
THE INFLUENCE OF UPBRINGING ON CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN
BILDUNGSROMANS

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As one of the widespread literary genres Bildungsroman explores personal growth through educational and social experiences. This article examines how the Bildungsroman reflects the role of upbringing in shaping the psychological, moral, and social development of protagonists. As it influences on personal growth, the Bildungsroman portrays upbringing—family influence, education, social environment, and mentorship—as central forces guiding a character’s journey to maturity.

Introduction

The Bildungsroman which was derived from German meaning “novel of formation” has been considered an inseparable part in the study of English literature. This style focuses on the psychological and moral enlargement. The genre has historically served not only as a narrative of personal growth but also as a reflection of societal values. It was originated in late 18th-century in German literature, starting with its shape in English novels of the 19th century.¹⁰⁰ The term Bildungsroman refers to a coming-of-age narrative that traces a

¹⁰⁰ Kayumova Aziza Ahmadovna. The bildungsroman genre and its role in depicting education, 2024.

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character's growth from childhood to adulthood. The core of this category is the influence of upbringing, including from family environment, moral guidance, education to social interactions. With these novels, the protagonist's transformation is not only a direct response to the circumstances of their upbringing, but also making it a crucial element in understanding character development family Influence on Moral and Emotional Growth. A child's sense of self is generally established in family as a foremost and powerful force. In Bildungsromans, parental care, absence, or even mistreatment strongly impacts the protagonist's personality and worldview.

In David Copperfield, Dickens maintains alive a romantic perspective in which human personality is highly emphasized and the character is master of his destiny, independent and able to fulfil personally in spite of all social interaction and determinism. The determinism of the milieu is strong but not successful; there is no real social influence or effect on the development of personality, and the outcome is the success of character formation.¹⁰¹

From this definition, it can be understood that Charles Dickens interprets the human personality as a leading force in the novel David Copperfield. In the work, the hero is shown as a person who, despite the strong pressure of the social environment and external circumstances, is able to independently control his own destiny. Although environmental determinism exists, it does not have a decisive influence on the formation of the hero's character. As a result, it is understood that in the work personal will, inner strength and individual perfection are given priority over social factors.

For example, in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, Jane's early experiences of neglect at Gateshead and strict discipline at Lowood School lay the foundation for her independence and moral courage. Similarly, in Charles Dickens's Great Expectations, Pip's conflicting feelings toward Joe, Miss Havisham, and Estella reflect how family-like figures shape his sense of guilt, ambition, and morality.¹⁰²

That is why family upbringing provides the emotional and ethical framework from which the protagonist begins their journey. Education serves as a second formative environment that has a profound impact on the protagonist's growth. It equips the individual with intellectual skills, broader worldviews, and the ability to question social norms. Therefore,

¹⁰¹ A History of the Bildungsroman: From Ancient Beginnings to Romanticism. Petru Golban .2018;

¹⁰² Cunningham, Gail (1993). "Society, History and the Reader: the Nineteenth-Century Novel", in Bloomsbury Guides to English Literature, The Novel, ed. Andrew Michael Roberts. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

academic upbringing functions as both a means of intellectual empowerment and a catalyst for self-discovery.

Beyond family and school, the social environment exposes the protagonist to external expectations, inequalities, and cultural norms. Confrontation with society often becomes the turning point in the Bildungsroman, pushing the character toward self-definition. Characters frequently face: class conflict, gender expectations, moral dilemmas, cultural pressures. Providing opportunities for personal reflection and growth, helping the protagonist forge their own moral and social identity.

In James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus's philosophical and artistic awakening is deeply influenced by his schooling and intellectual mentors. Education challenges him to question religious and cultural constraints, eventually encouraging him to form an independent identity.¹⁰³

Mentors and peers play significant roles in guiding the character's emotional and intellectual development. Supportive mentors offer wisdom, while negative influences teach important life lessons through conflict or temptation. Such relationships broaden the protagonist's understanding of the world and contribute to emotional maturity, reinforcing the idea that upbringing is not limited to family but extends to all meaningful human interactions.

Conclusion

In Bildungsromans, one of the central forces shaping character development is upbringing. From family influence, education, social environment, to mentorship, the protagonist undergoes moral, intellectual, and emotional growth. These interconnected aspects of upbringing guide the character's transition from youth to maturity, ultimately defining their identity and worldview. As such, upbringing is not merely a background element but a fundamental engine driving the narrative of personal development at the heart of the Bildungsroman genre.

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¹⁰³ *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions. Joyce, James .1992.

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