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Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* as a Bildungsroman Novel

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Abstract:

The present paper purports to study the way in which Charles Dickens applied the Bildungsroman genre to portray his protagonists life. David Copperfield successfully lightened Dickens fame and supplied a fresh perspective for Bildungsroman readers. There are various characteristics such as instances, a first-person narrative, heroism and his connection with the rest of characters which make this dissimilar from other novels in this Bildungsroman genre and these literary devices center upon David's quest for a true identity and his career.

These said characteristics intensify Dicken's novel and contributed to its approving response of the present novel and they also show Dicken's skill to intermingle forms and develop his fame in this novel. The genre question is pretty easy with David Copperfield this is not a surrealist experimental fiction. What we have here is a classic coming-of-age story, as we watch David grow from a boy to a man. And since almost all of the drama in the novel comes from family stuff – David's abusive stepfather, Annie Strong's (supposed) infidelity, Davids unsuitable first marriage, Emily's flight from her family, and so on – we think family darma is a pretty good description of what goes on in David Copperfield.

Keywords: Self Development, Self Determination, Accomplishment, Learning, Survival, Identity, Struggle, Experience, Quest, Hardships, Spiritual Nurturing.

INTRODUCTION:

Amongst the various characters of Charles Dickens, David Copperfield stands elated due to his life that the delineation of David's life assumes the influence of the Bildungsroman to exemplify under the environment of the nineteenth century. Many years after the appearance of David, people saw in the depiction of the young boy not only the vision of a miserable life that aroused affection but a life that reflected reality to its readers. The story of David Copperfield

journey of life has also appealed to readers in later centuries as the novel allows them to witness life in the nineteenth century and the manner in which David battle to outlive in that social order.

In circumstances familiar to its reader this story of a young boy in search of his identity made it more interesting to the serials readership. Dickens's excitement for portraying heroism remained and David is set for the quest for adventures in a world his readers were familiar with to ensure that they would follow the serialization with enthusiasm. The farcical events occurring to David offer to readers the discovery that they themselves are David Copperfield. The distance to which David's story sink in the market depended much, therefore, on Dickens's ability in the form of an autobiographical novel to make his contemporary popular culture accessible to his readers.

Ultimately, Dickens's was greatly hailed for the success of *David Copperfield* (1850) and became more successful as a writer. As John Forster, Dickens's close friend and personal biographer put it "Dickens never stood to high in reputation as at the completion of *Copperfield*"(Forster 2). Indeed, *David Copperfield* established Dickens's reputation through the story of the young David which similar to that of young Oliver in that they are both young boy protagonists whose lives have been deprived of boyhood happiness by fate. However, David is highly different because he is particularly in search of his true identity to become a grown man, whereas Oliver is simply struggling to survive in circumstances beyond control in a cruel society and part of the novel's success lies in its employment of many incidents from Dickens's own personal life. The current research paper will analyze Dickens's use of Bildungsroman genre as a tool to effectively portray the David Copperfield's life.

Portryal Of Bildungsroman in David Copperfield :

David Copperfield employs the influential German form of the Bildungsroman that became an appropriate device for dickens's intention to write an autobiographical novel. Generally, the Bildungsroman is according to Penguin *Dictionary of literary Terms & Literary Theory* (1999), the literary device of dealing with one person's, especially the protagonist's, formative years or spiritual education. *David copperfield's Bildung and autobiography* are intermingled together in a form that deviates from its original tradition and from its English early adoption in Fielding, Sterne and Goldsmith. According to this definition, David is going through the process of

learning by trial-and-error in his personal experience as the protagonist who is a Victorian man searching for his true character.

With its overt characteristic of a *Bildung* novel, Dickens absorbed the general notion into his new novel's title. During his search for new ideas for his next novel, the decision to write a new serial came from John Forster's suggestion to him to write from his own life experience. He accepted this advice enthusiastically and was at ease writing this story simply because many events were from his personal first-hand experience. After many attempts at finding a suitable name, he eventually entitled his new work: *The personal History, Adventures, Experience, & Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery*. (which he never meant to be published on any Account), later shortened to *The personal History of David Copperfield*, indicating what David would have to provide for his readers in his account of his self-improvement. Ostensibly, Dickens chose this epithet for his novel in order to lay out the entire story for the protagonist to lead his readers to witness his formation within the Victorian concept of self-development. Another reason, Dickens wanted to assert the point at which this story was going to be specifically the personal history of David Copperfield, not Dickens's own history; even though, readers would find analogous references to Dickens's experiences. Therefore, David is employed to narrate the entire novel by adopting the device of first person narrative.

Several overt features that emphasize David as the novel of *Bildungsroman* genre are, as well as the illustrations, the notion in novel of heroism and the development in David use of language and the first-person narrative.

David Copperfield reflects the notions of heroism in a common man whose main task is the quest for his identity. Yet, all the features of the work are in accordance with nineteenth-century attitudes and the employment of the *Bildungsroman*. This novel does not recount the tale from the perspective of a knight or a person from the noble family but that of a middle class man. This notion is declared in David's opening statement that:

"whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show"(David Copperfield 1).

Dickens differentiates his hero from traditional notions where the hero belongs to a princely class with extraordinarily precocious abilities whose occupation is war or dangerous adventure.

Instead Dickens creates David as a hero whose background is that of the common man of the Victorian era from a middle class family. The ultimate achievement of David as a hero is to narrate his life-story and to be capable of self-determination. In other words, heroism according to Dickens's definition is about achieving his success in a novelistic career, resulting in his fantasy of placing himself in a position of success that will lead to the firm settling of his life in a way that is more secure than his previous phases in the story. Because, David Copperfield is pursuing a writing career that requires the craft of literary skills, the way he presents his narrative implies, concurrently with his physical development, his developing process of crafting his skills in language.

As discussed earlier, David emerges as the hero of his story by being authorized to control the narrative himself and establishing his story up to the direction that can contribute to the *Bildungsroman* novel. Implicitly, the narrative technique observes the phases of his growth through the development of his language. This technique resembles the human process of language acquisition. Similarly, the tracing of David use of language is complemented by a serialization that implements the progress of David's growth in one serial, and when the new serial released, David is in another phase of his language development. This technique of language development subtly guides readers to notice each of his phases as being more mature-David himself is conscious of this as well. As a child, he recalls:

"I was born at Blunderstone, in Suffolk, or "thereby," as they say in Scotland. I was a posthumous child. My father's eyes had closed upon the light of this world six months, when mine opened on it. There is something strange to me, even now, in the reflection that he never saw me; and something stranger yet in the shadowy remembrance that I have of my first childish associations with his white grave-stone in the churchyard, and of the undefinable compassion I used to feel for it lying out alone there in the dark night...." (David Copperfield 2)

This passage demonstrates how David is able to construct simple phrases and sentences as a child. On the other hand, it also shows the process of how David is learning to master the language through his admission of confusion, as says he borrows a word from how English is spoken in Scotland. By detecting how he articulates the death of his father, through associations of words like "closed eyes," "grave-stone," or "churchyard" indicates a reflection of his vague

understanding of death. The particular changes in his narrative are slight and almost unnoticeable at the more mature stage, however, he subconsciously asserts his confident knowledge of the world as well as the more complex structure of his language as he speaks of his situation:

“I know enough of the world now, to have almost lost the capacity of being much surprised by anything” (David Copperfield 149).

Another phase of David’s language development is seen when he is living with Dora According to David:

"..... I will only add, to what I have already written of my perseverance at this time of my life, and of a patient and continuous energy which then began to be matured within me, and which I know to be the strong part of my character, if it have any strength at all, that there, on looking back, I find the source of my success..... Heaven knows I write this, in no spirit of self-laudation My meaning simply is, that whatever I have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well...." (David Copperfield 590).

This paragraph marks the difference in David’s use of language in terms of its maturity from that which he used when he was a child. The construction of language in this paragraph is becoming more complex with the insertion of David’s confidence of his consciousness of life and his inclination to write his life story- the task full requires literacy skills.

In addition to the subtlety of depicting David’s growth through his capacity to master language, a notable feature of David’s story is that it is communicate through a first-person narrative throughout the book. This feature implicitly marks the objective of making this the story of David himself, and to distance the author from intervening in David’s story. It is similar to *Great Expectations* in the sense that *David Copperfield* also relies on *Bildungs'* conventions and autobiographical elements. David’s first person narration works as a consequence of his identity formation. These three points in generating David maturity contribute to the fact that this is not only a *Bildungs* novel, but the *Bildung* of a writer.

In keeping with the *Bildung's* general notion, Dickens allows David to learn to grow up by facing various dilemmas, obstacles, mistakes and conflicts. To “come of age” David inevitably

has to set out on a journey in which difficulties and dilemmas are aspects that will shape and improve his character and personality according to the Victorian bourgeois values of self-development. The *Bildungsroman* of David, the protagonist, is completed by his search for his identity and his maturing into a grown man.

Regarding the significance of *Bildungsroman* in portraying the protagonist's progress in life, it allows the theme of "undisciplined heart:" to be supplementarily developed by way of David gaining experiences. David acquires his social education and moulds his self through the crucial process of trial-and-error. This is the crucial element in the *Bildungsroman* novel when he is chasing after remedies to his errors when he allegedly commits mistakes.

The "undisciplined heart" is a heart that represents the inexperienced existence of David who is supposed to understand and learn from those who have experienced lives, and also from his own experiences. Carl Bandelin states that David is required to "acquire the ability to live creatively and humanely in the world" (Bandein 601). The first incident that marks his misunderstanding over how to judge people tending to misjudge them by their external presentations is presented to him by the Murdstones. When the Murdstones are introduced into David's life, they appear to dislike him from the very start and they also show their intense hatred towards him explicitly. Consequently, he tends to misjudge people by association with whatever appears before his eyes. The explicitness of the murdstones' hatred of him is associated with his conclusion that what the eyes seen is what people intend to do with him. This misunderstanding of people leads David to judge the bad to be good, thereby displaying a lack of profound knowledge of the world. First and foremost, David's misjudgment of people emphasizes his lack of experience and he is asked to educate himself and not to commit the same mistakes in the future. To experience the world and gain knowledge, David inevitably associates himself with those experienced characters as well as applying his early mistakes to the more complex situation of embarking on the quest for a suitable love life. Stephen Lutman observes the significance of David as the narrator who has to subdue his desires and educate his "undisciplined heart" contending that:

"if David knows himself too well, or realizes consciously the wider significance of the other characters, he can no longer discover himself and develop" (Lutman 206).

Lutman points out the David develops his identity by depending largely on his circumstances and the people around him.

The parallel between the search for love and his pursuit of a career as a writer brings David very close to defining his existence in accordance with the concepts of the *Bindungsroman*.

Hills Miller suggests that:

“David has, during his childhood of neglect and misuse, been acutely aware in himself of gap in being” (Miller 157).

He is aware of this position of lacking in the knowledge to construct his inner being. David affirms the perspective towards his being of a nobody. He, thus, needs to form for himself an identity and move on to stage of maturity by filling up with “a number of these pieces” of memories by his relation with others. .

Among all the female characters, the central character in David’s life is Agnes whose role is significant in his growth and development both to maturity and in terms of his career. She is also supportive of him in whatsoever he does, even in his courtship with Dora. Agnes embodies the qualities which can not be found in Dora. Regarding David is seeking to discipline his heart, Agnes stands there as representative of a woman of disciplined heart. When David marries her, his life becomes easier, with such convenience in the marriage that it allows him more time to work on his writing and Agnes is able to keep house superbly and assists him in reading his work. The person who approves of his decision to live his life with Agnes is his aunt; all those times she has been observing and seeing what is good and suitable for David. Dickens requires that David eventually finds the woman who will help him making progress in his life and his expectations and persuade his aunt that he has achieved the status of a mature Victorian man.

It is through his two marriages that David learns about the true married life he needs to have and, more importantly, to quash his aunt’s concerns. Although his disagreement with his aunt’s advice signifies his obstinate disobedience, it also implies his failure to see what the experienced person can see. Therefore, his failure in finding the first suitable wife represents David and his immature stage and, as he realizes his disastrous decision, he moves forward to the new phase of being the experienced David when married to Agnes.

David depends on these female characters for one reason. They typically give him physical and spiritual nurturing but, for another reason, they provide lessons for him, especially lessons that shape him into a grown up person. From a mother who is weak and unable to manage things to an aunt whose own married life has failed, to the first wife who resembles his mother in many aspects, and, lastly, the wife, Agnes for whom David cannot find anyone to match; without these females, he would not be capable for learning to see his naivety. To live forever with his naivety, would not destroy him spontaneously or take him to a catastrophic end but David has to show his capacity to master life skills not only to survive but to gain more experiences and move away to achieve the phase of the experienced man. He admits at the blissful moment that:

“I had advanced in fame and fortune, my domestic joy was perfect, I had been married ten happy years”(David Copperfield 844).

CONCLUSION:

Dickens was not the inventor of any of these devices, neither was he the first to use them, but with his capacity to incorporate them with his narrative, they contributed to his fame and *David Copperfield's* popularity among the readers. The publication of *David Copperfield* in serialized form created a community who shared the story they read and in this way the community circulated the story of *David Copperfield* to wider group of readers, even to a longer period. Also, Dickens pervasive key concept of inserting plates of illustrations was to entice his readers. He would not have enjoyed his reputation as much as this if he had not modified the Bildung conventional form into his own convenient form as appeared in the novel. Moreover, the role of his narrative importantly attracted his readers in a way that it made the struggles of David more emphatic.

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