
THE DEPICTION OF SCHOOL LIFE AND ISSUES OF EDUCATION AND UPBRINGING IN ENGLISH BILDUNGSROMANS

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14840730>

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Abstract

The Bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel, has long served as a vehicle for exploring the social, moral, and psychological development of individuals. A recurring motif within these narratives is the role of education and school life in shaping the protagonist's growth. This article examines the depiction of school life and the broader issues of education and upbringing in key English Bildungsroman, analyzing how they reflect societal norms and the complexities of personal development. The discussion focuses on works by Charles Dickens, Charlotte Bronte, and Thomas Hughes, highlighting how school settings function as microcosms of society and serve as arenas for conflict and growth.

Keywords

Charles Dickens, Charlotte Bronte, Thomas Hughes, Bildungsroman, education, coming-of-age, novel, hero

Introduction. The Bildungsroman, a literary genre with German roots, has been widely adopted in English literature in XVIII century, focusing on the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and personal progress. Most novels of this genre describe children being sent to a girls' or boys' monastery or boarding school for upbringing. However, such works do not fully embody the image of the children's parents as most of them are usually orphan or homeless. Rather, they focus on the results of societal upbringing in the lives of main character. Because such educational institutions have strict rules and regulations, their students grow up striving for freedom and happy life. This is observed not only in English literature, but also in the literature of other nations. The work of the French writer Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) "Madame Bovary" is an example of such works. The work of the English writer William Thackeray "Vanity fair" also describes the

images of Becky Sharp, a poor girl studying at a girls' boarding school, and Emilia Sedley, a girl from a wealthy family.¹

Education is an essential component of main hero's developmental pathway, involving both formal instruction and informal life experiences. In English Bildungsroman, school environments are frequently used as critical spaces for intellectual, emotional, and moral development. However, these narratives frequently go beyond academic contexts to investigate broader cultural standards, class differences, and the intricacies of childhood. This study analyzes how English Bildungsroman writers, including Charles Dickens, Charlotte Bronte and Thomas Hughes portray education and school life.

These texts not only illustrate the transformative power of education but also critique the prevailing systems and values of their respective eras. In English Bildungsroman, schools frequently represent miniature versions of the larger world, complete with social hierarchies, moral dilemmas, and the struggles of conformity versus individuality. In David Copperfield, Salem House is depicted as a harsh and oppressive institution. The abusive headmaster, Mr. Creakle, embodies the cruelty and corruption that pervaded Victorian-era education. The school serves as an early testing ground for David, shaping his resilience and ability to navigate societal challenges. Ch. Dickens illustrates that education is not limited to the classroom but is influenced by mentors, experiences, and personal reflection, demonstrating that education is central to David's journey from a vulnerable child to a self-reliant adult.²

A literary scholar Kimberly Sutherland, talks about the attitude that Charles Dickens had when referring to education in the novel, inferring from his in-depth research of the educational philosophies of Charles Dickens, including his novel David Copperfield. She states the following description: *"Along with the key component of defining education the debate also argued the methods by which students should be taught. Some viewed the classroom as a place to force facts into students 'minds believing that knowledge was education. Dickens method is a gentle, at the knee experience, not a harsh-handed forcing of information"*.³

In the work, the author deliberately contrasts the life of two classes of schools and their educational systems. Through the depiction of these two schools, the

¹ Safarova Z.T. Education in Ch.Bronte's "Jeyn Eyre". Asian Journal of Multidimensional Research ISSN: 2278-4853 Vol. 11, Issue 10, October 2022 SJIF 2022 = 8.179. P.169-173

² Saidova D.R.,Safarova Z.T. The role of education in the development of David Copperfield by Charles Dickens. EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal Volume: 10| Issue: 6| June 2024|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2024: 8.402 || ISI Value: 1.188. P.194-197.

³ Kimberly Sutherland. Dickensian pedagogy, a novel approach: Educating David Copperfield, at the knee learning. Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2020. -P.7.

attitudes and views of representatives of different classes of that time towards education and upbringing become clear. The descriptions of Salem house can vividly provide evidence to our above-mentioned ideas:

*"I pass over all that happened at school, until the day arrived when we were to be examined in the presence of the mighty Mr. Creakle. ... The boys were all passive and meek; and seemed to have but one thought in their heads: and that was, to keep there as long as possible."*⁴

In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, similarly, Lowood school mirrors societal injustices, particularly in its treatment of orphaned and impoverished girls. Jane's experiences at Lowood, including her friendship with the saintly Helen Burns and the oppressive rule of Mr. Brocklehurst, highlight the intersection of education, religion, and class in 19th-century England. These formative years teach Jane not only academic skills but also lessons in endurance, morality, and self-worth.⁵ The depiction of Lowood Institution in *Jane Eyre* exposes the hypocrisy of religiously affiliated schools that claim to provide moral guidance while subjecting children to harsh and unjust treatment. The following passage reflects the inner feelings of Jane about her school:

*"My first quarter at Lowood seemed an age; and not the golden age either; It comprised an irksome struggle with difficulties in habituating myself to new rules and unwonted tasks. The fear of failure in these points harassed me worse than the physical hardships of my lot".*⁶

Education in Bildungsroman extends beyond academic learning, encompassing the moral and emotional development of the protagonist. A recurring theme in English Bildungsroman is the disparity in educational opportunities based on social class. Protagonists often face significant barriers to accessing quality education, reflecting broader societal inequalities. For example, in Thomas Hardy's *"Jude the Obscure"*, Jude Fawley's aspirations for higher education are thwarted by his working-class origins, highlighting the rigid class structures of Victorian England.⁷

In *Great Expectations*, Pip's upbringing by his sister and Joe highlights the limitations and struggles of working-class life, while his later exposure to wealth and privilege reveals the complexities of identity and aspiration. Self-Education Bildungsroman protagonists often engage in self-directed learning as a means of overcoming the limitations of their formal education. The figures like Joe Gargery

⁴ Charles Dickens. *David Copperfield*. Penguin Classics, 2004. –P.196.

⁵ Bradbury and Evans. Brontë, C. *Jane Eyre*, 1849-1850.

⁶ Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre*. Smith, Elder and Co., Cornhill, Third Edition, 1857.

⁷ Hardy, T. (1895) *Jude the Obscure*. Osgood, McIlvaine & Co.

serve as moral guides, contrasting with the more formal but flawed education Pip receives from society. This duality emphasizes the importance of both formal education and personal mentorship in the journey to maturity.⁸

This criticism reflects broader concerns about the intersection of education, religion, and social reform in the 19th century. In “Tom Brown’s Schooldays”, Hughes emphasizes the importance of physical education as a complement to academic learning. Rugby School’s focus on sports and teamwork is portrayed as vital for building character and fostering leadership, contrasting with the rigid academic focus of other educational institutions in the genre⁹ beyond formal schooling, the Bildungsroman also emphasizes the impact of upbringing on the protagonist’s development.

Jude Fawley’s self-study in *Jude the Obscure* exemplifies this determination to transcend social barriers through intellectual effort, even in the face of systemic obstacles¹⁰.

Conclusion: The depiction of school life and the issues of education and upbringing in English Bildungsroman serve as a lens through which authors explore the complexities of personal and societal development. School settings often reflect broader societal structures, highlighting the tensions between conformity and individuality, privilege and exclusion, and authority and resistance. Through their critiques of educational systems and their portrayals of formative experiences, works such as “David Copperfield”, “Jane Eyre”, and “Tom Brown’s Schooldays” provide timeless insights into the transformative power of education and upbringing. By exploring the interplay between school life, upbringing, and personal growth, English Bildungsroman continue to resonate with readers, underscoring the universal journey of self-discovery and maturation.

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⁸ Dickens, C. (1860-1861). *Great Expectations*. Chapman and Hall.

⁹ Bronte, C. (1847) *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*.

¹⁰ Hardy, T.(1895). *Jude the Obscure* Osgood.

Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2024 | | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epura2013 | | SJIF Impact Factor 2024: 8.402 | | ISI Value: 1.188. P.194-197.

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