



Bildungsroman in Jane Austen's *Emma* and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*: A Comparative Study

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The term 'comparative literature' is difficult to define for it evolves not only two or even more than two literatures in comparison at the same time. It is a difficult task for a critic or comparatist to compare two different treaties as they have different facets such as linguistic, cultural, religious, economic, social and historical.

'Literature Comparee', the French term for 'Comparative Literature' first emerged in France around 19th century. Susan Bassnett espouses that most of the scholars who have travelled, "Towards it from different points of departure" have not come to meet at a definite point. They have explored various contrasting perspectives. In short, critics have not arrived at a fixed norm but rather working towards enriching literary comparison by fresh and more developed theories. Etymologically, the term comparative literature denotes any literary work or works when compared with any other literary work. Hence, comparative literature is the study of two or more than two significant literary treaties or literatures in the light of the sources upon which they are based such as themes, myths, forms, artistic strategies, social and religious movements and trends into consideration.

The comparatist finds out the similarities and dissimilarities among various works that he has undertaken for the purpose of comparison and the justification lies in the fact that his approach must be unbiased and unprejudiced to reach the ultimate truth. It is only his earnest and sincere approach which will bring forth the naked truth or natural result and this reality is the purpose of the comparative study.

The term 'Bildungsroman' was coined in 1819 by philologist Karl Morgenstern in his university lectures, and later famously reprised by Wilhelm Dilthey, who legitimated it in 1870 and popularized it in 1905. The genre is further characterized by a number of formal, topical and thematic features. The term coming-of-age novel is sometimes used interchangeably with Bildungsroman, but its use is usually wider and less technical. In literary criticism Bildungsroman is a novel of formation, novel of education. It is a literary genre that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood. In other words it is a novel dealing with one person's formative or spiritual education. The birth of the bildungsroman is normally dated to the publication of Wilhem Meister's Apprenticeship by Johann Wolfgang Goethe in 1795-96.

A *Bildungsroman* relates the growing up or "coming of age" of a sensitive person who goes in search of answers to life's questions with the expectation that these will result in gaining experience of the world. The genre evolved from folklore tales of a dunce or youngest son going out in the world to seek his fortune. Usually in the beginning of the story there is an emotional loss which makes the protagonist leave on his journey. In a Bildungsroman, the goal is maturity, and the protagonist achieves it gradually and with difficulty. The genre often features a main conflict between the main character and society. Typically, the values of society are gradually accepted by the protagonist and he/she is ultimately accepted into society — the protagonist's mistakes and disappointments are over. In some works, the protagonist is able to reach out and help others after having achieved maturity.

Goethe is also famous for denoting the term "world literature" and exploring a platform for literature from around the world despite of chronological barrier, and constrictions of the time etc. Matthew Ar-

ISSN 2454-308X



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nold while providing touchstone method speaks of different literatures which should be compared for better understanding of the literature itself.

Jane Austen occupies an eminent position in the history of English. Austen presents not on the canvas of fiction' what is really great and heroic about human life, she just portrays the ordinariness of life in its daily routine. She was firm believer of order and discipline- the typical tendency of the neoclassicists. By and large she supported traditional values and her fictional world portrays them vividly. Unlike Thackeray or George Eliot, Austen interrupts not her story with personal comments, rather she leaves everything to the reader's imagination only. The greatest woman novelist of 19th century, Jane Austen, was certainly a woman of genius, whose reactions to life were singularly fresh and interesting. W.A. Clark has rightly observed:

Jane Austen's novels, like charity begin at home. The centre of all her novels is a family or families consisting usually of only two generations: parents and children whose growing up constitutes the novels progress.

David Daiches is all the praise for Jane Austen as he considers her 'the greatest of all the novelist of manner and one who raised the whole genre 'to a new level of art'. She draws the picture of life, no doubt, but she presents it in a way that the readers get amused. As she herself was gay and full of life, humour had become integral part of her creative process. Jane Austen wrote domestic novels with the general structure of the society in which live her main characters. Her men and women are presented in the flux of circumstances. As such, the fictionist remains ever ready to discover the psychology of human relationship and behavior in a class of society. She probes human nature with deep insight exploring how it acts and reacts in a particular situation. She is not an angry satirist but a critic of human follies presenting them ironically in varied moods. B.C. Southam rightly praises Emma depicts its narrow range: "Emma is universal just because it is narrow, because it confines itself to the range of Jane Austen profoundest vision."

Charles Dickens was much concerned with highlighting the exploitation, inhuman and hostile treatment meted out to children. He felt touched to visualize the miserable condition of orphans and working children. Dickens himself had spent a neglected life as a child. He focuses his attention on the emotional injury done to these children subjugated by sadist and heartless adults both at home and in society, at the hands of parents, school teachers, custodians of public charity and employer who exploit children physically as well as mentally. Dickens himself comments on autobiographical elements in the novel, saying, "I really think I have done it ingeniously and with very complicated interweaving of fact and fiction." The novel recounts what the novelist himself had suffered during the early formative years of his own life. In fact Dickens himself had passed through these traumatic experiences in early childhood so he tends to look back to similar situation in his fiction. Pratt is of the view that, "Dickens both consciously and unconsciously made his attempt to understand his own personality at the centre of his creative process."

The present study proposes to make a perusal of two bildungsroman novels: Jane Austen's *Emma* and Charles Dickens's *Great expectations*. Both novels are based on bildungsroman and depict the formative and spiritual growth of the protagonists. Whereas Jane Austen subverts bildungsroman novel by focusing on the growth and development of a character who is not the protagonist of the novel, Dickens gives vivid account of the spiritual growth of Pip, the central character of the novel, from his early childhood to youth, and bringing before our mind various hurdles involved in the process at its different stages till this character reaches a stage of maturity and better understanding and insight into life. The point of divergence between these two writers is that while Jane Austen's work on two inches of ivory' Dickens deals with the realities of an individual life. But if we compare these novel Austen subverted a bildungsroman trait. Austen writes about youth and adulthood of Emma, an upper class young lady of twenty-one. Since the main



character in a typical bildungsroman novel is the character to go through the maturation, one might assume that Emma is the bildungsroman figure. However Austen plays with her audience by focusing on a secondary character, Harriet Smith and her personal development. One final correlation Austen makes with the bildungsroman novel is the identity Harriet finds at the end of the book. Whereas the usual bildungsroman has the protagonist find independence and identity through circumstances throughout the novel, Austen plays with the meaning of “identity” by having Harriet discover her biological identity, which had been unknown until the closing chapter. Harriet’s social identity is dependent on the status of her lost father, and this is most definitely related to the circumstances in which she finds herself. Thus, Austen subverts a bildungsroman trait.

Unlike many bildungsroman protagonists, Pip’s maturity does not come through gaining but instead through losing. He realizes the negative consequences of the mistakes he made while trying to establish his place in the world. However, this realization only comes when he loses everything. This marks Pip’s coming of age with a “wiser but sadder” element. Although he is milquetoast to become the man he wanted to be, he learns that his ambitions were folly from the beginning. His experiences in the world cause him to redefine his values. He realizes that money, position and success do not necessarily make one happy. After he lets go of his initial ambitions he is able to find happiness, acceptance, and freedom.

Both the novels deal with the predicament of individuals in the society. The protagonists mature after initial struggle and crisis. In the process they gain an understanding of their own identity and also endeavor to contribute to the well-being of the society.

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