

## THE COMING OF AGE NOVEL IN UKRAINIAN TRANSLATION: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

ARTUR GUDMANIAN\*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4196-2279>

NATIONAL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF UKRAINE

“IGOR SIKORSKY POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE”

ANDRIANA IVANOVA\*\*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1733-4416>

UZHGOROD NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

**Abstract:** The present paper makes an attempt to analyse the genre of the coming of age novel in the light of modern translation studies. The research is based on the Ukrainian translation of the coming of age novel *The Queen's Gambit* by Walter Tevis. The dominant genre peculiarities such as the issue of upbringing, symbolism realized in the depiction of chess game and the author's peculiarities of character portrayal have been analyzed. Contextual substitution, transposition, concretization, omission, addition, antonymic translation are considered to be the dominant translation transformations used by the translator to convey the genre specificity of the coming of age novel.

**Keywords:** coming of age novel; translation transformations; upbringing; characters' portrayal; genre specificity in translation

### 1. Introduction

The genre of coming of age novel is extremely popular nowadays due to its focus on personal growth, transformation, and the development of characters. Coming of age novels highlight the challenges, triumphs, and lessons learned during the transition from youth to adulthood. The relevance of the topic lies within the fact that coming of age novels are a significant genre in literature, depicting the growth, maturation, and self-discovery of a protagonist. Analyzing the genre's specific elements within the context of translation offers insights into how these narratives are transformed or preserved across languages. The aim of the study is to identify and analyze the specificity of coming of age novel in translation. The material for this study is the

---

\* artgud13@gmail.com

\*\* andriana.ivanova@uzhnu.edu.ua



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

Received: 13.11.2024

Revised: 10.12.2024

Accepted: 20.12.2024

© The Author(s) 2024

English-language novel by W. Tevis *The Queen's Gambit* and its translation into Ukrainian by Ella Yevtushenko.

## 2. Theoretical Background

The coming of age novel as a theoretical, historical, and literary phenomenon is still of interest to many researchers of both domestic and foreign literary studies, including philosophers. There is a considerable amount of research devoted to the origin and evolution of this genre in various literatures, its specificity as a novel that developed during different epochs, starting with the Enlightenment and up to the present day, the structure of this genre, and its philosophical and artistic nature. Researchers express some doubts about the clarity of the genre, whether a particular novel belongs to coming of age novel, since the criteria are blurred and almost every novel contains some elements of this genre.

It is well known that the genre of coming of age novel emerged in German literature in the second half of the eighteenth century during the Enlightenment, spreading in the first half of the nineteenth century due to the change in the role of an individual in society, the emergence of the Enlightenment's belief in the need to improve human natural qualities through education, experience, and self-education. The bourgeoisie's backwardness and weakness contributed to the representation of issues of education, the meaning of life, and the purpose of the individual in fiction.

The term 'bildungsroman,' from which the coming of age novel then derived, was first used in 1774 by F. Blankenburg, who defined it as a type of novel dominated by education and character development (Zarva 2014: 7). Over time, Blankenburg's term gained recognition. The concept of the bildungsroman was introduced into literary criticism by the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, who was the first to recognise it as a historical genre, which found its best embodiment in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*.

Among the scholars who have studied the peculiarities of the genre characteristic of coming of age novel are Svitlana Prytoliuk, Oleksandr Sydorenko and Victoria Zarva.

According to Prytoliuk, coming of age novel is a specific genre form that, on the one hand, demonstrates a certain constancy of structure in the process of historical development, which is fixed by a number of invariant features (such as the presence of the history of the individual's formation, evolution of his or her character in confrontation with the environment, localisation of the conflict around the protagonist who plays the role of a 'student,' the obligatory presence of 'mentors,' who consciously or unconsciously guide the process of spiritual and physical maturity of the character.) On the other hand, it reveals the flexibility of the genre model, which is expressed in a number of variations that we observe in the so-called modified examples of the genre. Prytoliuk points out that the nature of these changes indicates the dominance of two main trends: the desire to preserve the traditional structure of the genre and an attempt to reconcile the structure of the novel with the changed concept of the protagonist (Prytoliuk 2004: 103)

By the type of plot, which is a defining element of any prose form, the coming of age novel is a novel, centered around a single protagonist who is formed and brought up under the influence of various factors (education, home and close people around him or her). Other characters perform a constructive or destructive function in his formation, helping with good guidance, understanding, or placing obstacles in the protagonist's way, while becoming his opponents or even enemies, which forces him or her to move forward, to look for other ways out of difficult situations.

In the composition of the coming of age novel, an important role is played by descriptions (of portrait, interior, places, landscapes, description of clothes, things, food, space, etc), which perform not only a specific reflective function, but are signs or symbols of certain attitudes, values and lifestyle.

The plot and compositional structure of the coming of age novel uses the method of introspective depiction of events, while also allowing for retrospection, the principle of monocentric composition, etc. Scholars call the essential characteristic of this genre biographical time, which is fully corresponding to the real time, but not always correlated with historical milestones, the generations serve as a dividing line in it, and it prevails over historical time (Zarva 2014: 9).

Typically, the coming of age novel is the story of a mature person who evaluates his or her past from the point of view of a person who is aware of the consequences of his or her own behaviour. Therefore, as S. Prytoliuk notes, such a distanced reflection on one's own history in terms of life experience is due to the shift of time layers (Prytoliuk 2004), which focuses even more attention on the moment of the character's development and upbringing.

Writers turn to the means of fully concentrating the action around the protagonist, and show the lessons of life he or she has learnt. Along with external events in the main character's life, there are more important internal factors of biography, represented by spiritual changes and an emphasis on the educational complex, where a significant role belongs to the obligatory characters - teachers, mentors who guide the educational process through knowledge and prevent possible mistakes of their students. The protagonist's inner development is revealed in his or her encounters with the external world and various trials in which he or she tries to achieve their goal and self-improve. The character's search for truth, justice, and the ideal significantly contributes to their spiritual growth.

In the process of forming the protagonist's worldview, it is evident that his views and ideas clash with those that prevail and are cultivated in this society. Such confrontations are quite understandable and natural, since with the change of socio-cultural conditions comes a change of generations, which leads to certain intellectual discussions and reflections on this issue. The coming of age novel is full of the characters' reflections on existential issues, which ultimately shape their attitude towards themselves, people around them, and their understanding of the world in general.

The main idea of the coming of age novel is the growth and formation of a dynamic personality. The dynamism of the protagonist's development lies in the constant search and desire of a character to self-realise in the rapidly changing conditions of life. A character's personality is not a static category, it is constantly changing under the influence of various psychological, socio-cultural, and political factors.

In the coming of age novel, the role of the young protagonist's mentor is also very important, as the mentor usually guides the character in the right direction. Such person is often either a teacher at the educational institution where the character is studying, or an older person whose worldview appeals to the hero at certain stage of life.

Overall, the system of features that characterise the specificity of the coming of age novel include: the inner development of the protagonist, which is revealed in clashes with the outside world; life lessons learned by the protagonist as a result of evolution, depiction of the protagonist's character development from childhood to physical and spiritual maturity, active activity of the central character aimed at establishing harmony and justice, the pursuit of an ideal that harmoniously combines physical and spiritual perfection as well as the protagonist's shift from extreme individualism to society.

One of the central elements of the coming of age novel is the portrayal of the protagonist's personal growth and evolution. Translating this aspect demands careful attention to the character's changing thoughts, emotions, and perspectives throughout various life experiences. Translators face the challenge of capturing the nuances and subtleties of this transformation. They must carefully select linguistic registers, narrative techniques, and lexico-stylistic choices that effectively convey the character's emotional and psychological states. The translated work must resonate with readers, providing an authentic portrayal similar to that of the original text. The narrative perspective, such as first-person or third-person narration, also has a significant role in this genre of novel, shaping the readers' connection with the protagonist. Therefore, it is important for translator to consider how to retain the intended voice and perspective in the target language, as it influences the readers' immersion in the protagonist's personal journey.

Symbolism plays a vital role in the coming of age novel, serving as a vehicle to represent abstract ideas, inner conflicts, and the protagonist's evolution. These symbols, whether objects, settings, or recurring motifs, require careful translation to resonate with readers in the target language. However, the challenge lies in finding suitable equivalents or alternatives that capture the symbolic essence while considering cultural context. Translators must navigate the potential loss or alteration of cultural significance, ensuring the intended meaning is effectively conveyed.

Coming of age novel may use different linguistic and stylistic devices to reflect the development of the protagonist or the narrative structure. Translators should capture the author's use of language, including dialects, slang, or puns, and find appropriate equivalents in the target language without altering the intended effect and tone.

The genre of coming of age novel is often deeply rooted in a particular cultural and historical context, and the protagonist's personal development is closely linked to his or her social environment. Thus, the translator faces the challenge of conveying these cultural nuances and historical references in a way that readers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds can understand and appreciate the context. Coming of age novels often contain idiomatic expressions and cultural references that may be specific to the source language. Translating these expressions while preserving their meaning and cultural significance poses a challenge, as direct translation may result in loss of impact or comprehension for readers in the target language.

Coming of age novels often follow a specific narrative structure (Millard, 2007: 24), with episodic events or milestones marking the protagonist's development. Translators need to maintain the coherence and pacing of the narrative while accounting for potential differences in linguistic structures and storytelling conventions in the target language.

Coming of age novel may address sensitive themes such as identity, trauma, or social issues, which can vary in cultural significance and reception. Translators must navigate these themes with cultural sensitivity, ensuring that the target audience can engage with and understand the narrative while respecting the author's intentions and societal norms.

Authors often employ symbolism that operates on multiple levels, creating layers of ambiguity. Translating this complexity presents a significant challenge, as each language may lack direct equivalents for nuanced symbolic associations. Therefore, translators face the challenge of preserving these elements while ensuring clarity in the target language. Striking a balance between staying faithful to the author's original intent and making the text accessible to readers can be demanding.

To ensure effective conveyance in the target language, translator should be able to identify and understand the intertextual references present in the novel, which often refer to other literary works, cultural texts, or historical events. If translator is not familiar enough with the referenced material, it can hinder accurate translation and diminish the intended impact on readers.

### 3. Discussion

Walter Tevis employs a distinct and detailed writing style when describing chess games in *The Queen's Gambit*. Tevis uses rich and evocative language to paint a visual picture of the chessboard and the movements of the pieces. He describes the strategic maneuvers, and the intensity of the game in a way that brings the chess games to life.

Tevis delves into the psychological and emotional aspects of the game, providing insight into the mindset of the players. He explores the thought processes, calculations, and the mental battles that take place during the matches, giving readers a deeper understanding of the characters' approaches to chess. Also, Tevis employs symbolism and metaphor to enhance the depiction of the chess games. In *The Queen's Gambit*, chess plays a central role in the life of the protagonist, Beth Harmon. Chess is not only a game to Beth, but a way of life and a means of escape from her troubled upbringing.

The novel's title refers to a chess opening known as the Queen's Gambit. This is a strategic move in which a player sacrifices a pawn to gain control of the center of the board. The Queen's Gambit symbolizes Beth's journey to greater confidence and control through chess. The Queen's Gambit is an opening in chess – a specific sequence of moves that begins the game. In fact, it is the first opening that Beth herself can recognize when she plays with Mr. Shaibel, and she is pleased when she does so. This makes it clear he Queen's Gambit, and chess in general, give Beth a sense of control and accomplishment.

Later, however, the Queen's Gambit reflects Beth's insecurity, which undermines her confidence. When Beth plays Benny Watts for the first time, she feels that she is a

weaker player than him, especially after Benny notes that she made a mistake in her game against Harry Beltik:

*“Beltik could have made the pin, and then his queen knight became a threat. She had to break the pin and then protect against a fork with that damned knight, and after that he had a rook threat and, bingo, there went her pawn. It could have been crucial. But what was worse, she hadn’t seen it.”* (Tevis 2014: 126)

“Белтік міг би зв’язати її фігуру слоном, і тоді його ферзевий кінь ставав небезпечним. Бет довелося б звільнитися від зв’язування, а тоді захищатися від вилки з тим клятим конем, а після того він вивів би туру і — гоп — кінець її пішаку. Це могло б усе змінити. Але, що ще гірше, Бет не побачила цього.” (Tevis 2021: 129)

Here the translator used such transformations as substitution: “make the pin” is translated as “зв’язати її фігуру слоном.” Similarly, “break the pin” is translated as “звільнитися від зв’язування.” Modulation was used in the phrase “his queen knight became a threat.”

The verb tense and aspect are changed in the Ukrainian sentence to convey the ongoing and developing nature of the threat. The expression “and, bingo” is translated as “і — гоп.” This is a substitution of the English expression to a Ukrainian interjection that conveys a similar sense of suddenness or surprise. The phrase “there went her pawn” is translated as “кінець її пішаку.” This is a transposition of the English phrase to a different word order that is more natural in Ukrainian.

In her match, Beth opens with the Queen’s Gambit, but she quickly regrets doing so because it is a complicated position. She does not feel as assured of herself because of Benny’s perception of her as weak. This causes self-doubt, which is in turn a contributing factor to Beth’s loss in the game:

*“The horrible feeling, at the bottom of the anger and fear, was that she was the weaker player — that Benny Watts knew more about chess than she did and could play it better. It was a new feeling for her, and it seemed to bind and restrict her.”* (Tevis 2014: 127)

“Найжахливішим почуттям був не гнів і не страх, а усвідомлення того, що з них двох Бет — слабший гравець, що Бенні Воттс знову звільнив її від зв’язування. Це було нове почуття для неї, і воно неначе зв’язувало і сковувало її.” (Tevis 2021: 131)

The translator used a superlative adjective (найжахливішим) to convey the same intensity as the English phrase “the horrible feeling.” This is an example of concretization, where the translator expands on the original text to convey a similar meaning with greater emphasis or intensity.

Overall, Tevis’ portrayal of chess games in *The Queen’s Gambit* is characterized by vivid imagery, psychological insight, symbolism, and strategic analysis. These elements combine to create an engaging and immersive experience for readers, even if they are not avid chess players themselves. The translator has employed various translation techniques, including equivalent translation, substitution, antonymical

translation, omission, and concretization, to effectively convey the intended meaning and maintain the author's style. The translated passages maintain the narrative flow and emotional impact of the original text while adapting it to the target language.

Tevis delves deep into the inner world of the main character, Beth Harmon, offering readers a profound understanding of her thoughts, feelings, and motivations. He explores the complexity of her psyche and provides insight into her fears, desires, and struggles. This psychological depth adds realism and believability to the main character.

Beth also feels a sense of exclusion and alienation within the chess community:

*“Listening to the two of them, she had felt something unpleasant and familiar: the sense that chess was a thing between men, and she was an outsider. She hated the feeling.”* (Tevis 2014: 125)

“Коли вона слухала тих двох, її охопило знайоме неприємне почуття: наче шахи були чоловічою справою, а вона тут зайва. Бет ненавиділа це почуття.” (Tevis 2021: 128)

The phrase “she was an outsider” is transposed as “вона тут зайва.” The translator has rearranged the word order to convey the meaning in a slightly different way while preserving the overall sense of being excluded. Beth's inner world is often portrayed as a place of solitude. She finds solace and comfort in her own thoughts and in the game of chess:

*“She was alone, and she liked it. It was the way she had learned everything important in her life.”* (Tevis 2014: 136)

“Бет була одна, і їй це подобалося. Саме так вона навчилася всього, що важило в її житті.” (Tevis 2021: 139)

In this example the same structure is maintained in Ukrainian translation. While “important” is an adjective in English, in the Ukrainian translation, it is rendered as a verb “важило.” This transposition might be a stylistic choice by the translator to convey the sense of significance or importance.

Chess becomes an all-consuming obsession for Beth. She is constantly studying, practicing, and seeking opportunities to play. The game provides an escape from the challenges and loneliness she faces in her life, and she becomes completely immersed in its intricacies and possibilities:

*“She felt powerless and silly. But then she looked at the boards again, with the pieces set in the familiar pattern, and the unpleasant feelings lessened. She might be out of place in this public high school, but she was not out of place with those twelve chessboards.”* (Tevis 2014: 39)

“Бет почувалася безсилою й дурненькою. Але тоді знову глянула на шахівниці з розставленими у звичному порядку фігурами, і неприємне відчуття послабшало. Може, тут, у старій школі, вона була не в своїй тарілці, зате поруч із цими дванадцятьма шахівницями була на своєму місці.” (Tevis 221: 44)

Here, the expression “out of place” is replaced with “не в своїй тарілці,” which conveys a similar idea of not belonging.

Beth’s journey is marked by her determination to excel in the game and her internal struggle with addiction. Beth overcomes her addiction through a combination of self-reflection, support from others, and her renewed focus and dedication to chess:

*“Then one morning after a night of dark and confusing dreams she awoke with an unaccustomed clarity: if she did not stop drinking immediately she would ruin what she had. She had allowed herself to sink into this frightening murk. She had to find a foothold somewhere to push herself free of it. She would have to get help.”* (Tevis 2014: 228)

“Тоді одного ранку, після сповненої темних, сумбурних снів ночі, вона прокинулася з незвично ясним усвідомленням: якщо вона не припинить пити просто зараз, то зруйнусе все, чого добилася. Вона дозволила собі вгрознити в цю страхітливу пітьму. Йї треба було знайти точку опертя, щоб виборсатися з неї. Йї знадобиться допомога.” (Tevis 2021: 223)

Here the translator mostly used equivalent translation. The phrase “with an unaccustomed clarity” is translated as “з незвично ясним усвідомленням” in Ukrainian. The translator uses contextual substitution to capture the meaning of the phrase in a different linguistic structure.

To conclude, Beth Harmon’s portrayal in Walter Tevis’ work is characterized by her isolation, resilience, and intellectual prowess. As an orphan navigating a male-dominated world of chess, she experiences a sense of alienation and strives to prove herself. Through Tevis’ depiction, Beth emerges as a complex and relatable character, highlighting the challenges she faces and her relentless pursuit of success and self-discovery.

The translator has done a commendable job in rendering the original text into Ukrainian. The translation exhibits a good understanding of the source material and effectively captures the meaning, tone, and style of the author’s work.

#### 4. Conclusion

To sum up, we have defined that the coming of age novel is a type of novel dominated by education and character development. Its main characteristics include concentration of the action around the protagonist, the method of introspective depiction of events, biographical time, and the depiction of character’s worldview formation and inner evolution. In the course of our research we have analyzed W. Tevis’ novel *The Queen’s Gambit* and defined its main tendencies characteristic of the coming of age novel, namely the topic of upbringing, symbolism realized in the depiction of chess and the author’s peculiarities of character portrayal.

We have identified the most prevalent translation transformations in the reproduction of the coming of age genre specificity of W. Tevis’ novel. Contextual substitution (78%), transposition (11%), and concretization (11%) were among the

translation transformations used by the translator to convey the specificity of depiction of chess in the novel. The translator employed many alterations, including contextual substitution (50%), concretization (20%), omission (10%), addition (10%), and antonymic translation (10%), to convey the idea of upbringing in the novel. The translator resorted to contextual substitution (50%), transposition (38%), and omission (12%) when translating the author's character portrayal.

In all cases, the most dominant translation transformation is contextual substitution. This is due to the fact that contextual substitution enables the translator to express the original text's content in a manner that is more acceptable and in keeping with the target language and cultural context. The translator makes sure that the intended message is properly delivered to the readers without sacrificing clarity or coherence by replacing certain words or phrases with their equal counterparts.

Transposition can be seen in the rearranging of sentence elements, such as the subject-verb-object order, or in the rearranging of adjectives, adverbs, or prepositional phrases in the analyzed passages. The meaning and flow of the original text are effectively conveyed to the readers due to this transformation, which also aids the translator in producing a target language text that sounds more idiomatic and natural.

## References

Harasym, Tetiana. 2014. "Roman vykhovannia ta roman initsiatsii: typolohichni zbihy i vidminnosti" [Bildungsroman and Initiation Novel: Typological Similarities and Differences]. *Naukovyi visnyk Mizhnarodnoho humanitarnoho universitytu. Seria: Filolohiia* [Scientific Bulletin of the International Humanitarian University. Series: Philology], 11 (1): 102-105.

Millard, Kenneth. 2007. *Coming of Age in Contemporary American Fiction*. Edinburgh University Press.

Prytoliuk, Svitlana. 2004. *Zhanrovi osoblyvosti romanu vykhovannia* [Genre Features of the Coming of Age Novel]. Ternopil: Vydatets Starodubets.

Tevis, Walter. 2021. *Khid korolevy* [The Queen's Gambit]. Kharkiv: Knyzhkovyi klub "Klub simeinoho dozvillia."

Tevis, Walter. 2014. *The Queen's Gambit*. RosettaBooks.

Zarva, Viktoriya. 2014. "Stanovlennia, evoliutsiia i osoblyvosti romanu vykhovannia" [Formation, Evolution and Peculiarities of the Coming of Age Novel]. *Naukovyi zapysky Berdiaskoho derzhavnoho universytetu universytetu. Ser. Filolohichni nauky* 2: 5-14. Accessed September 15, 2024. [http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/nzbdpufn\\_2014\\_2\\_3](http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/nzbdpufn_2014_2_3)

## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

## Ethical Standards

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.