrences, facts, or events as history does. Therefore, *BT* is not a narrative in the specific sense of a sequence of events; rather, it presents a sequence of *ways of Being*. For my argument, the most important thing is that reading *BT* as a *Bildungsroman* sheds light on the *sequential* pattern and development of the treatise. The phenomenological description of the *temporal* entity occurs *quasi-narratively*, or in a weak sense. It is *quasi-narrative* because it is not a composing of events, but rather a composition of ways of Being.

These ways of Being are arranged in such a way that one leads to the next, indicating that the latter is more original. Consider everydayness, the most common way of Being. Heidegger notes that inside this modal indifference, which is characterized by not choosing, *Dasein flees* in the face of itself: “*Dasein*’s absorption in the ‘they’ and its absorption in the ‘world’ of its concern, make manifest something like a fleeing of *Dasein* in the face of itself-of itself as an authentic potentiality-for-Being-its-Self.” (*BT*, H184). It is *Dasein*’s *absorption* that makes the fleeing manifest. Therefore, this way of Being prompts the analysis to explore a more original way of Being. However, to get there, *Dasein* requires a specific *pathos*, a *turning point* in its existence—*anxiety*. This *Befindlichkeit* is not an external intervention, but a possibility belonging essentially to *Dasein* itself. It arises, as Aristotle requires of proper tragic reversal, “according to probability or necessity” (*Poetics*, 1452a22) from the protagonist’s own nature.

According to Aristotle, the plot [*mythos*] of a tragedy has three parts: *peripeteia* (reversal), *anagnorisis* (recognition or discovery), and *pathos* (suffering). This concept was expanded by subsequent traditions to encompass all narratives, beyond Aristotle’s original scope. It is sufficient to employ this tradition to clarify my arguments.

A reversal “is a complete swing in the direction of the action” (*Poetics*, 1452a22). The *peripeteia* is central to our current understanding of *plot* in the narrow sense. In *BT*, the *peripeteia* of *Dasein*’s formation occurs through anxiety

and the call of conscience [*Ruf des Gewissens*]. These phenomena reveal that what appeared to be the “natural” mode of existence, absorption in public concerns, is actually flight and self-loss (*BT*, H184-5). The direction of existence inverts: from dispersal to concentration, from the familiar to the strange, and from the public to the proper.

The second element, *anagnorisis* manifests in *BT* as resoluteness [*Entschlossenheit*] and anticipatory resoluteness [*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*]. Aristotle defines *anagnorisis* as “a change from ignorance to knowledge” (1452a30) and emphasizes that the finest form of recognition occurs simultaneously with a reversal. In Heidegger’s text, the moment of recognition arrives when *Dasein*, shaken by anxiety and summoned by conscience, achieves existential transparency [*Durchsichtigkeit*] and decides on its ownmost possibility. Through resoluteness, *Dasein* recognizes itself not as an impersonal “one-self” but as a singular “I myself.” The recognition deepens when resoluteness becomes anticipatory through Being-toward-death. “Anticipatory reveals to *Dasein* its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concerned solicitude” (*BT*, H266). Anticipatory resoluteness comprises an existential *choosing*, precisely *choosing to choose* (*BT*, H270), which corresponds to the most radical freedom (Han-Pile, 2013). This freedom is not “built” or “created”, but rather is that in the face of the inauthentic *Dasein* flees from. Authenticity, thus, presents an epistemological character, as well as the *anagnorisis* moment of the plot. *Dasein* conquers an authentic self only when it chooses existentially, when existence in its various and diverse moments becomes *coherent* and can be properly told according to its transcendental structures.

In this *anagnorisis*, *Dasein* understands itself as a fundamentally thrown project within its own transcendental structures. This recognition is not of a stable identity, but rather of radical possibility. *Dasein* recognizes that it must constantly choose itself and that no past decision can definitively determine the present or the future. This recognition lends meaning to the conversion enabled by anxiety: *Dasein* understands why it was lost and glimpses the possibility of authentic selfhood. *Dasein* becomes open to itself, transparent in its existential structure. It achieves that passage from ignorance to knowledge that defines tragic recognition, but in an existential manner.

The third element, *pathos*, appears in *BT* as Being toward death (*Sein zum Tode*, §§46–53). Aristotle defines *pathos* as “a destructive or painful action, such as visible deaths, torments, woundings, and other things of the same kind.” (1452b11) However, in Heidegger’s existential analysis, *pathos* is not physical suffering, but rather the existential anxiety in the face of radical finitude. Being-toward-death is not the biological process of dying, but rather the ontological structure that permeates all of *Dasein*’s existence. As Heidegger insists, “death is only in an existentiell *Being toward death*” (*BT*, H234)—death “is” only insofar as *Dasein* comports toward it as its ownmost possibility. The *pathos* of *BT* lies in *Dasein*’s unavoidable confrontation with its own impossibility. Death is characterized as the “most proper” [*eigenste*], “non-relational” [*unbezüglich*], and

“unsurpassable” [*unüberholbar*] possibility. Anxiety is thus confronting itself with its fundamental finitude. This is not momentary pain but a permanent existential structure. *Dasein*’s Being is constitutively Being-toward-death, and therefore the suffering of finitude is not an episode but the very fabric of existence. Crucially, this *pathos* is the condition of authenticity. It is not enough to be seized by anxiety; one must also decide. Anticipatory resoluteness discloses *Dasein* in its authenticity, corresponding to an active aspect of the *pathos*. Unlike Aristotle’s tragic *pathos*, which typically culminates in catastrophe (the hero’s downfall), Heidegger’s existential *pathos* is the gateway to authentic existence. Confronting finitude does not destroy *Dasein* but liberates it for its ownmost possibilities.

Phenomenology and Fiction

The main point here is that *BT* imitates a traditional narrative *structure*. However, there are fundamental differences between phenomenology and fiction.

The same temporal dynamics present in any usage of an equipment are also present in reading. Confronting a text requires a project of meaning. However, if the reading is correct, this projection is based on the possibilities opened by the text read and all my previous readings and experiences. And then I am able to read the text in front of me.

When reading a fictional narrative, I enter a new world. My previous readings, knowledge, and experiences are brought to this new place, to the *world of the narrative*. The writer *created* this world and aims to elaborate a complex of meanings that transcend my experienceable world. I must surrender myself to the narrator’s guidance which appeals to my freedom, so that we can together give life to the narrative or, in Heideggerian terms, open this world. The narrative’s world may differ from mine inasmuch as its possibilities and meanings differ from those of my tradition. Having experienced the *otherness* of this world, I am forced to *choose* whether to integrate or ignore it. This is the fundamental insight of the *Bildungsroman* tradition. As readers encounter worlds, they can experience their own world as a *possibility* and then as a *possible* changeable one⁷.

A phenomenological text requires similar temporal dynamics of projection, retention, and actualization. However, instead of suggesting a new world of possibilities and meanings, it aims to *indicate the conditions of possibility of our world of experiences*. Also, rather than describing *things* as scientific texts do or creating things as literary works do, phenomenology *indicates* what is meant. Phenomenology cannot describe because it does not deal with *constituted* objects, but rather only with the dynamics of *constitution*.

In our tripartite structure (world pre-text; world of the text; world after reading), phenomenological texts explicitly require a pre-text world because

⁷ The implicit dialogue here is with Sartre, 2010 and Ricoeur, 1984.

they describe the structures of the living world. However, by doing so, phenomenology aims to *reorient* readers to understand phenomena in a way that is different from natural understanding. This is because phenomenology points to transcendental structures in its working of constitution of phenomena. Phenomenology, thus, searches for a *conversion* of the natural world, not by pointing to new possibilities, but by explicating the essential structures that are always present yet neglected and omitted in common experience. In this way, phenomenology approaches fiction, as both withdraw layers of prejudice to highlight the precedence of *possibilities* over effectiveness, in other words, the essential freedom of the world.

Thus, while *BT* employs narrative structure and shares the formative trajectory of the *Bildungsroman*, it remains fundamentally phenomenological in method. The comparison helps us see that philosophy requires a formative practice—yet this formation operates through disclosure, not fictional creation. The reader undergoes formation not by imaginatively entering a fictional world but by existentially appropriating the structures of their own being and therefore of beings in general.

4. The peculiarity of Heidegger's *Bildungsroman*

A thorough comparison between *BT* and the tradition of *Bildungsromane* should also highlight the differences. Beyond the literary form and narrative, there are at least two peculiarities, namely, radical temporality and perpetual incompleteness.

The first one was already mentioned. While all *Bildungsromane* accentuate the temporal character of formation, *BT* takes this notion to an extreme. In *Bildungsromane*, time is usually linear, representing a succession of events that lead to a more developed stage, which resembles the vulgar conception of time as a sequence of nows. Educational trajectories reinforce this impression by conferring titles that ostensibly certify an irreversible state of knowledge. If we can speak of a formative process toward singularization, we must conceive of it as an ongoing effort that must be reaffirmed continually, as existence is originary temporality. Taking temporality seriously means understanding that authenticity is not a permanent achievement but a constant task.

The second particularity derives from the first. In his reading of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, Heidegger emphasizes the fourth level of the narrative—the return to the cave—as Plato's reminder that the conquest of truth, the unconcealment of beings, and therefore freedom are never definitive. The three elements of mythos—*peripeteia*, *anagnorisis*, *pathos*—are not overcome but must be constantly repeated [*Wiederholung*]. Anxiety must return, recognition must be renewed, and the confrontation with death must be sustained. Every moment of resolute authenticity is “provisional” [*vorläufig*] in the sense that it does not eliminate the constant possibility of reverting to inauthenticity.

Conclusion

This study proposes reading *BT* as a philosophical *Bildungsroman*, recognizing its formative narrative structure without reducing phenomenological analysis to literary fiction. I demonstrated that *BT* exhibits a quasi-narrative structure in which the phenomenological description of the temporal entity is not composed of events, but rather of ways of Being. This quasi-narrative unfolds within a three-act dramatic framework that structures Dasein's journey from everyday impersonality (Act I), through the reversal of anxiety (Act II), to authentic resoluteness (Act III). This interpretation reveals an underlying premise: an existential turning is necessary in order to philosophize, and phenomenology is the formative method par excellence.

Grounding in Aristotelian concepts, I argued that it is possible to interpret anxiety as existential *peripeteia* (reversal); transparency [*Durchsichtigkeit*] as *anagnorisis* (recognition of one's own being structures); and being-toward-death as *patbos* (permanent existential "suffering" that conditions authenticity). The distinction between phenomenology and fiction clarifies the formative mechanisms. While fiction presents alternative possible worlds, phenomenology indicates existential structures that are always operative but neglected in everyday understanding. Both withdraw layers of prejudice to reveal essential freedom, but phenomenology demands a conversion from a natural to a phenomenological attitude.

Heidegger's philosophical *Bildungsroman* is distinguished since it sustains radical temporality (authenticity as a constant task rather than a permanent state) and perpetual incompleteness (the continuous repetition of formative moments). These peculiarities connect Heidegger to the German ideal of *Bildung* of reconciliation with factual finitude, while radicalizing it philosophically. This ideal runs from Romantic *Bildungsromane* to existential analytic.

This hermeneutic reading reveals the underlying, unthematized formative dimension of Heidegger's existential analysis. The quasi-narrative structure of *BT*—the composition of ways of being rather than events—illuminates its pattern and development. Although subordinate to the project of fundamental ontology, the analysis of *Dasein* embodies a philosophical ideal that the path to existential improvement through the phenomenological method demands constant self-transformation. *BT* is not merely expository philosophy describing a journey, but a formative narrative enacting the transformation it describes. *Dasein's Bildungsroman* has no final chapter—it is an infinite task of becoming oneself, a perpetual formation that acknowledges incompleteness as essential to authentic existence.

Finally, this reading clarifies that *BT* describes the conditions that readers must fulfill to originally understand [*Verstehen*] philosophy, insofar it does not present objects for the understanding [*Verstand*], but rather *indicates* how they are originally constituted, operating as a formal indication [*formale Anzeige*], guarding against objectification while guiding the reader's transformative enactment of the inquiry⁸.

⁸ I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

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