

Cultivating Selfhood and Resilience: The Feminine Bildungsroman in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

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Abstract

The prose fiction luminary Sefi Atta, in her inaugural literary opus, intricately delineates the intricate tapestry of Nigerian historical development. As an erudite migratory novelist crafting her oeuvre from the Diaspora, Atta exhibits a profound sense of self-awareness, unwavering commitment, and a nuanced responsiveness to the intricacies of her homeland's socio-cultural milieu within her literary compositions. Her literary corpus serves as a compelling canvas upon which the juxtaposition of traditionalism and modernization is meticulously portrayed, illuminating their profound impact on the collective Nigerian psyche, with a particular emphasis on the female demographic. Atta's ingenuity lies in her adoption of the bildungsroman framework, traditionally ascribed to masculine narratives, to fashion her narrative paradigm. She presents readers with a Feminine bildungsroman, featuring a resilient female character navigating post-independence Nigeria's challenges on a path of self-discovery. Thus, this paper explores the journey of self-discovery in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and its departure from the classical bildungsroman's conventions regarding social, political, and cultural themes.

Keywords: self-discovery; bildungsroman; traditional; feminine; contradiction; journey; Post-independence Nigeria.

Introduction:

“From the beginning I believed whatever I was told, downright lies even, about how best to behave, although I had my own inclinations.” (Atta, 2005, p. 1)

Sefi’s *Everything Good Will Come* ends up with a transforming depiction about her protagonist “Enitan”. The female character in the story engaged in a journey of self-discovery and self-realization. The readers’ debut encounter with Enitan (the narrator) was through the abovementioned passage which introduces Enitan from the very beginning as a naive, credulous girl. However, within the events of the story the readers observe a total metamorphosis in Enitan’s character. They notice how Sefi furnishes and arms her heroine with bravery, assertiveness, and awareness at the end of the novel.

The uniqueness about *Everything Good Will Come* is that Sefi Atta offers the readers a story that records all the stages of a growing woman in her homeland and abroad, from childhood until maturity. The story starts from 1971 Nigeria, with a seven-year-old Enitan. Normally, at that age, Enitan is introduced as an innocent, naive, unaware child. During her journey to self-discovery and realization, she encounters many incidents and experiences. She attempts to discover her voice and herself in a patriarchal oppressive society, a country shredded by civil war and military coups, and a divided home. Therefore, the novel is a reflection of Atta’s eagerness to present an independent survivor woman; equipped by formal and informal education she surmounts all the hurdles in her journey. Kehinde and Mbipom assert that:

Enitan comes of age as a self-conscious and assertive woman. Enitan’s process of growth comes with self-realisation which prompts greater response and reaction to the activities which go on around her. These processes motivate her sexuality and individuality. (2011, p.67)

The assertion made by Kehinde and Mbipom encapsulates a pivotal facet of Enitan’s character evolution, delineating her transformative journey into a self-aware and assertive woman. The authors underscore the nuanced interplay between Enitan’s maturation and her burgeoning self-realization, positing that this internal awakening serves as a catalyst for heightened engagement and discerning responsiveness to the ambient dynamics. Particularly noteworthy is the delineation of Enitan’s evolving

Cultivating Selfhood and Resilience: the Feminine Bildungsroman in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

sexuality and burgeoning individuality as consequential by-products of these transformative processes.

This analysis underscores the interconnectedness of self-realization, personal growth, and the heightened responsiveness that defines Enitan's coming-of-age narrative. It also alludes to the intricate ways in which individual agency, particularly in the realms of sexuality and identity, becomes manifest and integral within the broader tapestry of Enitan's character development. The critics, through this insight, shed light on the intricate psychological landscape of their protagonist, positioning her self-consciousness and assertiveness as integral components in navigating and responding to the socio-cultural milieu in which she is situated.

Similarly, *Times Literary Supplement*, U.K, declares that *Everything Good Will Come* is "A beautifully placed stroll in the shoes of a woman growing up in a country struggling to find its post-independence identity. It depicts the struggles women face in a conservative society. This is convincing, more remarkable is what the need to speak out when all around is falling apart" (Copnall, 2005). Another interesting feature in *Everything Good Will Come* is the generic choice Atta adopts in writing her novel. Atta uses the Bildungsroman narrative technique, a narrative of growth or the coming of age novel, in which the protagonist engages in a process of physical and psychological growth. Atta belongs to the third generation¹ Nigerian writers who have colonized and revived classical narrative techniques to write back to the single stories about their land and their history. Ogaga Okuyade (2012) in his article "Negotiating Growth: the Self and Nation in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*" describes that "these third generation Nigerian writers have exhumed a buried humanist legacy from the rubbles of Hitler's post-World War Germany, labeled the Bildungsroman" (p. 32).

This opt for such literary technique traces the shift towards a new genre in crafting the Nigerian novel. It appears that:

This shift is not total as it were, but marks the beginning of a new epoch. However, this curvature does not denote that the new writers have signaled a complete distinction from the oeuvre of the succeeding generations – making them new wine in antiquated (Okuyade, 2010, p. 2)

The above quote discerningly elucidates the adoption of a specific literary technique, the *bildungsroman*, as a catalyst for a discernible shift in the trajectory of the Nigerian novel. The deliberate choice of the term “shift” underscores the conscious selection made by writers, implying a strategic departure from conventional narrative frameworks in favor of a more nuanced and introspective form.

The identification of the *bildungsroman* as the chosen literary technique emphasizes not only a departure from established norms but also an inclination towards a narrative structure that intricately navigates the developmental journey of the protagonist. This choice implies a narrative sophistication, suggesting an exploration of character evolution, self-realization, and societal navigation within the context of the Nigerian novel.

The assertion that this shift is “not total” introduces a nuanced perspective, acknowledging a continuity with existing literary traditions while simultaneously marking the inception of a transformative era. The characterization of this transition as the “beginning of a new epoch” places the observed changes within a broader historical context, suggesting a paradigmatic shift with enduring implications for the evolution of Nigerian literature.

The metaphorical use of “curvature” poignantly conveys a gradual deviation from established literary norms, emphasizing a deliberate departure that is nevertheless part of a continuous trajectory. The metaphor “new wine in antiquated” artfully encapsulates the relationship between innovation and tradition, portraying emerging writers as contributors to a contemporary literary vintage within the context of an esteemed yet possibly outdated literary tradition.

Therefore, the inclusion of Okuyade’s reference in 2010 imparts a scholarly foundation to the analysis, grounding the assertion in academic discourse and indicating a broader theoretical framework. Consequently, the quote invites scholarly inquiry into the intricate dynamics between literary innovation and tradition within the Nigerian novel, contributing to a more profound understanding of the evolving nature of literary forms in distinct epochs.

Moreover, the opt for such a literary technique not only paved the way to a new trend but also makes the novel more vivid and realistic. Charles Nnolim assures that “the Nigerian novel is dynamic rather than static and blends the new with the old ...” (2006, p.53). This is because third generation² Nigerian, particularly female writers, as the paper’s

Cultivating Selfhood and Resilience: the Feminine Bildungsroman in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

target Sefi Atta did not just use this technique to write back to colonial discourse or patriarchal discourse. Instead, they transcend a mere recourse to literary convention within the overarching backdrop of a post-colonial milieu characterized by both historical legacies and contemporaneous challenges obstructing the trajectory toward genuine prosperity and untrammelled independence. Conversely, these writers engage in a process of post-colonization, wherein they intricately redefine the traditional parameters of the genre, thereby imbuing it with a distinctively Nigerian essence. Central to this innovative reconfiguration is a purposeful reckoning with the intricacies of home experiences and the pressing concerns of identity formation (Okuyade, 2011, p. 154).

In opting for the bildungsroman, these writers undertake a literary venture that extends beyond a mere narrative choice; it constitutes a deliberate act of post-colonial reclamation. Rather than merely adopting a conventional form to articulate responses to colonial legacies and contemporary challenges, they actively mold and reshape the genre to accommodate the intricacies of their domestic experiences. This transformative process is underscored by a concerted effort to address the pivotal question of identity formation, a theme deeply entwined with the socio-cultural fabric of Nigeria.

The notion of 'post-colonizing the traditional form' implies a purposeful departure from the colonial influence on literary structures, positioning these writers as agents of cultural reclamation and asserting their agency in shaping narratives reflective of their unique socio-historical context. The act of post-colonization here is not merely reactive but proactive, signifying a conscious effort to dismantle colonial impositions and construct an authentically Nigerian narrative framework.

In essence, the bildungsroman, as wielded by these writers, becomes a vehicle not only for personal growth and societal critique but also for the purposeful reclamation and redefinition of literary forms within the post-colonial Nigerian literary landscape. In this regard, the Nigerian author Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1980) regards the use of this style as an advantageous choice since it educates both the readers and the protagonist. According to her, narrating the story of another's education is a means of education (p. 15). Interestingly, *Everything Good Will Come* is a Bildungsroman narrative of Enitan's trip on the way to her identity formation. It is also a depiction of the realities of post-colonial Nigeria through the eyes of both a female child and a woman.

1. On the Masculine nature of the Bildungsroman Genre

The word Bildungsroman consists of two German words, the word “Bildung” which denotes formation and the word “Roman” which means novel. The word bildungsroman is a narrative technique and a genre of the novel in which the central character gets on a journey of self-discovery. The protagonist improves him/herself from the different stages and experiences of life he/she engages in. The origins of the term as various critics have argued is obscure, however, the first popular use of this term was by Wilhelm Dilthey in *Poetry and Experience* (1906) in which he traces that the bildungsroman is merely a German achievement resulted from current political circumstances and an antipode of the French and English novels of social realism (Boes, 2006, p. 647). Though Wilhelm Dilthey popularized the term as Boes indicated, the honor of invention goes to Karl Morgenstern who used the term publicly in 1819 in a lecture entitled “On the Nature of the Bildungsroman” (2006, p.647). In this lecture Morgenstern explained the characteristics of the term, he defined:

We may call a novel a *Bildungsroman* first and foremost on account of its content, because it represents the development of the hero in its beginning and progress to a certain stage of completion, but also, second, because this depiction promotes the development of the reader to a greater extent than any other kind of novel. The objective and work encompassing goal of any poet who produces such a novel will be the pleasurable, beautiful, and entertaining depiction of the formative history of a protagonist who is especially suited to such a development [...]. (1819, p.654-655)

The quote posits that a novel qualifies as a bildungsroman primarily based on its content, delineating the developmental arc of the protagonist. The inclusion of reader development as a distinguishing factor is emphasized, suggesting a unique pedagogical role for Bildungsroman within the literary landscape. From an academic perspective, this aligns with established criteria for the bildungsroman genre, emphasizing the central theme of character maturation. The assertion that a bildungsroman contributes more significantly to reader development than other novel types introduces an evaluative dimension. However, the subjective terms such as “pleasurable,” “beautiful,” and “entertaining” in the depiction of the protagonist’s formative history warrant further examination. The terminology introduces an element of aesthetic subjectivity, inviting

Cultivating Selfhood and Resilience: the Feminine Bildungsroman in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

considerations of diverse reader responses. The reference to development restricted to a “certain stage of completion” prompts an inquiry into potential narrative constraints within bildungsroman. This limitation implies a deliberate framing of the protagonist’s journey, suggesting that the genre may prioritize specific phases of growth over others. An academic exploration could further scrutinize the implications of this selective developmental focus. In conclusion, the quote provides a foundation for academic discussion by delineating criteria for the bildungsroman genre. However, the evaluative claims and subjective elements introduce avenues for critical examination, encouraging a nuanced exploration of the genre’s impact on both characters and readers.

Mostly, it is argued that *The History of Agathon* 1766-1767 written by Christoph Martin Wieland is the first known example that represents this subgenre. It is *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* written by Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe in 1775 that awarded the genre with fame and celebrity (Okuyade, 2010, p. 7). As Boes proposes, the English criticism witnessed popularity of the term from the literary work of Jerome Hamilton Buckley’s *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* in 1974. The history and origins of the term Bildungsroman is an area of research and study in itself. However, the present study does not focus on the history of the term, but rather emphasizes the ‘masculine nature’³ of the genre. This masculine emphasis aligns with historical and societal contexts where male experiences and perspectives were often dominant in literature. From an academic standpoint, scholars have examined how the bildungsroman’s masculine nature reflects broader cultural norms and expectations. This gendered lens allows for an exploration of societal ideals and norms, particularly in terms of masculinity, as portrayed through the protagonist’s development. The masculine Bildungsroman often delves into themes such as autonomy, identity formation, and the negotiation of societal expectations, providing a lens into the construction of male subjectivity. However, a critical perspective challenges the notion that the Bildungsroman is inherently masculine, urging an examination of the evolving landscape of literature. Critics argue that this categorization may overlook or marginalize Bildungsroman featuring female protagonists, where the journey of self-discovery is equally central. The critique extends to questioning whether the perceived masculine nature of the Bildungsroman perpetuates gender stereotypes or restricts the narrative possibilities for diverse experiences.

This masculine nature is emanated from the definitions given by some scholars. Jerome Buckley, in his systematic work *Season of Youth* 1974, has elucidated the trait and structure of the typical Bildungsroman. He explicates:

A child of some sensibility grows up in a country or provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy, antagonistic to his ambitions, and quite impervious to new ideas he has gained from unprescribed reading. His first schooling, even if not totally inadequate, may be frustrating in so far as it may suggest options not available to him in his present setting. He therefore, sometimes at quite an early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home,(and also the relative innocence), to make his way independently to the city (in English novels, usually London). There his real “education” begins, not only his preparation for a career but also...and often more importantly...his direct experience of urban life. The latter involves at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values. By the time he has decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. His initiation complete, he may visit his old home, to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success or the wisdom of his choice. (p. 17-18)

According to Buckley’s structural definition of the genre, the protagonist’s process of growth occurs “according to pattern” (Okuyade,2010, p. 7). The protagonist leaves the constraints in home, challenges the stages and struggles of his psychological and emotional growth, his journey marked by plights and love affairs, the final station characterizes his achievement in finding a place to use his ingenious talents. For Mikhail Bakhtin (1986), the Bildungsroman offers the readers “the image of man in the process of becoming” (p. 19). He argues that the protagonist “[The hero] emerges along with the world and he reflects the historical emergences of the world itself” (p. 23).

Cultivating Selfhood and Resilience: the Feminine Bildungsroman in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

Homi Bhabha (1994) further indicates that the protagonist in the Bildungsroman becomes prepared to “the art of the present” (p. 1). On the other hand, Susan Rosowski (1983) declares that in the traditional Bildungsroman the protagonist’s process of growth enables him to learn “the art of living” (p. 49). Furthermore, in *The Way of The World*, Franco Moretti (1987) assures that the distinguishing features of the coming of age novel or novel of formation is evident in the protagonist’s growth essentially in his youth (p. 9). Another interesting definition is introduced by Maria Karafilis who associates the Bildungsroman with the growth process of a male character and his establishment of a better relation with his environment after a journey of acculturation (1998, p. 63). Nadal M. Al-Mousa also defines the genre as a development of a male who “grows up in a humble family in the provinces, but endowed with an adventurous spirit, leaves home to seek his fortune and realize his ambitions” (1993, p. 223).

Interestingly, the critics’ anatomical definitions of the genre associate the traditional Bildungsroman with masculine identity since most of the definitions privilege male protagonist (Okuyade, 2010, p. 8). This is disclosed through the use of the personal pronoun “He”. However, it is by the anthology *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* by Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland that the existing canon witnessed critics on its gendered agenda. Their introduction demonstrates their dissent toward Buckley’s definition of the bildungsroman, which denies female experiences from the genre (Okuyade, 2010, p. 8). Similarly, the essays of Hirsch and Rosowski contributed in reconstructing both the genre and its themes. Consequently, the bildungsroman was reborn and reshaped by feministic notions. The genre, as many critics asserted, enables female writers an opportunity to embrace the female experience of forming an independent identity.

African female writers in general may gravitate towards the classical bildungsroman for its nuanced exploration of individual development and autonomy, particularly relevant in navigating intricate gender roles and societal expectations. This genre provides a structured framework to address the complexities of cultural identity, challenging established norms within the African context. By situating female protagonists at the forefront, writers can actively contribute to increased representation and visibility of women’s experiences, offering a platform to critique historical underrepresentation. The bildungsroman’s universal

themes of self-discovery and growth facilitate a global resonance, allowing these writers such as Sefi Atta to convey culturally specific narratives with a broad, cross-cultural appeal. Furthermore, the educational component inherent in the bildungsroman aligns with messages of resilience and self-empowerment, making it a powerful vehicle for conveying empowering narratives. By choosing this genre, African female writers engage with and innovate upon a well-established literary tradition, contributing both to its continuation and its expansion through diverse perspectives.

2. The Shifting Landscape of the African Feminine Bildungsroman

The genre bildungsroman did not gain favorable recognition in African literary outputs. It is consented that Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* is the early representation of a bildungsroman in English by an African white settler (Fennell, 2016, p. 57). The genre was broadened in the African literature by the post-colonial era in which the keen interest of writing is to revamp the African identity that was distorted by colonialism. Typically, third generation Nigerian writers more precisely female writers, adopt this genre in order to handle the tension of forming a post-colonial identity that marked the shift toward a new trend. Writers like Sefi Atta, Chimamanda Achebe, and other names find the bildungsroman genre an ample space to interact with social, political, and economical issues. It affords them the opportunity to lighten the failure of building the nation and to expose the hindrances of redefining a female African identity.

Sefi Atta with her first novel *Everything Good Will Come*, which is considered as a paradigm of the bildungsroman, does not just post-colonize the genre, she both Africanize and feminize it in order to account for the Nigerian experience. The novel depicts the zeal of Sefi Atta to compete with male authored texts and the colonizer discourse. Sefi Atta adds to the literary canon a story of a Nigerian woman and her struggles in forming her identity in a patriarchal society. The novelist's adoption of this western genre is an attempt to write back and oppose western ideals and patriarchal beliefs. This alternative choice exhibits what Frantz Fanon has called the envy of the decolonized people to possess the colonizers' properties. For Sefi, it is an envy to represent and embrace the African story.

Successfully, Sefi Atta presented a typical Feminine bildungsroman. She offers hints toward Nigeria socio-cultural

Cultivating Selfhood and Resilience: the Feminine Bildungsroman in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

atmosphere. The story starts with an ignorant, naïve girl Enitan, and closes up with a powerful, assertive, and audacious woman. Kehinde and Mbipom assert that “Enitan’s perspective- is a bildungsroman, which reveals an unbroken growth pattern till Enitan comes of age as a self-conscious and assertive woman” (2011, p. 67).

Unlike the conventional Bildungsroman, the protagonist in *Everything Good Will Come* is a female. According to Susan Fraiman (1993), the protagonist in the feminine coming of age novel or the female growth is “negotiated not as a single path to a clear destination but as an endless negotiation of a crossroads” (p. x). Therefore, the heroine’s path to redefine her identity could be achieved neither in a linear nor in a teleological manner (p. 3). *Everything Good Will Come* is a first person narrative, which is also called autobiographical narrative, where the heroine, Enitan, narrates her own story of growth and realization from childhood to adulthood. This is recognized by the use of the pronoun “I”, Enitan says: “People say I was hot-headed in my twenties. I don’t ever remember being hotheaded. I only ever remember calling out to my voice” (Atta, 2005, p.179).

Sefi’s use of this technique is an endeavor to grant women an ample space to criticize what is going on in the Nigerian landscape. Ebele Eko opines that third generation Nigerian novelist describe the “world around them, the events of their growing-up years” (2006, p. 45). While this technique is viewed as subjective choice, Sefi shows that it is high time for women to voice out their concerns. For Atta, the inclusion of women’s voices is imperative in the process of reconstructing the nation. However, the inherent challenge within this imperative aligns with Gayatri Spivak’s conceptual framework expounded in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Particularly in the context of African nations, it becomes evident that not all women possess the agency to express themselves freely. Consequently, the narrative crafted by Atta can be perceived as a paradigm, offering a potential model for Nigerian women to emancipate themselves from the entrenched constraints of their patriarchal societal inheritance. In the novel Enitan declares that she would fight until she is heard:

I wanted to tell everyone, “I! Am! Not! Satisfied with these options!” I was ready to tear every notion they had about women, like one of those little dogs with trousers in their teeth. They would not let go until there was

nothing but shreds, and I would not let go until I was heard. (Atta, 2005, p. 191)

Enitan's words voices the need of women to fight for themselves. This quote encapsulates a visceral and assertive expression of dissatisfaction, where Enitan's desire for agency and acknowledgment is vividly conveyed. The repetition of exclamations signals a profound frustration and a determination to disrupt existing norms or options. The metaphor of tearing down notions about women, akin to a dog with trousers in its teeth, paints a vivid image of the heroine's intent to dismantle preconceived ideas and expectations. The comparison also suggests a tenacious resolve, as Enitan envisions persisting until these notions are reduced to mere fragments. The juxtaposition of the protagonist refusal to release their grip with the imagined destruction of societal expectations underscores a quest for visibility and a refusal to be silenced. This quote captures a moment of rebellion and a commitment to being heard, revealing a poignant struggle for autonomy and recognition within the larger social fabric.

Atta's novel aptly marks the difference between the features of the classical bildungsroman and the feminine one. In traditional Bildungsroman the male protagonist leaves his home willingly to "slay the dragon" (Okuyade, 2010, p. 23). However, in feminine bildungsroman the heroine's departure from home is initiated by her family. In this sense, Felski (1989) argues that "the female on a journey of self-discovery seeks surroundings that aren't a threat to her" (p. 135). Similarly, Enitan's travel to London was her parents' decision who believed that her friendship with Sheri threatened her future particularly after Sheri got raped and committed abortion.

Another contrast is that in the conventional genre the male hero does not show any intention to return back home, unlike the heroine of the feminine bildungsroman who never denies her desire to return back home. Enitan in the story did not want to return back as she said "I never wanted to go back" (Atta, 2005, p. 73). However, in a one moment driven by her nostalgia, she has recognized, despite the fact of a country plagued by chaos and a separate parents, that it is in the country where the person could feel the warmth. She declares that "I was thinking that if I returned home, at least, at least I would be warm" (Atta, 2005, p.73). The concept of 'home is no longer home' has not been addressed in the novel. Instead, Sefi adeptly illustrates the deliberate and introspective awakening of the female protagonist as she embarks on a journey back to her roots,

Cultivating Selfhood and Resilience: the Feminine Bildungsroman in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

engaging earnestly in the multifaceted endeavor of nation-building. The author's deliberate choice to orchestrate the heroine's return to her homeland serves as a poignant manifestation of the writer's fervent desire and profound awakening, signaling an active involvement in the intricate tapestry of nation-building processes. This narrative decision vehemently rebuts any assertion suggesting that writers of the third generation or contemporary milieu are indifferent to domestic concerns, dismissing the notion that they uncritically adopt Western ideals or find solace in their expatriate status. Instead, it underscores a conscientious commitment to grappling with and contributing meaningfully to the societal and cultural dynamics within their native context.

3. Exploring Personal Growth: Bildungsroman Structure in the Novel

The novel is divided into four phases ranging between the years 1971, 1975, 1985, 1995. Each period chronicles the protagonist's experiences and process of growth. From the plot structure and analysis of the novel three parts structures are depicted: the set-up, experience and change, and finally maturity.

3.1 The Set-Up

In the first phase 'the set-up' Enitan is introduced as an unknowledgeable child who accepts whatever she was told. One major accident in this phase is her meeting with Sheri who has influenced her life later. Though the critics argued that Sefi's heroine is naïve from the very beginning, Enitan owns from a young age a sense of intelligence and awareness, this is proved through her saying "I had my own inclinations" (Atta, 2005, p. 8). She also was aware of the issues occurring between her parents. Enitan in describing how she handles the fighting of her parents says that, "Walls could not save me from the shouting. A pillow, if I stuffed my head under it, could not save me. My hands could not, if I clamped them over my ears and stuffed my head under a pillow" (Atta, 2005, p. 8).

3.2 Experience and change

In the second stage 'experience and change', Enitan witnesses the culmination of self-discovery from the formal and informal education she has received. In addition to the complicated experiences she has faced. One indicative example of Enitan's change is through Sheri's ordeal when she learns about truculence of the other sex. Consequently by this incident

the heroine gets “some assurance that our world was uniformly terrible” (Atta, 2005, p.66). The secondary school “Royal College” marks a turning point in Enitan’s growth. It changes her perspectives and allows her to come across the diversity among the Nigerians. Her meeting with girls from different cultural backgrounds assures to her that this was the leading cause that hinders the way for the Nigerians to build their nation. The writer condemns the British colonialism in neglecting the differences and ethnicities among the Nigerian people. Enitan says that “Uncle Alex had always said our country was not meant to be one. The British had drawn a circle on the map of West Africa and called it a country. Now I understood what he meant. The girls I met at Royal College were so different” (43).

In recounting another notable experience, Enitan’s journey to London stands out as a significant chapter in her life. A prominent challenge that confronted her upon arrival was the imperative need for conformity to the societal norms of her new environment. This necessitated an adaptation and assimilation process, which was not devoid of its own unique set of difficulties and trials. Enitan’s initial experience as a settler in London afforded Sefi a valuable opportunity to shed light on the pervasive issue of racism faced by Nigerian emigrants in the context of color discrimination. Through Enitan’s narrative, the narrative voice was able to illustrate the resilience and perseverance of Nigerian emigrants who are subjected to racial prejudice based on the color of their skin. This depiction adds a profound layer of social commentary, offering a poignant reflection on the enduring challenges faced by individuals who seek a better life beyond their home country.

3.3 Maturity

The final station ‘maturity’ demonstrates how the protagonist becomes fully mature and social activist. She finds a way to survive despite the patriarchal practices that relegated women to the dark corner. She opposed the patriarchal notion that regards the kitchen as the only place when women frequently found. She participates in the release of her father. Consequently, she was arrested but she never stops her battle to be recognized in her society. She also fought for her mother to make her father transform the estate to her mother. Enitan in this station recognizes the need to fight for herself, her family, and her nation when things fall apart. Her last dance at the end of the novel symbolizes her victory in her mission in forming her identity. It is a dance of freedom and liberation

Cultivating Selfhood and Resilience: the Feminine Bildungsroman in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

from the shackles of life. By the end, she becomes resolute and powerful to save her happiness and joy, as she concludes her story stating, “Nothing could take my joy away from me. The sun sent her blessings” (Atta, 2005, p.323 324).

Conclusion

Sefi Atta's “Everything Good Will Come” is a quintessential example of a feminine Bildungsroman narrative. It masterfully adapts the conventions of this classical genre to portray the arduous journey of individuation and the complex negotiations of feminine subjectivity. Within the narrative, the theme of identity becomes intricately intertwined with feminist perspectives, illuminating the multifaceted struggles and triumphs of the female protagonist. The novel's deliberate use of chronological order serves as a pivotal narrative device, serving to vividly showcase the protagonist's profound metamorphosis, a transformation borne from her lived experiences. Sefi Atta skillfully underscores that the process of personal growth and self-discovery is inextricably linked to one's geographical location and gender. Through this lens, the narrative emphasizes the distinctive nature of the human experience, demonstrating that it is profoundly influenced by these contextual factors. However, *Everything Good Will Come* is far from a tale of despair or resignation. It radiates an underlying optimism, asserting that women possess the resilience and inner strength to not only endure but also transcend the formidable constraints imposed upon them. It envisions a brighter future not only for women but also for men and society as a whole, suggesting that through the protagonist's journey, there is hope for a more equitable and harmonious future where all members of society can thrive.

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Cultivating Selfhood and Resilience: the Feminine Bildungsroman in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

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Notes:

¹The categorization of Nigerian writers into three generations in literature, typically referred to as “first”, “second”, and “third” generations, offers a framework for understanding the evolution of Nigerian literature. It aligns with historical periods, reflecting distinct socio-political and cultural contexts in Nigeria. The “first generation” includes pioneers who wrote during the colonial era, the “second generation” emerged post-independence, and the “third generation” writers respond to contemporary issues. This classification offers also a thematic framework. It allows for the exploration of evolving socio-political contexts, shifts in literary styles, and responses to changing cultural dynamics. It identifies key figures, aiding focused study and educational structuring, while also encouraging inter-generational dialogues. For critics, this framework provides a roadmap, facilitating a nuanced understanding of Nigeria's rich

literary tapestry and the diverse voices that have emerged and used the power of the pen across different historical periods.

²The third generation of Nigerian writers demonstrates a deliberate departure from antecedent literary traditions, notably through the adept appropriation of classical techniques such as the Bildungsroman. By infusing indigenous elements into this narrative form, writers engage in a form of “writing back,” reclaiming agency over their discourse. The Bildungsroman becomes a narrative prism, effectively encapsulating the dynamic interplay between individual growth and broader socio-political dynamics. This strategic employment of classical techniques enables a nuanced exploration of post-colonial identity, socio-economic disparities, political corruption, and the tension between tradition and modernity within the Nigerian context.

³The identification of the Bildungsroman with a masculine nature has been a subject of academic discourse. Traditionally, many Bildungsromane have featured male protagonists undergoing journeys of self-discovery, moral growth, and social integration.